



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 4:3-6

["The Gospel: God's Glory in Christ's Face. Self Esteem Banished!"](#)

You know, we occasionally hear people say that, "Believers Chapel is a very cold church." There may be some cold individuals out there. Would you raise your hand if you're cold? [Laughter] That no doubt, there are some of us who don't respond to other people as we should, and it often also reflects on the doctrine to which we adhere, and, particularly, if we talk about the sovereign grace of God, as we do in Believers Chapel, and then we're not friendly enough with the people sitting in the rows to at least introduce ourselves to them, and they go out and say, "The church is a cold church," that really hurts our testimony as a whole, to some extent. And so here is an opportunity for us to see really how you do respond to the opportunity to meet some people in the Chapel.

And so we hope you will take advantage of it and participate in this that Mr. Pryor has just mentioned. And if there is not that participation, that don't say, "That the chapel is cold." Say, "I'm cold." Say, "I don't particularly care to meet people, and I want to come in and hear the word of God, and I want to leave without anybody saying anything to me." Now, there are some people like that, and I think you should respect them for that. They want to come to hear the ministry of the word of God, and they are not quite as interested as some of the rest of us in other things such as Christian fellowship. But for

those of us who tend to enjoy a bit of Christian fellowship and the ministry of the word of God, here is an opportunity for you to meet some others and get to know some of the other Christians who do meet at the Chapel.

From my standpoint -- and since I am no longer an elder, I can speak simply as one of us, so to speak -- I found the Chapel to be very warm. And when the difficulties of life come, when I have needs, that I know about and in my life I found the men on the board of elders and the men on the deacons and the members to be the kinds of friends that I would like to have -- Christian friends that I would like to have in times of trouble.

Now, we are turning again to 2 Corinthians. We’re looking at Paul’s treatment of the ministry that has been committed to him. We are studying it in some detail because the one who is teaching, that is I, am interested in doing this in a little more in depth this time. Going through 2 Corinthians. So we are in 2 Corinthians chapter 4. We are reading for our Scripture reading verse 3 through verse 6. And the Apostle writes,

“And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.”

You know, it’s an interesting thing that in this verse, and I will say something about it later but I’d like for you to notice that the apostle says that we don’t preach ourselves, we preach Christ Jesus as Lord, and then he says ourselves as your servant for Jesus’ sake. And notice the use of those two terms. We preach him as Lord but we say that we are bond-slaves not for the Lord’s sake, although that could have been said by him perfectly, validly, but for Jesus’ sake. Those two aspects of our Lord’s being being

suggested by the apostle’s use of the words. And then in verse 6 he concludes the section we’re looking at by saying,

“For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”

And probably that word that is translated “light” in this instance means illumination. And so what he is suggesting is that the light that has shown in his heart that through him there might come the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God and the face of Jesus Christ as he and others with him proclaim the message of the Lord Jesus Christ in his day.

May God bless the reading of his word, and let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the apostle’s ministry for it has reached to us in the twentieth century. And by Thy grace through the ministry of the Holy Spirit we’ve been brought to know in measure the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We are indeed grateful for the gospel which Thou hast enabled us to understand and appropriate, for we surely have need. Rebellious sinners, wicked, foul rebels and enemies of the Lord God in heaven was what we were, and Thou hast in marvelous grace touched our inmost being, made the unwilling willing, and brought to rest through the ministry of the spirit and the full atoning work which Jesus Christ has accomplished. We are indeed grateful.

We give Thee thanks and praise. We worship Thy name the Triune God: father, son, and Holy Spirit. We thank Thee, Lord, for the day in which we live and for the opportunity to proclaim him, not simply behind the pulpit but in all of the ministry which Thou hast given to us through the radio, through the publications, through the Sunday school, through the teaching in the Sunday school, and particularly through our own

personal testimony to our relatives, to our friends, and to others with whom we come in contact.

O God, help us to remember that we are here to represent him to others. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the whole church of Jesus Christ today, those that are weak, those that are strong. Lord, continue the work of sanctification and bring us to the fullness of maturity as the body of Christ.

We pray for our elders and for our deacons, for the members and friends and the visitors who are here today in the ministry. May they receive a blessing from Thy word. May it be edifying for us and may it be that which changes our lives. We pray particularly for those who’ve requested our prayers, especially for those who are sick or ill or facing operations, we commend them to Thee. We pray Thy blessing upon them. And for others as well, Lord, who’ve requested specific prayer for specific problems. We pray, Lord, that Thou wilt answer their petitions affirmatively if it is within Thy will. Particularly, Lord, do we pray for those who minister to them: the physicians, give them wisdom and skills. And now we pray Thy blessing upon us as we sing, as we listen to the word of God, and as we enjoy the Christian fellowship of meeting with other Christians around the Scriptures.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today, as we continue our exposition of 2 Corinthians chapter 4 is, “The Gospel: God’s Glory in Christ’s Face. Self Esteem Banished!” The apostle has set forth the solemnity of new covenant ministry. He has pointed out, I think very solemnly, the fact that when we give out the Gospel of Christ, we are, to some, an aroma of death to death but, to others, an aroma of life to life. He expatiates upon that in chapter 2, verse 14 through 17 as he began this section. He has pointed out primarily in the preceding section the supremacy of new covenant ministry. The ministry of the new covenant as over against the ministry of the old covenant seen particularly in God’s

ministry through Moses the Prophet to the children of Israel. But he’s not finished with the supremacy of the new covenant. And the verses that we’re looking at form the climax of that theme, the supremacy of new covenant ministry in the present day. And in reaching his climax in this section, he affirms that he proclaims the glory of God in Christ’s face, a glory that is now in his heart and hopefully in the heart of others.

Now, that’s something the apostle implies though he doesn’t say it, that Moses and his ministry could not do. One cannot help but read this particular passage and gain a bit of encouragement. If one is seeking to proclaim the gospel of Christ, whether behind the pulpit like this or in a Sunday school classroom or in a home Bible class or in our conversations with our friends, at business or in our homes, over the fences in our backyards, in school, or in the grocery store, wherever we might come into contact with people. The tendency for Christians is to become discouraged. I know that from my own personal experience.

There was once a discouraged Methodist preacher who wrote to the great Scottish Presbyterian preacher Alexander Whyte who was the minister for many years of Free St. Georges in the city of Edinburgh, which is still an important church in that city. He wrote Mr. Whyte, whom he respected and said, “Should he leave the ministry?” And Mr. Whyte wrote back to him, “Never think about giving up preaching. The angels around the throne envy you, your great work.” I think the apostle would have appreciated that because that’s the spirit in which he writes these words that we have just read. And in them we have Paul’s central, I think, and his ultimate conception of Christian ministry and its glory. It’s the dissemination of the moral glory of Jesus Christ. It’s the absolute antithesis, my Christian friends, and any of you non-Christian friends who are with us today, it’s the absolute antithesis to every strident claim to primacy by the self-exaltation of ecclesiastical organizations with their hierarchical orders and casts. What Paul talks about is something entirely different from the exaltation of the church, its ministry, and its orders. What he is speaking about is the exaltation of Jesus Christ. That’s far different

from the exaltation of any church, even Believers Chapel. He negatives everything that is denoted by what someone has called, that term of “mournful omen clericalism.” One cannot find any of that in the apostle’s writings.

Look at what he says, We don’t preach ourselves, we preach Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your bond-slaves for Jesus’ sake. That’s what Apostle Paul regards the ministry as being, not preaching ourselves but preaching Christ Jesus as Lord. That’s the ministry and accompanying it with the kind of life that is to be expected of one who exalts Christ. The servant of the Lord Jesus Christ lives to make Christ great to human hearts. That’s why we proclaim the word of God. So I look at this section as of tremendous significance for those who proclaim the word of God, and that includes you as well as me.

Now, let’s take a look at our section, and we’ll turn first to verses 3 and 4 where the apostle gives us an explanation of the present unbelief that characterized his day and his own ministry. Paul has a mind throughout, I might say, the Judaizers. They’re in the background. They’re enemies of the gospel that he proclaims. He alludes to them in verse 17 of chapter 2 when he says, For we are not like the many peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God. And he’s had them in mind in verse 1 and 2 of this chapter when he has said, “Since we have this ministry as we’ve received mercy, we don’t lose heart. We’ve renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in Christ.” So the apostle has in mind those who -- well, Judaizers, we know, but individuals who are preaching the word of God ultimately for their benefit, rather than for the glorification of the Lord Jesus Christ. And surely the apostle has them in mind, too, in chapter 3, verses 1 when he says, “Are we beginning to commend ourselves again?” It’s so characteristic of the day for even those who profess to be Christian ministers, to present themselves to the public as promoters, and promoters not of the glory of Christ,

so much as the promoters of themselves and their ministry. The apostle, I think, would have been appalled. This has not been a good spring for preachers, incidentally [laughter], and I think the apostle would have had a lot to say about ministers of the word of God, were he here with us. So he’s not here with us, so I have to speak for him.

Now, one might think that, in the light of the context here, that you can just imagine the objections the apostle might have to what he’s been saying. I can imagine some of those vehement objectors, who didn’t like Paul, saying something like this, “Paul, you say that the Jews had a veil on their hearts when Moses has read, you say that’s the condition of things today. When the word of God is read, Israel being blinded, does not receive the word. But, Paul, your gospel conceitedly proclaimed, (later on they will accuse the apostle of that) conceitedly proclaimed (you could see a man who claims to be a servant of Jesus Christ and claims to have the word of God, it’s easy for someone to say that he’s magnifying himself, but he says -- they would say) your gospel conceitedly proclaimed is not very perspicuous. It’s not very clear. We don’t understand it. And, furthermore, it’s not received by the majority of the people to whom you preach.”

Now, the apostle concedes some of this. For he says in verse 3, “Even if our gospel is veiled.” So he acknowledges that it’s probably true to say that the majority do not respond to his message. And, furthermore, it’s probably true to say that his gospel appears to be a very difficult message to comprehend to some people.

Now, I frequently hear people say, “I won’t talk about myself. I’m just going to talk about others.” But you know, of course, that I have experienced this, too. There are lots of people who say, with reference to preachers, and sometimes it’s true and, no doubt, I’ve been guilty of this, that is, we’ve taken the word of God and made it unclear.” But I like to look at things as realistically as I can, and I think that many of us in this auditorium -- and I include myself -- when we read the word of God, we would probably, at one time or another, say, “You know it’s not easy to follow the word of God.” And so we rush off and get the New International Version or we get the Cabbage Patch version or

whatever version it is, to try to find out how to understand what’s going on. And, you know, it’s a strange thing, but there are people who read the Authorized Version a generation or so ago, who understood the Scriptures and loved the Scriptures and found them very meaningful to them. That version actually has lasted over three hundred years and has proven to be extremely edifying to people who read it.

The problem is, we don’t read the word of God. We don’t ponder the word of God. We find it very difficult, for the simple reason we don’t ponder it; we don’t read it. Look at your own heart. I know I’m speaking the truth because I can tell from the results of our lives that we are not readers of the word of God. We are not students of Scripture and, therefore, we hide behind, “The Authorized Version is difficult to understand,” or, “He is so abstruse in his preaching, I don’t seem to get anything out of it whatsoever,” when the real truth lies along other lines. One of them is simply the fact that we are not interested. We want everything made so easy to us that we can avoid reading the Bible if possible and yet obtain the truth of the word of God. That’s impossible.

But there is another matter, and that’s what Paul mentions specifically here. He says, “Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.” In other words, the fact that we do not read the Bible and understand it may not be because the apostle was hard to understand or because preaching that we hear is hard to understand, but it’s because we are perishing; that is, we’re lost people. We do not understand because we do not have the divine teacher who instructs us in the word of God, for Scripture says, “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned.” That may be the reason. We have to ask ourselves that question. The man outside of Christ who has never responded to the Gospel of Christ cannot understand the word of God. It’s not that it’s difficult. He cannot. The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them, for they are

spiritually discerned. But then there’s the element the apostle mentions here. He goes on to say, “In whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving.”

Now, we don’t have to deal -- we don’t have to go all through the Bible to make claim that when Paul says, “The god of this world,” he’s not talking about the Father in heaven, he’s talking about Satan, and he calls him the god of this world or the god of this age, and the Lord Jesus refers to him as “The prince of the world.” He’s referred to as “The evil one in whom the whole world lies,” by the Apostle John. Paul says, We walk according -- “When we are lost, we walk according to the prince of the power of the air,” again a reference to Satan. So in other words, one of the reasons why we do not understand the word of God is because Satan is blinding the minds of those who do not believe.

Now, let us not for a moment think that Satan is stronger than God. The apostle makes very plain that if there is a question of the sovereignty and autonomy of the two, there is no question that God is in the complete control of his universe, and Satan is under his thumb. And so, God is sovereign, but he has determined that Satan have certain freedoms and this is one of the things that is stated and belongs to Satan’s freedom; that is, the blinding of the minds of the unbelieving. That’s a fact. It does transpire. But that blinding is something that lies ultimately within the decision of God himself. In other words, the response to the gospel is something that lies ultimately within the decision of God himself. Of course, you can always settle the question of whether you are responsive to the word of God by responding right at this moment. And if you say to me, “I don’t want to respond,” well, then you’re getting exactly what you want so you don’t have any excuse whatsoever. But you may at this moment, if you think that you are blind to truth but you would like to know truth, at this moment, you lift a prayer to the Lord God, acknowledge your sin and acknowledge Christ as the savior of sinners and plead for mercy from him to open your eyes to truth, you’ll find your eyes will be open and you’ll want to read the Scriptures, and the Scriptures will become

understandable to you, or you won’t understand them as a person who has been reading them for fifty years immediately, but you’ll come to love them and appreciate them, and they’ll minister to you. In fact, you’ll have new life. That’s what Paul tells us in many places.

But when he says here, “There are individuals who are blinded,” he’s not talking simply about people in the congregation. He’s talking about people behind the pulpit as well. Last week I mentioned Professor John Hick, who was a British Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham, an outstanding, quote, “Christian philosopher,” unquote, as well as theologian. That was his teaching ministry. He has come to the United States. He teaches in a well-known university in Southern California, brought his credentials from the reformed church to which he belonged over there as a minister, sought to have status, brought his credentials to the San Gabriel Presbytery in Southern California, and thank God for a few believers in that Presbytery who stood up and said, “Wait a minute. Professor Hick is not a believer in Christianity.” And of course there were enough unbelievers in that Presbytery, or at least sympathetic with it, a question of the reception of Professor Hick as a minister in the San Gabriel Presbytery. In the Presbyterian Church, you moved from Presbytery to Presbytery, not from church to church, as you probably know. For four years the fight went on. And finally, I’ve forgotten the exact vote I mentioned I think last week, it was something like ninety-six to ninety-two. Professor Hick’s credentials were rejected. Thank God for that, but what about the ninety-two who said, “We should receive a man who does not believe in the Christian doctrine; does not believe the Christian revelation in Christ as being the revelation of God and that through which alone we may be saved; does not accept other aspects of the Christian faith.” Listen, for example, to Professor Hick’s views concerning the incarnation: He says, “The doctrine of Christ’s incarnation if taken literally is a pernicious teaching because it implies that God can be adequately known and responded to only through Jesus Christ and that the whole religion of mankind which is outside the

Judaic Christian faith tradition is therefore by implication excluded as lying outside the sphere of salvation.”

Now, would you have any question at all about receiving a man like that as a minister of the triune God as found in the Westminster Confession of Faith? That will give you an understanding of the status of the ministry in the day in which we live in one of the more respected denominations. So when Paul says, “If our gospel hid even if its hid, it’s veiled to those who are perishing in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.” I think I can understand. Incidentally calls it the gospel of the glory of Christ; the gospel that unfolds the glory of Christ. In other words, what’s the task of the man who stands behind the pulpit? To promote himself? To promote his ministry? To promote his church? To promote the facilities of the Christian organization? To promote the things that we do? To promote our meetings, even our fellowship meetings? To promote that kind of thing? The apostle I think would have been startled to see what happens in our Christian churches today. Yes, I include Believers Chapel.

What he says is that, “The gospel unfolds the glory of Christ.” In other words, the presentation of the moral glory of the Lord Jesus is the task of the Christian church and its ministry.

Now, to explain what is meant by the apostle when he says, “The gospel of the Glory of Christ who is the image of God.” Would take us weeks, literally weeks. Think, the personal glory of Christ? The personal glory of our Lord as represented in those incidents in which he carried out his ministry day by day, week by week, month by month for three years to unfold the glory of the Son of God as reflected in that ministry, or think of the meditorial ministry of the Lord? To represent the Father and claim that when men see him they see the Father? “He that hath seen me have seen the Father, Phillip?” Then to think of other meditorial ministries, the forgiveness of sins, justification, declaring us righteous with the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Not only justification, but

the ministry of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, in fact the indwelling permanently of the Holy Spirit is coming, his kingdom and even in the eternal ages for that belongs to the glory of Christ as well.

I love the way that John concludes his treatment of the glories of the future by saying, “One of the outstanding things about the future is simply that Emmanuel himself shall be their God.” That’s the sense of that expression in Revelation 21:3; “God himself with them shall be their God.” Emmanuel, the name given to him in the beginning, shall be their God throughout the ages of eternity and as he leads his sheep. On we go from living waters to living waters of growth in the knowledge of the Son of God. What a blessing lies in front of Christians. This is part of the ministry of the word of God. And then Paul, as if to reach an anticlimax which is not, says, “He’s the image of God.” We talked about that when we expounded Colossians. I won’t say anything more about it.

Our great expositor has said, “The sun is no less resplendent because the blind do not perceive its light.” It’s true. This world cannot receive the gospel. The world is an unbelieving world. The apostle in 1 John says, “The whole world lies in the wicked one, but let us never forget that, though the world lies in the wicked one, the glory of Christ is still resplendent glory.” Just as this morning while I arrived at Believers Chapel and looked out at the audience, I was never so amazed at how many people were afraid of rain. It’s true. There were a few flashes in the sky. Perhaps they didn’t know about it. We haven’t had rain for so long here they wondered what that is in the sky flashing, but, nevertheless, the sun was still shining. It was cloudy. There were a few drops that were coming down, but the sun was still resplendent in its glory. And so the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the truth concerning him is just as resplendent as it has ever been, even though we are living in the clouds and the murkiness and fog of unbelief.

Now, Paul, in verse 5, clarifies precisely the gospel’s subject. He says, “We do not preach ourselves. We preach Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as your bond-slaves for Jesus’ sake.” Notice Paul did call the gospel his. He said, “Our gospel,” up there in verse

3, but he was not doing that in the sense of being arrogantly claiming to have the gospel as his own, he meant simply its the gospel given to him, which the Lord God has given to him to proclaim to the Gentiles. It’s really God’s gospel, and it concerns the Lord Jesus for he said in his first letter to these people, “I determine not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” So we don’t preach ourselves. We preach Jesus Christ as Lord. All modern gospels are here by contrast; new age theology, pantheism, eclecticism. If anything is believed seriously enough, its truth. How ridiculous can one treat truth?

Liberation theology; a clever attempt to wed Christian principals to Marxist principals, and under the guise of Christian terminology, seeks to bring economic and political freedom to peoples who do live in measures of economic and political oppression. But to do it by affirming that the Lord Jesus came as the ultimate liberator, political and economic, does so much damage to the word of God it’s hard to understand how anyone could respond except we remember. We no longer read the Scriptures. Further, Paul’s right, the wicked one is blinding the minds of people, and even the ministry, and particularly the leftist ministry. Blinded to the truths of the word of God, do not understand Scripture and in the guise of Christian teaching; a firm false doctrine, opinions, idiosyncrasies, prejudice, prejudices.

In fact, if you looked at the ministry today, you could think of them as “The Crazyes.” That’s really what they are, “The Spiritual Crazyes.” Yesterday I was in Austin with Dr. John Gerstner who has had meetings here. Dr. Gerstner, as you know, has been a highly respected Christian minister, taught church history and history of Christian doctrine for many years in the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, Presbyterian Seminary, the Northern Presbyterian Church, highly respected evangelical man, and Dr. Gerstner was the eldest speaker, and he spoke three times, and I spoke three times in a conference on reform theology. Well, Dr. Gerstner is a man in his seventies. And you know when you’re in your seventies, your life is really gone, but he’s living out his life. And he is, to

my mind, perhaps the most converted professor and minister that I’ve ever known. When he starts talking about the gospel of Christ and the truths concerning the gospel, he really gets excited. And he was talking about the fact that we don’t understand what we really are in the sight of God; rebels, rebellious, vile, enemies of God, all of these things the Scriptures say about us. There are things that God says about us outside of Christ. He said he finished one of his messages and a lady came up to him and said, “Dr. Gerstner, you made us feel like that tonight.” He said, “That’s too high.” [Laughter] He said, “As a matter of fact, you should be like this. No, he said, you should be minus something.”

And then he went on to talk about the things that are being said and when he came to the gospel of self-esteem, in the light of what the Scriptures say about us -- Now, Dr. Gerstner, as I say, is a tremendous man. I’ve known him for many years. He’s just a great man I greatly admire, but he gets so excited about truth and against error. He said, “The Gospel of Self-esteem!” And with that, his head went down below the pulpit, to imagine that anyone could come up with the gospel of self-esteem in the light of what the Scriptures say about us is astonishing and yet it can not only be found in our society but highly regarded. Isn’t that startling? The Gospel of Self-esteem. I can hear Paul now, “What in the world is that?”

Well, anyway, he says, “We preach Christ as Lord. That’s his message. Note the two names: Lord, Jesus, the God man. We preach him as Lord for the simple reason that he was crucified, that he has been raised from the dead. He’s been -- he has ascended to the right hand of the Father. And there he ministers in the light of what he has accomplished by the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross, securing for his people, for whom he died, all of the benefits that he purchased with his blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross.

Therefore, my Christian friends, we shall have everything for which Jesus Christ died. Isn’t that encouraging? Isn’t that marvelous? To think that everything that he purchased shall be ours. We already have some of it. John heard the elders and the

others in heaven saying, That he bought us, and that he has made us -- not will -- has made us kings and priests already, and we shall reign with him on the earth.

Luther said, We always preach him. Incidentally, Luther is now Mormon. Did you know that? Perhaps you didn’t know that. Maybe I said something about that. That’s a sign of old age, too. But Luther has now become a member of the Mormon Church. The Mormons have the doctrine that someone related to an individual, years later may be baptized for that individual, and they become a member of the church. And a distant relative of Martin Luther has been baptized for him in the Mormon Church, and so Luther is now Mormon. I don’t think that would be accepted by most good Lutherans, but, nevertheless, they’re claiming him now. Luther is out of harmony with that doctrine, however. He said, “We preach always him, the true God in man.” Notice that, “The true God in man.” No good Mormon could say that. The true God in man. “This may seem,” Luther says, “a limited and monotonous subject, likely to be soon exhausted, but we’re never at the end of it.”

Listen to what George Whitfield said, the greatest evangelist whoever came to America two hundred years ago preaching a sermon in Glasgow on the duty of the gospel minister. He said, “You will never preach with power feelingly while you deal in a false commerce with truths unfelt. It will be but poor dry, sapless stuff. Your people will go away out of the church as cold as they came in. From my part, he cried out, I would not preach an unknown Christ for ten thousands worlds! Such offer God’s strange fire and their sermons will but increase their own condemnation.”

When the Apostle Paul says, “We preach Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake,” he’s preaching in that tradition and there in his tradition. And one might ask, “Why does Paul do this?” And he tells us in the last verse. He says, “For God who said -- or it is God who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness and the god who said that is the one who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” That little word “for” literally “because” in the Greek

text introduces the reason -- because it is God who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness.”

The fact that he said that -- remember, he’s going back to Genesis Chapter 1 in verse 3. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. The God who said, “Let there be light,” the God who said, “Light shall shine out of darkness,” that God is the one who has shown in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Unbelievers are blinded. The apostle acknowledges that, but Paul has been illumined. Paul has come to understand. And further, in this last statement that he makes here, “He has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” We have the clinching reason why there is no place in genuine evangelical ministry for self-esteem, self-proclamation, self-promotion.

Everything comes from God. This is no academic theorizing on Paul’s part. He was not a professor of systematic theology. Thank God for that. Paul was a man who had all of the knowledge of a systematic theologian, but he learned it the way professors of systematic theology ought to learn it, through his own Christian experience. He was a person who had been blind. If anyone was blind, Paul was blind, persecuting the Christian church, persecuting them to death, hounding them if he possibly could, treating them as if they were the scum of the earth, trying to wipe out the followers of the Nazarene until God met him on the Damascus road. And that’s what he’s alluding to here when he says, “God is shined into his heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

The light from heaven, as Luke puts it in Acts chapter 26 in verse 13, “Left an abiding wonder in the mind of Paul and an everlasting spell upon his heart that never left him, the knowledge of the saving acts of God in Christ.” That is resulted in apostolic activity,” he says. He has shown in our hearts to give the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ and so the same God who brought into the darkness and chaos of the beginning, the light has shined into the heart, the chaotic heart

of the great apostle who was fighting the Christian Church, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ for the purpose of the illumination of others, such as you and me, with the knowledge of the word of God.

What we have in Paul and others who have given us testimony to the revelation that came to them is a true record of the ministry of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. There was once a little girl, the preacher, philosopher who told this story about the little girl was Dr. Rufus Jones, he was a notable Quaker philosopher. He used to tell the story of a mother who was assuring her little daughter that she needn’t be afraid of the dark as she was going to bed because he said that she said, “Because God’s going to be with you, so you have no need to fear.” And the little girl replied, “ But I don’t want God. I want someone with a face.” Well, we have in the Lord Jesus Christ in the revelation of the word of God concerning him, the face of God, and it’s reflected in all that the Lord Jesus accomplished in his saving ministry.

When the glory of God shown upon the Apostle Paul, he recognized immediately it was from God and the truth concerning Christ was brought into his heart. And that, he never lost the zest for proclaiming. In fact, Paul tells us even something better than this. In fact, I think it’s really the climax. He said, now remember he’s been thinking about Moses. He said, “Look. The glory on Moses’ face,” -- if he were to spell this out, “The glory was on Moses’ face by reflection.” He was in the presence of God. He came out and he reflected the glory of God, but it was a fading glory. But in our case, we don’t have a fading reflected glory by virtue of what God has done in Christ, God himself has come to dwell within us forever through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

The light which no man can approach unto, Paul says in another place, has come to live permanently in our hearts. What a blessing it is to be a Christian. What a blessing it is to have Christ dwelling within us. What a tremendous thing it is to know that he, the eternal God, is our constant companion in all of the experiences of life. And what a tragedy, my Christian friends, that we don’t ponder the word of God, that we don’t read

the word of God, that we don’t come to know what we really have in Christ. We live in the fog. The clouds are over us. We don’t see the sun of Christian theology. It’s resplendent out there, but we don’t see it because we’re really not interested, that interested, in discovering what we really have in Christ.

May God help us to repent of the way in which we have treated the word of God and the way in which ultimately we have responded to the glorious ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ. May we give ourselves to communion with him.

If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in Christ, we invite you, as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, to recognize that the word of God does say, “We are rebels, we’re enemies, we’re vile in the sight of God,” we’re not like this. As Dr. Gerstner said, “We are minuses.” But through the gospel of Christ, we can come to know that we possess the righteousness of God, that righteousness which God’s righteousness requires him to require. So if you’re here and you’ve never believed in Christ, you don’t have the assurance of the forgiveness of sins or of the possession of the righteousness of God, come to Christ. Believe in him, trust in him, and thank him for what God has done for sinners through the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks and praise for these marvelous words from the apostle. And, Lord, enable each of us who are believing Christians to, in our daily life, preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord and ourselves as bond-servants for Jesus’ sake. Deliver us from self-promotion, not the singular peril of preachers or ministers or others who appear in public, but a singular peril for all of us, personally.

And, Lord, if there should be some here who have never believed in Christ, we again ask, if it should please Thee, give them no rest nor peace until they rest in him who has offered an atoning sacrifice sufficient to cover their sins and to provide them with a righteousness that is pleasing to Thee. Go with us as we part.

“The Gospel: God’s Glory in Christ’s Face” by S. Lewis Johnson
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For Jesus’ sake. Amen.