



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 6:1-10

“The Hymn of the Herald of Grace”

TRANSCRIPT

For those of you that have been hearing our announcements concerning volume three of Thomas Brook’s works, we’d like to say that this morning, in the 8:30 service, I made mention of this again and suggested that the elders may be considering appointing a special prosecutor. [Laughter] And a moment ago, I came in the office, and there was Volume Three. And, unfortunately, however, our investigation shows that the individual did not hear the threats at 8:30 and so brought them in of his own free will [laughter] but it’s a -- so I’m glad some of you got that anyway.

So there’s one other thing, however, that we must say, and that is that we have to reveal now something that we don’t like to reveal that Believers Chapel has a security council, and because we have a security council, this is going to have to be kept top secret. Now, I know that some of you are going to badger the elders and try to ask them, “Who was the party that brought it in?” Actually, we don’t know that he took it out. We just know he brought it in, at this point. [Laughter] And if that becomes an issue, we will have to take further testimony. But at any rate, that’s the way it stands now, and we are going to leave it that way. And Martha, aren’t you happy? She’s the Librarian, so anyway I thought you would be interested in that. It’s one of the highlights of today.

For the Scripture reading, we are turning to 2 Corinthians chapter 6, and we are reading verse 1 through verse 10. And you’ll remember that the apostle has reached the climax, but not the conclusion, of his words concerning Christian ministry. And that climax was reached in that great passage that concluded the 5th chapter, the final text of which is,

“For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Continuing in verse 1 he writes,

“And working together with Him, we also urge you.” (That there a little bit of emphasis in the Greek text and so the Apostle evidently has in mind, specifically, the Corinthians.)

“We also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: *“At the acceptable time I listen to you, And in the day of salvation I helped you.”*”

That’s a quotation from the Old Testament in which the apostle seeks to support of the appeal in verse 1, and now he interprets that,

“Behold, now *is* the accepted time; behold, now *is* the day of salvation. Giving no cause for offense in anything, in order that the ministry be not discredited. But in everything commending ourselves as servants of God: in much endurance.” (Now, these following words define the endurance in what ways the endurance is manifested.) “in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger;” (Some of you have a text that has fastings, but this is not religious fasting but the fasting of lack of food, simply. And so it’s translated properly in

the New American Standard Bible, as in hunger.) “in purity, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, in genuine love, in the word of truth, in the power of God, by the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report; regarded as deceivers, and *yet* true; as unknown, and *yet* well known;” (Of course, that means, well known to God.) “as dying, yet look we live;” (And obviously the apostle considers that a rather remarkable thing. He carries about in his body, the dying of Jesus he has said, in the previous, 4th chapter. But now he regards it as, somewhat surprising, humanly speaking only, that he still lives. So he says,) “as dying yet behold we live as punished, yet not put to death, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, *yet* possessing all things.”

May God bless this reading if his word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we come to Thee in the same of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ again. We give Thee thanks for the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Remembering that is has come to us in 1987, in the Western world, with so much blessing from Thee from the Holy Spirit. And so Lord, we thank Thee.

We thank Thee for the privilege that is ours of knowing him whom to know his life eternal and behold proclaiming the word of God ourselves. We thank Thee, and we worship Thee, and we pray Lord tat through the Holy Spirit, the preaching and teaching of the word of God may be fruitful in our time together.

We commit to Thee, the whole church of Jesus Christ and we pray for each individual member, and we remember that fact that we are bound together in the oneness that is made possible by the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we thank Thee and praise Thee, and we ask, Lord, that Thou will give us an even deeper understanding that we may more truly appreciate the love and grace and mercy that Thou has shown to us.

We pray also for our country in these critical days in which we live. We ask that Thou would give wisdom and guidance to all of those who rule over us, not only in Washington but in Austin and in Dallas. We commit them to Thee. We pray that providential hand may be over us continually for the purposes of the triune God in Heaven.

We pray for those who are sick and ill. We remember partially the [name redacted] and ask Thy blessing upon, them the loss of [name redacted], this morning. We pray that Thou art give comfort and strength and all the things necessary as we pass through the experiences of life that are not pleasant to us.

We thank Thee now for the ministry Thou hast given to our elders, deacons and members and to the Chapel. We pray Thy blessing upon it. May it continue to bare fruit for the glory of Jesus’ name.

We pray in his name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today in the expedition of 2 Corinthians is the hymn “Of the Herald of Grace.” And of course “Of the Herald of Grace” is the Apostle Paul and these verses represent the hymn.

As we mentioned in the Scripture reading, the apostle has reached the climax of his magnificent exposition of the ministry of reconciliation. He has proclaimed a representative union with a dying and rising Messiah by whom men have life, reconciliation, and justification by, specifically, his penal substitution. And we pointed out that since our Lord has borne the judgment of the individuals for whom he has died. Those individuals can never again come under judgment. Heaven has no further grounds to raise against them.

Augustus Toplady was right when he wrote, “Payment God can not twice demand. First from my bleeding sutras hand and then again at mine.” But of course the message of grace must be received. Now we know, from the New Testament that the reception is

through the instrumentality of faith and that faith, as The Westminster Confession has put it, which we read last Sunday, is by the gift of God.

Now, the apostle has just stated that the message is reconciled to God, and this is a message to be proclaimed to the world of Jews and Gentiles. And so now it’s natural for him to speak with reference to it by exhorting those who are listening to his message to not receive the grace of God in vain.

We know from things that are said in this epistle and particularly from later chapters, that the Corinthian were weak and in danger of laxing from their profession into a heathen laxity. That is evident from chapter 11 in verse 4. We don’t have time to read it. Later on we’ll seek to expound it and probably refer to it, as well.

So in the light of that, it’s not surprising that the apostle should make an appeal to them at this point. And that’s the meaning of that very first verse. It’s Paul’s appeal for continuance in grace. He writes, “In working together with Him, we also urge you,” a little bit of emphasis upon that in the original text, “not to receive the grace of God in vain.” In other words, put simply, to make right use of the message of reconciliation.

Now, it’s not surprising that these words “Receive the grace of God in vain” have created some discussion, and discussion concerning their significance in the light of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints or the security of the believer. So, for example, some have said, “You see this isn’t a text that supports the idea that after we have come to believe in The Lord Jesus Christ, it is possible for us to lose our salvation.” It’s not true to say, “Once saved, always saved,” so they say. And while this is not the greatest text that these would appeal to in support of that doctrine, it’s one of them. And so when we read, “We urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain,” this is supposed to mean that it is possible for us to receive it in vain in the sense that having received it, having received life through grace, we may lose that life.

Now, we don’t have time, in our forty minutes or so, to deal with a subject as big as that and, furthermore, it’s been dealt with in many messages through the years here at

the Chapel. And, in fact, several written lessons are available on the subject titled, “Once saved, always saved. Is this the teaching of the word of God?” But let me just say this; I’m sure that you’d probably agree that these are texts that must be discussed in the light of that. The Lord Jesus himself says, “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish.”

And the fact that the Lord Jesus said, not simply, “that I give unto them eternal life,” which cannot be eternal life if it’s not eternal. And adds, “they shall never perish.” In some of the most emphatic ways to express a prohibition in the Greek language, “they shall by no means ever perish,” is an acceptable rendering of John 10:28. It would seem very plain that one could not explain that text if this text is supposed to mean that we can receive the grace of God and receive it in the sense of receiving salvation and then receive it in vain in the sense of losing it. So let’s drop that Arminian doctrine and move on to other possibilities.

Now, it is possible to understand this, “that you not receive the grace of God in vain,” as being addressed to mankind in general, not to reject the message. Of course, “not to receive the grace of God in vain,” is not the same thing as saying, “we appeal to you not to reject it.” So even in the terminology of the language, that view is somewhat suspect because Paul does not say, “We appeal to you not to reject the message.” He says, “We appeal to you not to receive the message in vain.” So we’ll drop that explanation, though it’s been given by some interpreters whom I admire and feel that they are generally reliable interpreters of the word of God.

It’s possible, thirdly, to take this as a reference to professed reception of the grace of God. And thus it becomes an admonition to security, an admonition to perseverance. Now, we do know this for many passages in the word of God that one of the means by which God keeps his saints in their relationship to him is through the admonitions and warnings of the word of God as well as through the believer’s prayer. These are all

means to obtaining of the divine purposes. Those are things that God has given us in order to accomplish his ultimate purpose.

So it is possible that the apostle means that we urge you, who have professed to receive the grace of God in Christ and therefore have eternal life, we urge you, you Corinthians, not to receive the grace of God in vain. Your professed reception should be followed by the kind of life that indicates that you really have received the grace of God in Christ. So it would become then an admonition as a means to keeping them within their relationship to the Lord.

One thinks, for example, of the parable of the soils, which the Lord Jesus told in which that very idea is set forth in which it is possible for individuals to have a great deal of ministry and then in the light of our Lord’s parables, there are some that are good ground in whom the word of God finds permanent lodgment and fruit is brought forth, some thirty fold, some sixty fold, some one-hundred fold. So it’s possible that’s what the apostle means. It has been suggested by more recent commentators on this epistle that the apostle is referring back to chapter 5 in verse 10 where we read,

“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each may be recompensed for his deeds in the body according to what he has done whether good or worthless.”

And therefore the apostle is exhorting the Corinthians whom he recognizes as being Christians and being those that are the receivers of the ministry of perseverance and of security. He then would be referring to a possible failure to measure up to their profession and their Christian life after they have entered into their Christian life. In other words, it wouldn’t be a question of whether they are saved or lost but a question of whether they are believers who are pleasing the Lord in their life or whether they are believers who are falling short of the kind of life that will be rewarded at the judgment

seat of Jesus Christ, with things characteristic of the rewards for those who have, in measure, done the Lord’s will while here. That may be the force of it and that would agree with not only the preceding context here, but also agree with other exhortations given in this epistle. I’m not sure that that’s the meaning of the apostle. This is a rather doubtful expression; I don’t want to force my view upon you. Isn’t that contrary to my usual -- grace even ultimately has its affects upon me [laughter], so I leave that up to you. There are at least two possible interpretations that certainly satisfy all the things that we find in the word of God.

If this last is the significance, it certainly illustrates the fact that we must, as believers, walk in the new life that we have received through the Lord Jesus Christ. So often we do not do that, and I think regardless to whether this is precisely what the apostle has in mind, it certainly is a biblical truth. Can anyone who has believed in the Lord Jesus Christ really live on as if what Christ has done means nothing at all? There are lots of people that have made an evangelical profession, including me and including probably most of you, but our lives at times, do not measure up to the standards set forth in the word of God. If an evangelical profession and an immoral life are the ugliest combination of which human nature is capable, the force of this appeal will surely strike home to us. Now, we’ve seen so much of that recently that we can see why the apostle urges those who made profession of faith to follow through by the relying upon the Holy Spirit that the kind of life that flows out of our Christian profession may be one in which the Lord may find us faithful.

So that’s the appeal the apostle makes, and he supports this appeal as is so often the case, characteristic of him, by appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures, which, remember, for him, were the Scriptures. He states in the 2nd verse -- and this is the Scriptural justification for this appeal -- not to receive the grace of God in vain for he -- that is God. For he says, the text says, simply it says, but the reference is to the Lord

God, “At the acceptable time I listen to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you. Behold, now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.”

This is a parenthesis in which the apostle just supports the exhortation with the Old Testament passage. But it’s a very interesting passage, and I am going to forego turning to it. In the 8:30 service I did and found that it took me longer to explain it and therefore wasn’t able to finish what I intended to say so I am just going to tell you at essence what that text says in its context. It is a passage that has to do with the suffering servant of Jehovah. In fact, it’s the second in those great psalms in the Old Testament; prophecy by Isaiah concerning the ministry of the coming Savior. And specially, it’s a passage which refers to the servant and probably directly to our Lord, although possibly in atypical way, but probably directly, as the one who will, through his mediation, make possible saving grace, not simply to Israel but to the Gentiles. It is specifically stated in that passage that the servant is the means by his ministry of the mediation of divine grace not simply to Israel. He’ll be not simply a light to Israel, but to the Gentile world the ends of the Earth.

Now, the apostle sees, in that reference to Gentile salvation, a reflection of his own ministry. Because if you’ll remember, God called him, not simply to speak to the nation Israel but to be a minister of the grace of God to the Gentiles. He speaks of himself as a minister of the gospel of the Gentiles. He’s the apostle of the Gentiles. So he contends that that prophecy has to do what’s happening today -- that is Paul’s day -- in his ministry. The word is now going out to Gentiles. It had been sent to the children of Israel. The Lord Jesus said that he didn’t come to bring the message of salvation specifically to the Gentiles but first to the children of Israel. And so now, however, things have changed. The apostle finds in this statement of the ministry that he has been given by God. So today is the day of the fulfillment in Gentile salvation, and he interprets Isaiah 49:8 by saying, “now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” That’s Paul’s interpretation of Isaiah 49:8. So today is God’s appointed day. And one can sense the jubilant union of

urgency and also of triumphs, in the words of Paul. Don’t neglect the grace of God. This is the day in which it is going forth as an acceptable time and in which is found salvation.

Now, I’m going to stop for just moment and ask you to think for a moment about Paul’s interpretation. “Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.” Now, you can see from this several things that you might pass by if you just read this casually. In the first place, God assigns a set time for the showing forth of his grace. “Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.”

Now, if God sets forth an acceptable time for the showing forth of his grace, it follows that all times are not equally suited to it. Is that not plain? All times are not equally suited to it if he sets a set time, an acceptable time, as the day of salvation. Furthermore, it follows that the free offer of salvation is not open everyday. If not is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation, that inevitably follows. Further, you can see from this, of course, the offer salvation depends entirely on God’s providence, the only time that is accepted is what Galatians and other passages call the set time of the father or the fullness of time.

Now, I want you to notice a further thing about this, notice the order in which the apostle uses these expressions. “Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.” In other words, first a time of acceptance and then a day of salvation. Now, what does that indicate? Well, that indicates that the only source of our salvation is the grace and mercy of God. “Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.” Therefore, we don’t look to ourselves to discover why God saves us as though we could by our own works induce him at any particular time to save us. Why does the day of salvation come? It’s because it’s the accepted time which God in his underserved favor has ordained. In the meantime, we remember Paul’s purpose in saying this, is that there be an underlying urgency in response to the message of the present salvation.

There’s a story in which Warren Wiersbe tells in his little book on 2 Corinthians about a preacher who was speaking to a young lady, and she was arguing that she had

plenty of time to decide for Jesus Christ and was in no hurry to do that. And so probably he had talked with her for a long time on several occasions because I don’t know of any preacher who would normally do this. But he took a piece of paper out of his pocket and he said, “Would you be willing to sign a statement that you would be willing to postpone your salvation for one year?” And she thought about it for a moment, and she said, “No, I don’t guess I would.” And he said, “Well, what about six months?” And she said, “Well, no.” And he said, “What about one month?” And after more hesitation she finally said, “No,” because you see we don’t have any assurance of any other time except today. We don’t know from the word of God that we have the freedom to say, “I won’t respond to Christ today, I’ll respond to him tomorrow.” That is beyond our knowledge, beyond our experience. No one ever has the right or the privilege to say, “Not yet.”

Paul says today is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation. God, in his wonderful grace, has stretched it out nineteen hundred years. Even less reason to delay today than in the Apostle Paul’s day. We don’t have that freedom. We don’t have that luxury of saying, “I’ll believe in Christ tomorrow or the next day.” Many people find themselves today under divine judgment forever having that philosophy. We know because they have made confession of it and passed into eternity without the Lord Jesus Christ.

So the apostle then has appealed for continuance in the grace of God, and he supported it by the word from Isaiah that today is the day of Gentile salvation. The apostle’s message is still being given. We still live in the day of Gentile salvation. Not simply that only Gentiles, but Gentiles and Jews are to be saved today. And tomorrow? That’s in the hand of our providential God.

Now, Paul turns to support of this appeal in verse 3 through verse 10. And you’ll notice, as we read through, that you couldn’t help but be impressed with how Paul has grounded his appeal in his ministerial -- and I’m using that simply in his servant -- in his servant devotedness to the Lord God. You might say just simply to reject the message of

the apostle is to pass censure on his life. Of course, that’s one of the things that are to be inferred from what Paul will set forth before us now.

About a year ago, I read an article in one of our local papers by one of our local sportswriters. He wrote it after the tragic death of Lynn Bias, and he told a story about Edward Bennett Williams who was at one time -- who is today, one of the leading lawyers in the city of Washington and was at one time the acting president of the Washington Redskins, an attorney for them and today is the owner of the Baltimore Orioles, the baseball team. He said that Mr. Williams, who is one of the big lawyers in Washington, told a story in a public meeting.

He said that at one time he was called from Connecticut to ask if he could serve as the attorney for Mr. Bernard Goldfein, a very prominent financier that the government had charged with evading income taxes. And so he was called and he was asked, over the telephone, if the Boston lawyers -- by the Boston lawyers, if he could come and join in the defense of Mr. Goldfein because he was having tax problems with the government. And so Mr. Williams said, Well, send me the files, and I’ll take a look at them. Well, the lawyers in Boston said they couldn’t do that because there was a difficulty, Mr. Goldfein didn’t exactly keep files. And then he said that he would fly to Boston and he would meet the client in his hotel and talk with him. And he said that cannot be arranged either, specifically because the client was spending ninety days with the government on a Connecticut correction farm, at the time, but since Mr. Williams knew the man who was the warden of the detention place, he arranged to meet Mr. Goldfein in a place, and so he went up to meet with him.

And he said as they sat down to discuss the matter, he noticed that Mr. Goldfein had a number of people about him, and he even had his own lawyer. And this lawyer, however, he noticed was not equipped with the greatest smarts and, furthermore, didn’t seem to be able to do anything much more than arrange to have coffee on the tables and go out and get a few sandwiches and put nickels and dimes into the automobiles outside

so that they wouldn’t get a ticket over parking. And his name was Ralph the Slob, that’s what they called his lawyer, Ralph the Slob. And so he had a lengthy conference with Mr. Goldfein and reviewed his case with him and then Mr. Williams said at the end of it, he said, “I’m afraid, Mr. Goldfein, that you have no defense.” And the client’s jaw dropped. He stared at Mr. Williams in disbelief. He jumped to his feet. His face was purple with fury, “Certainly, I’ve got no defense,” he roared. “If I had a defense, Ralph the Slob would handle it.”

Now, Mr. Williams went on to say later on that story came to mind, that experience, when he was the one who hired Vince Lombardi to coach the Redskins, near the end of Mr. Lombardi’s life, many of you will remember that. Well, Mr. Lombardi came down to Washington and Otto Graham had been the coach of the Redskins, a master of offense, one of the great quarterbacks in professional football history, coach of the Redskins. But, unfortunately, the Redskins weren’t winning too well, and so Lombardi was called down, accepted the job, as you may remember and coached for a year or two before he died.

Well, when he came, Mr. Williams said that he got all of the films, and he looked at those films for hours and hours. He said I sat with them for a while but it was so boring, and I didn’t understand what they were talking about. I finally left. But I got a telephone call a few days later, and Mr. Lombardi said he’d like to come out and talk to me. Said he came out, came to my home, we went upstairs. He said we had something to drink. We sat down, and Mr. Lombardi looked at me and he said, “Mr. Williams, or Ed, you’ve got to face it.” Oh, incidentally, I should have said that Otto Graham was now the coach of the Redskins, noted for a tremendous offense, as we Cowboys remember, in the Cotton Bowl days, but not the greatest of defense. So he said, “Ed, you’ve got to face it. You’ve just got no defense.” And Mr. Williams said he jumped to his feet remembering his experience with Mr. Goldfein and said, “Certainly we’ve got no defense. If we had a defense Otto Graham would still be the coach.” [Laughter]

Well, I want to tell you, I thought about this incident when I read this defense that the Apostle Paul sets forth for his ministry. And I want you to know that he had a defense of his ministry. Just take a look at the things that he writes in his defense. There is a negative concern that he expresses and then a positive description of it. Notice first that negative concern in verse 3. He states, “Inasmuch as we,” I’m sorry I’m reading the 5th chapter instead of the 6th. “Giving no cause for offense in anything in order that the ministry be not discredited.”

Now, it’s evident from this that the apostle knew that there were people that would take delight in excuses not to listen to his ministry. That’s plain and clear from Christian ministry. There are people who are always anxious to find some reason by which they can excuse their failure to listen to the word of God, and specifically, failure to listen to a faithful preacher of the word of God. We have those defense mechanisms because we are sinners. And so the apostle, obviously in his words, implies that. He states, “Giving no cause for offense in anything in order that the ministry be not discredited.”

That Greek word is a very interesting Greek word translated “to blame.” In fact, the noun from that same root was the name given by the Greeks to the god of mockery and ridicule. And some commentators have suggested that the meaning here is something like “being made a laughing stock.” So giving no cause for offense in anything in order that the ministry not be made a laughing stock.

Do we live in days like this? Gordon Rupp, one of the great students of Luther, says, the Christian church stands or fall by the integrity of its ministers. Well, that’s not entirely true, but it’s very close to the truth. And certainly the integrity of its ministers has a great deal to do with the success of the ministry.

We are living in days in which we have the Bakkers and the Roberts and the Schulers and others who have certainly done more than to discredit methods by which Christian works survive through solicitation but have also brought blame upon the

Christian ministry itself. I’m sure that there are many in this room who wonder just how Christian ministries like that could possibly be in the light of the slanderous things that have unfolded or the scandalous things that have been unfolded. And now recently, Mr. Roberts, in addition to sending out one million packets of water, telling people that if they are anoint their pocketbooks, their financial problems would be solved, and if they anoint their bodies their physical ailments will be healed. Now makes claims of raising people from the dead. But when questioned closely, begins to hedge and admits that it’s not really true, although his son says he’s done than fifty or sixty times. That’s false and surely, if nothing else, it has brought blame upon Christian ministry.

There is more to it, of course, than that. The very ways by which Christians today obtain their monies is suspect. And the things that such have done in our ministries have caused a flood of letters to go out from works with a bit more integrity who are saying -- I received one just yesterday from a theological seminary that I served in for five years in Chicago, a very fine school, in which they said specifically, we have suffered as a result of the ministry of the Schulers and the Bakers and the Roberts, and we want you to know we have carried on our ministry with integrity and I think so far as recognized integrity by evangelicals, they have done that.

But there is something even more fundamental. I’ll try to bring that out when we get to chapters 8 and 9 because these are the two chapters on the doctrine of Christian giving in the New Testament, the two great chapters. But there is one great thing that has happened in evangelicalism that has led inevitably to this, in my opinion. Now, mind you, this minority opinion. I don’t think ultimately it’s a minority, but you understand it surely is a minority of professing Christians. What we have been exposed to over a lengthy of period of time is the idea that we should not give to Christian works unless we are solicited. In other words, we went to receive letters, prayer letters, statements of the need, statements of the blessings that have been given out, often which are not true, some of which are true and those that use integrity, I am thankful for to that extent. But we

have exposed to a method, by which -- now this is the worst part of it. We, as Christians, have been implicitly taught that the way to give the Christian works is if we are solicited. And if we sign pledge systems, if we adhere to faith promises, then we give and the whole blessing of voluntary giving out our thanksgiving for the grace of God shown to us provoked by God the Holy Spirit has been lost in our Christian world.

There were men like George Muller, Hudson Taylor, many of the works of God down through the years and today up to the present, I haven’t checked it recently. But even things like the radio Bible class, Dr. DeHaan never asked for one penny, and God blessed that ministry. And God also taught us that voluntary giving is giving a set forth in the New Testament. But we have lost that as a result of what has been carried on.

Therefore, when Paul says in verse 3, “Giving no cause for offense in anything in order that the ministry be not discredited.” Let’s seek in caring on the ministry of the word of God to fulfill what Paul says regarding all of the things that are found in the word of God. Not simply the preaching of the gospel, although that is super important, but it’s also important how we carry on ministry. And those ministries should be carried on in the light of the teaching of the word of God. And if we follow that, then we’ll have a testimony that people will listen to and they won’t have an excuse for saying, “Well, I don’t want to believe a ministry in which this is done and that’s done and this is done, and those things are obviously not in harmony with the word of God.”

Now, the positive description follows. No Christian can read verse 4 through verse 10, I don’t believe, without humiliation. I certainly do. Listen to how Paul speaks of his ministry and how he sought to commend what God was doing through him, not himself, but what God was doing through him. He says, “as servants of God commending ourselves in much endurance.”

Now, we know that Paul means what God has wrought in him. That’s the supreme quality, the quality of endurance, fortitude, under trials, and that’s necessary for all of these virtues that are followed and is illustrated in the details of them.

One of the oldest of the Christians, John Chrystostom said concerning endurance, “It’s the root of all the goods, ” goods in the sense of the things that are good, “The mother of piety, the fruit that never withers, a fortress that is never taken, a harbor that knows no storms. It’s the queen of virtues. It’s the foundation of right actions. It’s the peace in war, a calm in tempest, security in plots, which no violence of man and no powers of the evil one can endure -- endurance.”

Now, what did Paul endure? Well, after giving that general word in verse 4, the apostle goes on to speak of these things in nine statements, three triplets, the first of which, express independence of human agency. He states in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses; and then of trials that were inflicted by men, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults; and then those that are voluntarily accepted by him, in labors, in sleeplessness, and in hunger.

Now, we don’t have time to talk about the ways in which this could be illustrated. One could go to the journals of George Whitefield and particularly, John Wesley who wrote so fully of this. Their days in the preaching of the gospel were filled with the things of which Paul is speaking. Tumults. You read Wesley’s journal and you will find, “Today I preached in St. John’s. I was told I should never preach there again. The next day we went to so and so. I preached in St. Phillips. I was told we should never preach there again. The next day...” Day after day in the Anglican Church in which he was an accredited minister, he preached, he was told afterwards, he was never to preach there again. He was having the experiences such as those that were described by the apostle.

He describes the graces that characterized his life in verse 6 and the first part of 7. He says, “Impurity.” That means freedom from every stain of flesh and spirit. Inclusive of that is not simply that the apostle is not afflicted with AIDS, not simply the fact that he would not support pornography. What that statement, “impurity” means freedom from every stain of flesh and spirit, and it surely includes chastity. And chastity is a lost virtue,

even in the ministry today, as we well know. Many published, now even in most evangelical circles, found fortunately in that last case, confessed after a year or so.

So one sees, in the apostle’s statement here, words that speak directly to 1987. In chastity, he says also, in knowledge, which probably means comprehensive knowledge of the faith. In love, which is the power of the age to come breaking in, at the present time genuine love. He goes on to speak about the conditions and methods and says in the latter part of verse 7, “By the weapons of righteousness,” you’ll notice the prepositions how they change here, in and by and through and so on. Here is verse 7, “By the weapons of righteous for the right hand and the left, by glory and dishonor, by evil report and good report, regarded as deceivers.”

Look, our Lord was regarded as a deceiver. This deceiver, they said of him. The apostle was regarded as a deceiver following in our Lord’s steps. Look at Matthew 27, verse 63. John also was regarded as a deceiver and yet though deceivers nevertheless, as he says, true. We have so many instances of that even in relatively modern times.

Many of you know Thomas Jefferson as the third President of the United States, drafter of the Declaration of Independence and in the minds of many American, one of the handful of truly intellectual presidents that we have had. Mr. Jefferson was a deist. Not a theist, or Trinitarian I should say, but a Deist. And, consequently, any idea of the supernatural working in our life, he could not accept. He admitted that the Lord Jesus, at times, said things that were really nice, but nevertheless, he went on to say that he could not agree that men were saved by repentance and received forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ. He required what he called a counterpoise of good works to redeem him.

He said I say there were many admirable things in the words of Jesus but he also found, in the gospel, much ignorance, absurdity, untruth, even charlatanism and imposture among the things written by the gospel writers. The unfavorable things he calls stupidity and roguery. This is what he said concerning Paul. He reserved his worst words for Paul, saying this on more than one occasion, “Paul,” he says, “of this band of

dupes and imposters,” the gospel writers, “of this band of dupes and imposters, Paul was the Great Coryphaeus” That is, that he is the great director of the orchestra. He’s the Great Coryphaeus and the first corruptor of the doctrine of Jesus. This is what our President said. In other words, Paul, the writers of the gospel, they’re deceivers, they’re imposters, and yet they’re true. Fortunately, there is a time of reckoning by great white throne judgment. And if Mr. Jefferson never believed anything but this, you can be sure that at the time of the great white throne judgment, Paul shall be vindicated and Jefferson devastated with all the others who have termed the apostle a deceiver and stuck by their words.

So Paul goes on and concludes -- our time is up. He says, “as unknown, and *yet* well known; that is to God as dying, yet behold we live; as punished or disciplined *yet* not put to death; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing;”

I cannot pass by that without saying one thing. If there was ever a puritan, if there was ever a person who contended for purity, if there was ever a person who could be thought to be the model of the great puritans, who are regarding a doer, sad, professing believers; Paul was such and yet noted. In the midst of the sorrowing, always rejoicing. Listen, the true puritans are those who, in the midst of their trials, are always rejoicing. That’s the Apostle Paul, “always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing and *yet* possessing all things.” Jerome, the Roman Catholic scholar, said, “The believer has a whole world of wealth. The unbeliever hasn’t a single farthing.”

So I close on this note. A man may have an abundance of this world’s goods, but he does not possess them. The fact that he does not possess them is evidenced by the fact that he came in to the world empty-handed, and he’s going out the same way. All that a man has in Christ however, he possess forever. What are the important possessions? Your bank account? Your portfolio of securities? Your land? Are they the important things? No, they are not the important things. The important things are what you have in the Lord Jesus Christ. And I cannot help but say this beautiful, moving,

hymn-like passage makes me grateful to be one with its author in Jesus Christ. Just as Colonel Oliver North’s defense made me thankful for the patriotism, in which I was trained so many, many years ago.

If you are here today and you’ve never believed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we remind you of the gospel; Christ died for sinners. And if you, by God’s grace through the Holy Spirit, came to recognize that you’re a sinner, today is the day of salvation, today is the accepted time. You may have assurance of a welcome by the Lord God in Heaven. Come to Christ, believe in him, and trust in the true riches found in the saving knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] We give Thee thanks, Lord, for these marvelous words that the apostle wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in defense of Christian ministry, truly Christian ministry. O God, help us to follow in his steps. Enable us to have a true idea of the ultimate values of life. Deliver us from the worldliness, the materialism, and all of the other things that seek to crowd in upon us in the day in which we live.

May the Lord Jesus be supreme in our lives. May the word of God be our standard. And for those, Lord, who have come in here, who have not yet believed in Christ, O, in wonderful grace, bring them to the knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal who died for sinners that they might be reconciled, justified and live in him.

We pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.

“The Hymn of the Herald of Grace” by S. Lewis Johnson
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