



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

“A Cameo of Paul's Christianity”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We're turning this morning to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 13 through verse 17, a relatively short but very important passage, and the apostle writes in verse 13, you may remember that in the earlier part of the chapter he has been talking about the day of the Lord. He's talking about the man of sin, the lawless one, the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of this chaos on the earth, and now having finished that part of his letter to the Thessalonians he writes in verse 13,

“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.”

The traditions incidentally are the doctrines that the apostles taught. Traditions, they are the only traditions that are genuine traditions. There is a large religious organization that tells us that we are justified by faith plus the ordinances of the church

that we should hold to the traditions which are defined as traditions of a church. They’re no genuine traditions outside of the apostolic traditions, and so these are the things of which Paul is speaking. He’s talking about the things that he taught them, plus the things that are in his letters to them.

“Stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are so thankful that we are able to call upon Thee and know that Thou doest hear us. We thank Thee for the apostolic traditions found in the word of God. We know there are no other traditions to which we should yield the ultimate alliance as these traditions, the things handed down by the prophets and the apostles, and we thank Thee for them. We thank Thee for their power as the Holy Spirit brings to our hearts the significance of them. We thank Thee for the everlasting salvation that is found in the ministry of our great Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for all that Thou hast accomplished through him and all of the things that Thou art accomplishing to this very day to this very moment.

We ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon the whole church of Jesus Christ. We especially ask Thy blessing upon this body of believers and the members of this church and pray that Thou wilt strengthen them, encourage them, supply their needs, meet them in the difficulties and trials of life and be to them all that the apostles have affirmed to us that

Thou art. We thank Thee for everlasting consolation. We pray that each one in this auditorium may experience just exactly what that means.

We pray for our elders and for our deacons. We pray especially for those who have requested our prayers. For those who are bereaved, we pray especially for them as well. Encourage them, strengthen them. Give them the kind of consolation that will stand them in the experiences of their new life without loved ones.

And now, Lord, we ask, as we sing together, as we hear the word of God together, that we may be strengthened in our faith and if there should be among us who are here some who do not truly know what it is to have an eternal Savior who has delivered us from our sin that today may be the day in which they come to the knowledge of him. This we pray in our Savior’s name. Amen.

[Message] This morning the subject is, “A Cameo of Paul’s Christianity.” It’s always helpful to review the foundations of the faith. I think that Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy, chapter 2 to take the things that he had learned and commit those same things, the same things to others who might be able to teach still more. And so, the great foundations of the faith are something that we should review every now and then because the more we think about them the more wonderful they do become. I know when I first learned the real significance of the expression, “sovereign grace,” was long after I had been a Christian. In fact to tell you a truth, I was already a professor in a theological seminary when I came to understand fully, I think fully, it’s not complete, mind you, but what I would call fully what “sovereign grace” really means. So, to review the faith is always something that’s useful to us, profitable and certainly edifying.

What we are talking about is not the things that are passing, the kinds of things you read in the news paper, but we are talking about things that are eternal. Many of you know, of course, I read the funny papers, and I only read them, of course, in order to have rapport with you, you understand. [Laughter] But, I do enjoy them, and I enjoy

particularly those that frequently have some theological insight, and occasionally one finds them in B.C. for example, and occasionally in Calvin and Hobbs. And back a few months ago, Calvin is walking along with his tiger and he says, “I’m a great believer in the value of novelty.” This is, incidentally, a cartoon for the evangelical church today. “I’m a great believer in the value of novelty. I say anything new is good by definition. It can shock. It can insult or offend me so long as it doesn’t bore me. If you can give me something new, then repackage the old so that it looks new. Novelty is all that matters. I won’t pay attention if it’s not fresh and different.” And Hobbs says, “I see why timeless truth does not sell.” [Laughter] And Calvin still in his world, “Give me a good flash in the pan any day.” [Laughter] Well I’m not going to give you flash in the pan today. I’m going to give you some timeless truth because that’s precisely what we are looking at. We are looking at timeless truth.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, whom I admired about, and still admire about, as much as any preacher, said that the greatest compliment that had ever been paid him was paid him by one of his enemies. I think I understand what he’s talking about, friendly enemies you understand, have paid me a somewhat similar comment. I always say, “thank you for that. At least I sound a little bit like Spurgeon, but not much.” The comment was “Here is a man,” his enemy said, “Who has not moved an inch forward in all his ministry, and at the close of the 19th century is teaching the theology of the 1st century and is proclaiming the doctrine of Nazareth and Jerusalem current eighteen hundred years ago.” Hallelujah. That’s what I want to proclaim. That’s what I think every preacher who is a Christian should proclaim, the doctrine that was current nineteen hundred years ago.

There is another man that I loved. He’s with the Lord now, Charles Hodge, Professor of Systematic Theology for a number of years at Princeton Theological Seminary when Princeton was a great seminary. He wrote some letters to another man who was a great man in Scotland at New College, and in the course of one of the letters to his friend

he said, “I have but one object in my professional and as a writer and that is to vindicate the doctrines of the reformed church. I have never advanced a new idea and have never aimed to improve on the doctrines of our fathers.” Many people would think that was a horrible error. I think it’s the sign of a great Christian theologian.

He also said this about the seminary. He said, “There are theologians who exhort men to think for themselves and to receive nothing on authority and others who crave after novelty.” Calvin was living then too, I guess. “And aspire after originality and others who have a philosophical disposition. It pleased God that the first professors in this seminary should belong to neither of these classes. They exhorted their students to be humble rather than high minded. They had no fondness for new doctrines or for new ways of presenting old ones and they dreaded the thought of transferring the ground of faith from the rock of God’s word to metaphysical quick sands. For this reason Princeton Theological Seminary was regarded by the illuminati in every part of the land as very umbrageous,” that’s an old word that only a Latin student would know if he hadn’t looked it up in the dictionary, but it means “very darkened,” in shadow land so to speak where truth doesn’t really shine upon them, “Very umbrageous, impenetrable to any ray of new light. This did not move the men of who we speak. Would to our great triune God in heaven there were men today who would devote themselves to preaching these great timeless truths without apology.”

The verses that we’re looking at form part of an apostolic thanksgiving meant to encourage the flock. He had just written about reports that would have agitated them. He talked about the coming of the day of the Lord, but before that time he talked about the lawless one who should come, the Antichrist. He talked about the man of sin. He spoke of the mystery of lawlessness as being already at work. He went on the talk about the coming of our Lord and how ultimately our Lord would win the battle and destroy that which Satan had sought to set up upon the face of the earth. So the Thessalonians, simple minded Christians, would sure have been agitated by the things that the apostle

had told them and so in order to encourage them and remind them that although there is this coming chaotic disorder, nevertheless there is a work of God that is going on alongside the work of Satan and his hosts, grounded in loving election and furthermore it has its triumphs, as over against the failures in the immediate future. So the apostle is encouraging the Thessalonians. We always need that. That’s one of the great benefits of going over the old truths again. So I want to look at the passage, a short passage, in that kind of light.

First of all, verse 13 and verse 14, the apostle gives us a thanksgiving for the work of God. It’s very short it’s very pointed. It’s very full of truth. Let me read it again.

“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, 14 to which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

James Denney said this is a system of theology in miniature, and in a way it’s true. He starts in the infinite past. He moves on into the infinite future and in two short verses does give us something of a theology in miniature. It’s thoroughly Pauline, not that the Bible would not, we could not say it’s thoroughly true to the apostles and prophets as a whole, but it’s thoroughly Pauline because I guess of all of the biblical writers it’s the Apostle Paul who particularly stressed the sovereign grace of God in our salvation. He begins with God in sovereign grace. Pardon the expression. It’s thoroughly Calvinistic. That disturbs a lot of people to mention Calvin. Some people seem to think because you mention Calvin that therefore you are talking of him as if he was inspired of God in everything that he wrote. We have enough sense to know that that’s not true, but there is a distinguishing between the authors who write on scriptural matters, and John Calvin was one who wrote some of the greatest of the theological literature.

Why is it that 400 years later he’s still being read, and in fact his books are selling more today than they did in the 16th century? The institutes themselves are selling more today than they did in the 16th century. Why? Because the work is a quality work and true to the word of God, that’s why. It’s not the liberals who are reading it. Oh no, they don’t want to have anything to do with timeless truths. They want the things that are relevant to today. But timeless truths are the truths that are really relevant. We believe that in Believers Chapel. I think most of you do. They’re probably some of you lurking here in the audience who have other ideas. Why are you here? [Laughter] Well, it may be in the sovereign providence of God you are here to rethink some of the things that we all need to rethink from time to time, and anyway, I say it’s Calvinistic. I’m not ashamed of the word. It is.

I remember reading a Southern Presbyterian’s writing about the turn of the century, and he was talking about Calvinism because he was a Calvinist, and he said, “You have all, of course, heard the memorable and classical definition of a crab, in which a crab is defined as a red fish which crawls backwards.” He said, “Now this has, upon very good authority, been pronounced to be a highly scientific and essentially correct definition with three incidental corrections. First of all, a crab is not a fish, and second, it’s not red, and third, it doesn’t crawl backwards.” Now I say that because there are people who think of Calvinism as the kind of doctrine which means that if you are a Calvinist it doesn’t make a bit of difference what you do, everything is all planned and so therefore you sit like a bump on a log, and if you’re elect, you’ll be elected, and it will all come to pass. That’s Calvinism. That’s a definition of the crab as a red fish that crawl backwards. It’s utterly false, false to the word of God, false to the term Calvinism. So, we’re going to talk about something that is Calvinistic, and you will see that it has to do with sovereign grace, and it also has its responsibilities. R-e-s-p-o-n-s-i-b-i-l-i-t-i-e-s, did I spell it correctly? Responsibilities, that’s part of the Christian doctrine that we call Calvinism, responsibilities. We do sometimes forget to emphasize it, but that’s what it is.

I want you to notice now, seven great anchors of the faith that stress that salvation is of the Lord, and you can divide these up into two parts because the first several of them, the first three to be exact have to do with the eternal purpose of God. The last four have to do with the historical outworking of the eternal purpose of God. Seven great anchors of the faith that Paul felt would be the kinds of truths that would stir up the Thessalonians who looked forward to the day of the Lord, the problems of it, the coming of the Antichrist, the lawless one, and the recognition of the fact that the mystery of evil was working in our society, still working, incidentally. So they need to understand that there is a mystery of goodness from the Lord God that also is working in our society carrying out the will of God eternally.

First of all now, in this eternal purpose he says of the Thessalonians, “You have been loved.” Notice the 13th verse, “We are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord God.” Verse 16, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace,” we have been loved. This is the ultimate basis of everything. It’s the ultimate basis of election. We are elected because we have been loved, eternal love. We don’t love the people that we love because of the things they do for us. We don’t love our wives because they’re good cooks. We don’t love our wives because they’re beautiful. We don’t love our wives because they’re good companions. All of the qualities of our wives which we love are things that arise out of one fundamental fact; we love our wives because we love them. It’s a sovereign thing. In fact we don’t have any control over it seems. We find ourselves loving someone. We don’t say, “I will want to love this person, and so I will love them and ultimately I will come to love them.” We don’t do that. We find out, “I’m in love. I love them.” It’s a sovereign activity. God’s love is like that. It’s a sovereign activity.

Now I don’t have time to turn to Deuteronomy but if you turn to Deuteronomy chapter 7 and verse 6 through 10, the Lord says to Moses the same things about Israel that

Paul is saying here. God chose Israel because he loved them. It was his love for them. Not because they were more than any others or more amendable to his will, or more righteous or anything else. He loved them because he loved them. It was sovereign love. Everything flows out of that, but I want you to know that everything rests upon it too for time and for eternity. We have been loved, number one. That’s the love of divine complacency, not the love of divine beneficence because God loves. He loves people that he has not chosen. That’s the love of beneficence, his desire to do them good, but the love of complacency, as theologians put it that which makes him pleased with reference to an individual is the sovereign love. It’s that love that God has for his elect people.

Second, they have been elected as a result of that love. The word elected here is a word that means something like take to themselves in the voice and the verb itself, and of course it emphasizes that this is a sovereign act of the Lord God. I don't have a friend. I call him a friend because I've read a number of his books, and he's a Presbyterian minister, and he's probably as old as I am now, but he's been a faithful man. And in the Southern Presbyterian church through the years teaching in the seminary in Richmond, Virginia, Union Seminary, and he made a statement once that I copied out because I thought it was so good. He says that “Our election is rooted in the will and intention of God,” “Rooted in the will and intention of God.” And what I liked about this is that it raises the question of the rational of the divine election. It's commonly believed among Christians, commonly believed in almost all aspects of the body of Christ, and it's believed in Believers Chapel too, that God elects because of the decision of our free will.

Unfortunately we are taught the doctrine of free will in our newspapers, in our society, in our school as if it's a given of heaven, one of the timeless truths of people like Calvin in Calvin and Hobbs. That the reason that individuals are elected is because God looked down through the years and saw that they would of their own free will believe in Jesus Christ. Think for a moment, my Christian friend, does that mean that God cannot act until

we act. Yes, that’s what it means. God cannot act until we act. He looked down through the years and saw we would believe therefore because of our act, the choice is made, our free will decision.

It’s very interesting when you talk to people who believe in free will decisions. Some of the ways in which they seek to skirt what I would call the truth. Usually an individual who is faced with something like that, when I say to them and when others say to them, not just I, the whole class of people who believe in sovereign grace, well my friend if you really believe that then evidently you think that there is a time when God gains in knowledge. In other words, he looked down through the years, he didn't know this until he looked down through the years, and he looked down through the years, and he saw who would believe and then he chose them. Then you have a God who gains in knowledge. Now, evidently before he looked down through the years and saw who would believe, he was not omniscient. The Bible tells us that the God of Scriptures is an omniscient. He is an unchanging God. He is an eternal God, and the things that are true with him in ages past, the ages past of eternity, are still true. He hasn't gained anything by looking down through the years.

Well if you speak to an Arminian like this he will say, “Well, but wait. He knows all things, but there are some things he chooses not to know.” [Laughter] Now please tell me how it’s possible for a person to know something and then choose not to know it. He’s known it, but he chooses not to know it. So he looks down through the years, having chosen not to know what he knows, and then chooses those who of their own free will decision believe. I don't think anybody with much biblical sense is going to believe that if they come to realize what we’re talking about.

Well, now if it’s true that men are not chosen because of their free will decision, what is the ground of their salvation? Well I guess it’s works after all then. No, it’s not works after all. We dismiss this by simply saying, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man boast.”

That eliminates that. Upon what then is God’s divine election based? Well the Scriptures make it very plain. It’s according to his sovereign grace. It’s according to his discussion made by himself, or to use the language of Scripture in Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 5, “It’s according to the good pleasure of God.” He makes a choice. He elects. You cannot avoid it my Christian friend. If you want to avoid this then you better tear out pages in your Bible because over and over again it’s clear that it is God who elects believers.

That’s why Paul thinks so much about it. That’s why he tries to encourage the Thessalonians by reminding them of the fact they’ve been loved and they’ve been elected. He saves those whom he has purpose to save through faith.

Spurgeon used to say, “Men love God everywhere but on the throne.” But he’s always on the throne, and we love him when he’s on the throne because he’s always on the throne, and what he does is give us truth, timeless truth. Thank you, Calvin. We needed that. Timeless truth, don’t forget it. If you never read the Bible, remember Calvin timeless truth. There is such a thing as timeless truth.

Now he says, thirdly, they have been set apart and called. Notice how he puts it. He says, “God has chosen us for salvation through sanctification by the spirit and belief in the truth.” And he goes on to say in the next verse, “To which he called up by our gospel.” Calling, sanctification, what does that mean? Well it means essentially he has set us apart for a special purpose. He set us apart to belong to him as his family, the believers who belong to him, set apart by him, called. Paul never uses the term “called” except in the sense of an effectual call. It’s not an invitation that a man standing behind a pulpit might give to people. “We invite you to come and believe in Jesus Christ.” No the calls of God, according to Paul, are effectual calls. When he calls, they come. That’s part of the call of God. It’s an effectual call. So they have been called.

This is the pre-salvation ministry of infallible grace. The thing that Paul talks about in Romans 8 verse 30, “Those whom he’s called,” it’s the spiritual counterpart of the proverb, “You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink.” You can have

people come to hear the gospel. You can preach fervently. You can preach with perspiration. You can preach in such a way that when you wind up your clothes are wet with perspiration. You’ve tried as hard as you can. But when it comes to Christian salvation my friend, the work must be done by God. Sometimes it’s very quick. It almost seems easy. Someone is ready to respond to the gospel through the pre-salvation work of the Holy Spirit that’s setting apart ministry. At other times, there are people who sit in an audience for years and years, we’ve had them in Believers Chapel, some of you are probably there still, sitting constantly hearing, and God has not worked in your heart yet. We hope that he does. It would be a great testimony to the grace of God if he were to work in your heart, and we could say, “Did you hear the news? So and so has been converted. After all of these messages that are so plain and clear. You know they finally have seen the light.” That’s what makes Christian life interesting. Called, we have been loved; we have been chosen; we have been called.

Those are things beyond our history, but now in history, the historical outworking of the great electing purpose of God is, fourthly in verse 13, Paul says they have been evangelized, “To which He called you by our gospel,” good news, the gospel of truth. This is the means of the calling. There is no salvation without the word of God. It is not possible for an individual to come to an understanding of what Christian salvation is without the message of the good news concerning Christ, his death, his burial, his resurrection. Many of the other things the Scriptures go on to expand in great detail. That’s why we have letters. That’s why we have gospel, lengthy, and that’s why we have the many pages of the New Testament. It’s because God wants us to come to the good news of truth, not simply the saving truth, but more than that, and so we have been evangelized, no salvation without the word of God.

In verse 13, he also says they’ve believed, notice, “Through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.” Everything is passive up to this point, God’s love, God’s election, God’s calling, but now we have the belief of truth. This is the human side of the

work of salvation. This is the active part of it. God doesn't believe. We believe. Man believes. Yet at the same time, remember it's God's gift. As a matter of fact the text we quoted is sufficient, the passage from Ephesians, but I'm going to cite another one in chapter 1 and verse 29 the epistle of Paul to the Philippians he says, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Notice the word "granted." You probably have given in one of your texts because the Authorized Version had that. "For to you it has been given," "To you it has been granted on the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but to suffer for His sake," both of these things given to us, given. It's not something we can work up. It must be given by God, but nevertheless, we must believe. As I say, God doesn't believe. That's the fifth thing.

And then coming back again to verse 13 he says, "God from the beginning chose you for salvation." So they have been saved. They have been loved. They have been elected. They have been set apart and called. They have been evangelized, and they have believed, and so now we can say of them, they have been saved. He says he's chosen you "For salvation." We have people who say, "I don't like that term election. As a matter of fact election is primarily for Christian service." No, this text says it very plainly. It's true we are elected for Christian service, but we are elected for Christian salvation too. That's very evident. Just read the text. So many errors are corrected by reading the text isn't it? So often if we just read the text. We listen to preachers too much. You have only ten minutes more to listen to me, but we listen to preachers too much and do not read our Bibles enough. That's true of Believers Chapel. I don't know about you who may be visiting today, but it's true of people in Believers Chapel. I know them. They don't read their Bible enough. They listen to preaching. They listen to Bible teaching, but they don't read the Bible enough. So, let's don't forget. It's belief of the truth, truth, the timeless truth of the word of God, and we have been saved. We've been elected for salvation. It's true election is for service, but the, to put it this way, we are

saved. We are elected for salvation. That, of course, we could call the proximate purpose of election, but we are also elected for service which is maybe we would say the intermediate result of our election. We are ultimately elected for the glory of God throughout the ages of eternity. It’s true. We are elected for service. We’re elected for salvation. We’re elected for service. We’re elected to be an instrument of the glory of God extolling his glory down through the ages of eternity. It may be difficult to understand, but that’s what God says in his word.

Do you know how you can tell if a person has been elected? Oh, I cannot enter into the labyrinth of the wisdom of the eternal God, but he’s given us some signs to tell us. What are the signs? Well, in the first place, one of the signs is faith. If a man believes, if he truly believes the gospel, that’s a sign of his election. That can come quickly, I believe by God’s grace. Paul told the Philippian jailor, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and Thou shalt be saved.” And he did. That was a sign of his election. He was an elect man. He didn’t have to find out whether he was elect by consulting some of the great texts of Scripture, but simply his faith that was a sign of his belief, the fact that he was a new person, regeneration. Faith and regeneration are the means by which we discover who has been elected. We never know until then.

And finally, for the seventh, the fourth of the historical things, evangelized, believed, saved, glorified, verse 14, “To which He called you by our gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This is the last stage in this magnificent plan of God which is called the plan of salvation, the last stage of this great sovereign grace methodology of the Lord God. I think you can see that this passage has begun in the past and moves on into eternal future. And one of the commentators who said, “Paul let’s his religious imagination range from everlasting to everlasting,” is speaking accurately. He has begun in the infinite past, moves into the infinite future, and in this brief cameo had given us the essence of Christian doctrine.

Christian theologians study what is called the *Ordo Salutis*, “The Order of Salvation.” It’s a part of Christian theology in which you study the decrees of God and the order in which the decrees of God are carried out. And so there was a man who was preaching, teaching students, young theological students, such as I was many years ago, and he taught them the following order of the decrees of God. There were seven decrees, he said, for ordination, that’s pre-destination, election, foreknowledge, three things in the infinite past, calling, justification, sanctification, and glorification. These were the seven decrees of God. He warned the students that on the exam they might have question like that, and so many of the students were prepared and they came in the class and one young student was prepared, he thought, and when he looked and saw the final question was, “Set forth the order of the decrees,” he thought, “Well I’ve got that question.” He went ahead and wrote the answers to the other questions. Time was growing rather short, like now, and when he came to the end he wrote down glorification. He remembered, however, that there were seven of the decrees, and he went back and counted his, and there were only six. And for the life of him he could not remember the other. The clock was gradually moving to the close of the hour, and finally the bell rang, and exhausted he wrote down, “Glorification” and then for his seventh point, “More glory.” [Laughter] And I know how the professor felt. When he got that paper he couldn't help but smile, and he couldn't help but mark it wrong. That’s a professor’s responsibility, of course. So, “more glory.”

Before we close I want you to notice that after we’ve talked about this marvelous plan of sovereign grace, the apostle says in verse 15, “Therefore, brethren, (stand and) stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.” “Stand fast and hold,” this shows, of course, that in Paul’s mind sovereign grace does not destroy the necessity for responsibility. “Stand fast and hold,” this is part of the divine program. You cannot therefore say, “Calvinists destroy all need for any kind of energy whatsoever. You just sit like a bump on a log and wait for God to move.” That’s

contrary. That’s like the definition of the crab as a red fish that crawls backwards. It’s not scientific. It’s not accurate. Here is the great Calvinist himself saying to the Thessalonians, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or by our epistle.”

The traditions, of course, were the teachings of the apostles. They were not traditions that didn't have apostolic background. They’re not the traditions of a church, such as we have today, a large religious organization with all kinds of traditions that are contrary to the truth of Scripture. The only traditions that are valid traditions are the traditions of the word of God, the traditions of the apostles, the apostolic traditions, and they are in the word of God. Our Lord warned against the traditions of the fathers, the Jewish fathers because they were not truth.

This is a warning also incidentally against depreciating doctrine and propositions. “Stand fast and hold the traditions,” that means stand fast, my Christian friend, and hold to the doctrine that you’ve been taught, what you’ve been taught this morning in so far as it’s in accord with holy Scripture. Hold to the doctrines. Therefore a true Christian could never say, “Look I’m not interested in Christian doctrine. I’m not interested in theology. I’m interested in Christ.” Who is Christ? The minute I say that you have to answer me doctrinally, and there is your theology. Or some say, “I’m not interested in doctrine. I want life.” There is no life apart from the traditions. There is no life apart from the doctrine. There is no life apart from these things that Paul has been talking about.

Gordon Clark, who’s been--is now with the Lord, is rejoicing there, he may even be hearing me now, he’s probably found some things wrong already, but Dr. Clark used to say that an individual who doesn't understand that a Christian is a person who must believe doctrine, must hold to doctrine, has a charlie horse between his ears. [Laughter] And that is truth, in my opinion.

And finally, Paul says in verse 16 and verse 17, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation.”

All effort, incidentally, is called forth and supported by God. Every kind of effort of holding fast the traditions is the product of the work of God. He promises that as we seek to hold fast the traditions he promises the help that is necessary. Paul prays to that end. “May our Lord Jesus Christ, and God our Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work.”

Look at that for one moment. “Who has loved us,” for present troubles, the source of assurance and help is the cross death of Jesus Christ. That he loved us and gave himself for us, my friend, is the source of all of the help that we expect in the troubles of life, and will you notice too that the apostle says that God has given us “Everlasting consolation,” not timely, not for a time, but “Everlasting consolation.” No matter what the experiences of life are, there is a constant consolation that God gives us along the way. It’s everlasting. Do you know what that means? It was true yesterday. It’s true today. It will be true tomorrow. It will be true a thousand years from now. It will be true a millions years from now that everlasting consolation that has been given to us, he says, and good hope by grace. No matter what the experiences of life are, we have everlasting consolation by this sovereign grace. And we have good hope; eternal comfort does not exhaust his gifts. For future uncertainties, he’s bound himself to us for well founded hope.

This great passage may be, as Denney says, a system of theology in miniature, but judged as I’m judging it by its impressive completeness, beginning in eternal love and winding up in eternal comfort and consolation, to me when I think about the precision of its truth beginning and ending, it’s not only theology in miniature. It’s theology, pardon the expression, even old people sometimes read everyday things; it’s theology to the max. That’s what it is, theology to the max. It’s the theology of yesterday. It was Spurgeon’s. It was Hodge’s, and down through the centuries, it was Calvin’s. It was in large measure the emphasis of Agustin, all the way down to the apostles and the prophets and our Lord

Jesus Christ, of course, preeminently. It should encourage us while making us humble, making us fearless, and holy and above all, grateful.

That’s the way I feel about it. And I feel, my friend that in this truth there is found the specific needs for every single individual in this audience. The children, they need it. They need it now. Their lives are lives that are soon going to be out in the midst of the world, and they’re going to be buffeted back and forth, and the one thing that will really hold them will be the truth that they have learned from the apostles and the prophets. Never forget that. And for those of us who are old and our hair, if there is still any there at all, is gray, we know what we face. We know what we face soon. And from Paul I gain a great deal of encouragement. And when I look at things that are happening in the world and realizing that there is a system of evil at work that comes from the evil one at work in our midst, it’s great comfort to know that we have the conquer in our Lord Jesus Christ. So I ask you to come to him. Trust in him. Christians as well, trust in him. Give yourself to him. Enjoy the blessings of sovereign grace. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee and thankful that the apostle has written such a short and yet full explanation what Thou art seeking to make known to all of us, the marvelous grace of God in the cross of Jesus Christ for all men. We thank Thee for the privilege of preaching the gospel, and the privilege of preaching it to everyone. We all need it. We pray, Lord, that through the Holy Spirit Thou art at work in hearts right now in this auditorium and then elsewhere through the ministry of the holy Scriptures. Glorify the Savior...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]

“A Cameo of Paul’s Christianity” by S. Lewis Johnson
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