



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Local Church

“Its Ordinances”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Let's begin our class this morning with a word of prayer. Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the word of God. And again we ask for the guidance and illumination of the Holy Spirit as we study together this day. We commit our class to Thee and the classes of the Sunday school and pray that in each one of them the Spirit of God may do the work that is best for us. We commit our time to Thee with thanksgiving. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] This is the fifth in a series of studies on the local church in the New Testament. And we have studied these subjects, the local church, its organization, and we spent two of our lessons upon that. Then the local church, its spiritual gifts, in which we tried to point out the difference between spiritual gifts, offices, and graces. By the way, I overlooked one spiritual gift. After one of the meetings Dr. Alan Hull came to Howard Prier and said that in a church in which he had formally fellowship they had a discussion on spiritual gifts and after the discussion on spiritual gifts a man came to one of the elders and said that he thought he had a spiritual gift and he wanted to know what to do with it. The elder said, “What is your spiritual gift?” He said, “Well my spiritual gift is the gift of

criticism.” [Laughter] And the elder was very wise, he said, “I suggest that you bury that gift.” [Laughter] I thought all Christians had that gift, myself.

Then we studied last time the local church, its priesthood in which I tried to point out every one of us is a priest. And in the sense that we speak of priesthood as an office it is true to say that every one of us holds an office in the local church. We are priests if we are not elders and deacons. Now today we are coming to a subject which again is a big subject. It is impossible to cover all of the ramifications of it in one lesson; it is the subject of the ordinances in the church.

And so we will look at the two ordinances, the ordinance of baptism and the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper. Now for some of you who are interested in a more complete discussion of the Lord’s Supper there is available a series of tapes on this. About three years ago, I think, I gave a series of five messages on the Lord’s Supper in the morning Ministry of the Word meeting, and I believe that four of them, the last four, were taped. For some reason the first was missed but the last four are a series in themselves because they have to do with the New Testament subject of the Lord’s Supper. And if you are interested I suggest that you get the tapes and listen to them.

So today the local church, its ordinances and for a beginning Scripture reference will you turn with me to Acts chapter 2, and let’s read verses 41 through 46. Acts chapter 2, and verse 41,

“Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their

meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

Believers Chapel is committed to the principle that the choice of one's church or local fellowship is a very important thing and it is to be decided by the word of God. There are many human standards by which we choose our local church fellowship. For example, some of us choose our local church because it is our family church and that is the basis upon which we make it ours. My family has been here, and my family's family, and for generations we have been a member of this church and I cannot possibly be in any other church. It's like being a Republican or a Democrat because your family has been a Republican or a Democrat for generations. Some people choose their church in that way. Some choose their church on the basis of its size. If it is a large church and they like a large church then they choose a large church. Occasionally you will find people who like a small church and they will leave a large church because they want to be in a small church. They find need for fellowship in that type of surrounding and so they choose their church on the basis of size.

Others choose their church on the basis of influence. If it has influence in the community and if it may be a means of helping me then that is the church for me, and influence is the standard for some. Others choose churches because their children like certain churches. I have discovered through the years and calling on many people in North Dallas that this is a very large thing with many people. It's the church that their children like, which is the church that they choose. Now this to me seems a very, very immature way of choosing a church, to ask your children what church they like because it is obvious that the principles whereby they are guided are not, or at least should not be, the principles whereby the parents are guided for the parents supposedly are mature. But many choose their church on the basis of their children's choice.

Others choose it on the basis of the opportunity that exists in the church and I find this to be true of many very good Christians and some who have reached a level of maturity. They go to a certain church because it affords them an opportunity for Christian service of one form or another. For example, if they sing it may offer an opportunity for them to sing. If there are openings in the Sunday school it may offer them an opportunity to teach and so on. Now again it seems to me that this is an immature standard by which to choose a local church fellowship, providing all things are not absolutely equal.

Then others choose their church because of its friendliness. Some will come in and say, “That church is very friendly, that’s the kind of church for me,” or, “The other church is very cold, that’s not the kind of church for me.” I find this very frustrating. I find it very frustrating for myself as an elder of Believers Chapel to hear someone say to me who has been attending Believers Chapel, “This church is not friendly.” I found you very friendly, you’ve been very friendly to me and I hope I’ve been friendly to you, but it is true that many do come in a church, even a church like this, and say it’s unfriendly, it’s not warm. Just this week I spoke to a young man who is looking for a church. He said, “Frankly, the only thing that hinders me from Believers Chapel at the moment is because it’s not a warm church.” I tried to explain to him that probably a third of the people who attend at eleven o’clock are not really completely identified with Believers Chapel. They are here, I presume they enjoy what they hear, but that is as far as they wish to go and perhaps you have sat down between two people like that and you have said, “They are not friendly.” And it seems to me that perhaps they are not friendly because you are not friendly. So this morning I’m recommending that at the morning service when the benediction is pronounced that each one of you turn around and if you see a stranger rush up to them and throw your arms around [Laughter] them and hug them and say, “It’s wonderful to have you here.” However there is one provision, the men must choose men and the women, women [Laughter].

Now these are standards by which churches are chosen but it seems to me obvious from the reading of God’s word that we should choose our local fellowship on the basis of what does the Bible teach. After all, suppose we chose our gospel on the basis of its influence? Suppose we chose our gospel on the basis of the friendliness of the people who espoused the teaching? Suppose we chose our gospel on the size or number of the people held to that particular truth? Now we wouldn’t dare do that, we choose our gospel on the basis of what the Bible teaches. But then when we come to the choice of a local church fellowship we do not practice the same principles. We practice principles of size, influence, friendliness, fellowship, etcetera, instead of looking at what the Bible teaches.

Now in our discussion we have come to the ordinances and I think it’s necessary for us as we look at this subject, first of all, to define an ordinance. What is an ordinance of the church? Just to get us started and thinking, an ordinance is a symbolic right setting forth primary facts of the Christian faith and universally obligatory among believers. An ordinance is a symbolic right setting forth primary facts of the Christian faith and universally obligatory among believers, strictly speaking the term ordinance is not really a biblical term. Baptism is never called an ordinance. The Lord’s Supper is never called an ordinance. It is not called a sacrament, nor are any of the others that are called sacraments, called sacraments in the Bible.

But it is true that the Bible does call us to hold fast the traditions or the ordinances and in the context the 1st Corinthians 11:2 in which the term ordinance is mentioned the Lord’s Supper is referred to as a tradition or as an ordinance. So I think it is scriptural to call the Lord’s Supper an ordinance and scriptural to call baptism an ordinance. But the precise word is not used specifically in some text regarding it.

Now most Christians have felt this way and so this is nothing new. There are two ordinances practiced among Protestants; baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The Roman

Catholics practice ordination, confirmation, matrimony, extreme unction, and penance so that they have seven ordinances instead of two.

Now the general symbolism of the ordinances is this; baptism is a symbolic right that represents our initiation into Jesus Christ and the church. The Lord's Supper is a symbolic right that represents our continuance in Jesus Christ and in the church. Now let's look at the ordinance of baptism first and I want to consider this subject in seven aspects, and again we are trying to have a little discussion at the end and so I will just be brief but perhaps it will suggest some questions that you may feel free to ask when we conclude.

Now the beginning of the teaching on baptism in the New Testament is properly to be taken to the baptism of our Lord by John the Baptist in passages such as Matthew chapter 3, verse 13 through 17. You remember that Jesus came to John the Baptist who was the appointed forerunner of our Lord and who was baptizing in Israel to be baptized by him. John objected, for he recognized that in point of moral quality he needed to be baptized by our Lord rather than to baptize him. But Jesus said, remember, “Suffer it to be so now: for it's necessary for me to fulfill all righteousness.” Now the reason that Jesus was baptized was not, of course, in order that he might confess his own personal sins but in that right Israelites signified that they were prepared for the coming of the king, prophesied in the Old Testament, and preached by John the Baptist. And our Lord Jesus, while he had nothing negative in his life to confess, had positively to manifest the same expectation and preparation for the coming of the king as any other Israelite. And so when he was baptized it was a testimony to his positive preparation for the coming of the king who was really king himself. So Jesus was baptized by John.

Now we do not, I say, have any other references to baptism preceding this. The Jews practiced it, proselyte baptism, and John apparently using that by the guidance of the Holy Spirit as his model began to baptize Israelites. Now his baptism was unique because not only was he baptizing, proselytes baptize themselves, but he was baptizing

Israelites. You see, up to this time when proselyte baptism took place it was the baptism of a gentile in recognition of his becoming a Jew. But John was baptizing Israelites and that's why the Jews were upset and sent a delegation to inquire about it. But at any rate, Jesus was baptized by John.

Now we often hear people say today that we are to follow the Lord in baptism. It should be obvious to us that our baptism is not really anything like our Lord's baptism by John. It is totally unscriptural to suggest that. It is not only not a New Testament expression, that's not necessarily something that would make it unscriptural, but it is never referred to in that light and his baptism is different.

Now the next thing that we need to remember about baptism is a statement that Jesus himself made. To my mind this is the key to all of the discussion of baptism. In Matthew chapter 20, and verse 22 we have Jesus' explanation of the meaning of baptism. Now this text, which is also found in Mark and Luke, is very important. Notice the 22nd verse,

“But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able.”

Now it is evident that Jesus has already been baptized by John at this point but yet he speaks of a baptism that he is to be baptized with. And he links it with a cup. Now the cup, as we shall see later on or as we see later on in the gospel, Matthew, Mark, John the cup is a reference to his death. The baptism of Jesus is his death, that was when he was baptized, that's the baptism he speaks of. So from this we learn from our Lord this basic fact, that baptism has to do with death from our Lord's own words. In other words, is the key to the teaching.

It does not have to do, then, with purification; that is a result. It has to do with identification in his death. Now the institution of baptism itself takes place when Jesus has been raised from the dead and commissions the disciples in Matthew 28, verses 19 and 20, and so will you turn there? Jesus said,

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, (now notice, baptizing them with reference to the name of, literally unto the name of.) Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Now it is evident from this expression baptizing them with reference to, “The name of,” that baptism has to do with an identification. It has to do with identification with the trinity; the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Notice the singular name but the three persons. That is, the eternal trinity.

In other words, Jesus Christ’s death is the baptism; our baptism is our association with his baptism. So that our baptism is an identification with the baptism of our Lord Jesus, it is an identification with his death. It is our incorporation into him by means of faith as Paul tells us in Colossians chapter 2.

Now fourthly, the administration of baptism: the administration of baptism may be accomplished by any Christian. It is not necessary for baptism to be exercised; that is, the baptism in water which represents the spiritual reality. It is not necessary for this to be done by some ordained minister. Nowhere in the New Testament is that taught. For example, Philip the evangelist, the deacon baptized. So far as we know from Scripture, Ananias was a simple Christian man. He baptized the Apostle Paul. It is not necessary that one be an officer in the church, an elder or a deacon, that one be baptized. But as far as the New Testament is concerned any disciple may baptize another disciple. And so

when you hear occasionally some saying that one should be a Christian minister, or one should be an elder in order to do, this check the New Testament.

Well let me sum up what we have said at this point. Baptism is the death of our Lord Jesus. Our baptism is our identification by means of the water ceremony with his death, burial, and resurrection. Paul gives the full theological explanation in Romans chapter 6 when he says, “Know ye not that as many of you as were baptized, were baptized into his death, into his burial, and into his resurrection.” So that water baptism is our identification by means of the symbolic rite with the spiritual reality of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Now that is accomplished in the spiritual reality by the Holy Spirit who, when we believe in Christ, puts us into Christ into his death, burial, and resurrection and we are united to him.

Water baptism is the symbolic representation of the spiritual reality that is found in that. Who are the proper subjects of baptism? In the Middle Ages flags were baptized, bells were baptized, forced baptism of children took place, baptism of unbelievers took place; all of these were very lucrative practices in the churches of the Middle Ages but totally unscriptural.

The Bible teaches that believers are to be baptized. There is no clear evidence in the New Testament that anyone who was not a believer was ever baptized. Now of course it is possible for an adult unbeliever to be baptized but as far as the Scriptures are concerned believers are to be baptized, not unbelievers. This, of course, introduces the question of infant baptism.

The earliest historical references to infant baptism date to the last half of the 2nd Century. And if you examine the teaching of men who do hold to infant baptism who at least try to maintain some contact with the teaching of the word of God you will generally find that they acknowledge that infant baptism is not a doctrine derived from the New Testament. For example, let me read you the words of a man who himself was a believer of infant baptism, a genuine Christian man. These are the words of Albertus Peters, “If

some intelligent being from Mars should come to visit our earth and we should hand him our Bible with the request to tell us what he found he would learn the general doctrine and some of the practices of the Christian religion without any other aid. He would find the Lord's Supper, the organization of the church with elders and deacons, and adult baptism, (these are the words of a man who believes in infant baptism.) But it is safe to say he would never get into his head that little children should be baptized. He would not find infant baptism in the Bible because it is not there and cannot be gotten out of the Bible.” Infant baptism is not found in the Bible.

Now infant baptism arose as a latter practice of the Christian church, it is not found in the Bible. Believers are to be baptized. Recently Karl Barth has issued the fourth section of the fourth volume of his gigantic church dogmatics and in it he too, a reformed man, Presbyterian, has acknowledge again that baptism is a response to divine revelation and consequently infant baptism is out. And just recently I noticed from *Time Magazine* this week that many Lutheran pastors are now dissatisfied with the doctrine and are requesting permission to change the teaching of the Lutheran church because it is not found in holy Scripture.

So believers are to be baptized. Remember Tertullian's words, I suppose that they will become the banner of this brief course for you, “Custom without truth is error grown old.” “Custom without truth is error grown old,” the more I think about that statement the more I'm enamored with it and the more I hope God will enable me to carry it out. The proper place for baptism is never specified in New Testament Scripture, it is possible to be baptized in a creek, a river, the Jordan River, some people are never satisfied until they take a trip to Palestine and are baptized in the Jordan River. I know many Baptist preachers who've been baptized in this country but they cannot resist it when they get over to Palestine and stand by the Jordan River, they generally ask someone to please re-baptize them in those waters hoping that something will be done there that had not been done previously.

The proper mode of baptism; there is no question but that the mode of water baptism is water. Now Luther said [laughter] - Luther said that if water was not available as far as he was concerned he would be glad to baptism in good German beer [laughter] but I would think that that would be an unusual circumstance so I do not recommend that you be baptized in Schlitz, or Falstaff [laughter] even if no liquid is available. I think it would be better to wait.

The Bible says we are to be baptized in water. Now what is the physical mode that is set forth by Scripture? Now I'm sure that it would be presumption and dogmatism for me to say to you that there is no question whatsoever but that the Bible teaches that baptism should be by immersion. Now that is obviously an incorrect statement because you can adduce a great number of authorities. Many good Christian men who believe that baptism should be by sprinkling, or effusion; that is, pouring. But when we come right down to the teaching of holy Scripture it is very difficult to find any real support for sprinkling or effusion other than the fact that it was practiced in the latter part of the 2nd Century and practiced later.

When we come to the Bible itself it seems to me that there are some arguments that are very strong. For example, the word *bapto* means to dip. *Baptidzo* is the frequency, using the technical term. Therefore it means normally to cause to dip and hence that is contrary to the idea of effusion or sprinkling. Furthermore, we have illustrations of the Ethiopian eunuch who went down into the water, came up out of the water. Now it is possible, of course, that he went down into the water and he was sprinkled in the water. It does not seem to be, to me, to be the most logical interpretation of that passage.

We have a perfectly good word to sprinkle in the New Testament, *rhantizo*, which is used a number of times in a number of places; sometimes in the same book where the word baptism occurs, but that word is never used of baptism. *Rbantizo* means to sprinkle, clearly. Peter uses it in chapter 1 of his first letter but when he speaks of

baptism in chapter 3 he doesn't use *rhantizo*, he uses *baptizo*. Furthermore, it seems to me, that if we want to represent our identification with Jesus in death, burial, and resurrection the Spirit baptism, the reality if we want to represent that identification with him in this which is accomplished by the Spirit when we believe that water baptism by immersion is by far the best representation of that. Sprinkling or effusion does not represent that. If we believe in sprinkling or effusion we should logically as most who do believe in it say that baptism represents our cleansing and therefore we should not talk about the baptism of the holy Spirit in connection with water baptism at all, therefore would have no connection whatsoever. So if baptism means cleansing I think that that's a result of the experience myself, but if it means that then sprinkling might be a representation of it. But I think that all of the evidence really stands on the side of immersion and consequently I believe in immersion. I have been sprinkled; it didn't do much for me. I have been immersed; it didn't do much more for me except it satisfied my conscience. I have been sprinkled before I was converted and then for a long time after I was converted, three or four years, I wrestled with the problem of baptism, what should I do? Be sprinkled again? Be immersed again? Finally came to the conclusion I must be baptized after I believed, believers were baptized. And then I wrestled with the mode and finally came to the conclusion that I ought to be immersed and so I was immersed after I believed. That satisfied the troubling of my own conscience and consequently I'm very happy. If you are happy with your sprinkling and you feel it is supported by God's word I would not tell you you have not been baptized in this. I must confess I personally I don't know what my elder colleagues think about this. But I must confess that I regard such a baptism, even by mode, I do not think myself is the best as a genuine baptism if it has occurred after you have believed. I think all who have believed ought to be baptized in token of it.

Now the actual ceremony itself is referred to in 1st Peter chapter 3 and Peter calls it a pledge of a good conscience. I would presume from this that in the ceremony of

baptism there is a confession made of one's past condition of the change that has occurred and that now he has a good conscience before God by reason of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. 1st Peter chapter 3, in verse 21 says, “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us, (ah, lest you think that baptism really puts away sin, Peter says,) not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God.” That's what baptism is, it's the pledge of a good conscience toward God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now that's all we can say about baptism, we have to spend a few minutes on the Lord's Supper.

Now the Lord's Supper symbolizes, remember, our continuance in Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper is the only act of worship for which Jesus Christ gave special directions. Isn't that strange? It's the only act of worship for which our Lord gave special directions. The highlight of the corporate worship of the church is the Lord's Supper. In fact, we have in the very name that we give to the communion service we have unfortunately been led astray slightly. You see, in the New Testament when we read the Lord's Supper the word that is used for supper is the word *deipnon* in Greek. Now *deipnon* is a word that does not really mean supper.

Now let me illustrate this way before I tell you really what it means. The Greeks and the ancients had a light breakfast, they had a light lunch, usually taken where they happen to be at the time, and then they came home at night for the big meal of the day. That was their dinner. That was called their *deipnon*. Now when we read in the New Testament that the Lord's Supper is the Lord's *deipnon* immediately, of course, we have introduced a slight difference with our practice here. For you see, for us, in Charleston where I grew up we have breakfast in the morning, we have dinner at 2 o'clock in the middle of the day and supper at night and it's rather incidental, supper. In some homes it's very much like your lunch, you go fix yourself a sandwich if you want something. But in the middle of the day is the big meal and men in business in Charleston still come home for the meal in the middle of the day; that is, if they own their own businesses and

are able to leave. And that's the big meal, that's the dinner, it's in the middle of the day. It's when the whole family is together, it's when the fellowship of the family exists.

Now the Lord's Supper is really called in the Bible the Lord's dinner, that's what it is. It was the big meal of the day for them and that's the name that is given for it. It's not a place, it's not an event which is to be an incidental. In the corporate life of the church it is the most significant thing. Now I think this is evident when we read the New Testament. For example, in Acts 20, in verse 7, we read, and when the apostles came together to hear a sermon, no we don't, and when the apostles came together to get that warm feeling that comes from Christian fellowship, no it doesn't say that. It says, “And when the apostles came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them.” In other words, the purpose for which they came together was the breaking of bread. The preaching was incidental. Important, long-winded, Paul preached till midnight, but nevertheless incidental. They came together for the purpose of breaking bread.

Now you will discover that the early church in the earliest writings practiced this. Irenaeus speaks of it, Justin Martyr speaks of it. Of course, the New Testament speaks of it, very important. What is the biblical significance of the Lord's Supper? Now we don't have time to go into the controversy of just exactly what type of way in which we are to regard the Lord's Supper is proper for us. We know, of course, the views of the Roman Catholics, the Lutherans, the Reformers, and then Zwingli, one of the reformers whose view was slightly different from the others. It's not necessary for us to go into this, it is obvious that probably with most of you some view mingling a view of John Calvin with Ulrich Zwingli is probably correct; at least it is for me. I do not believe that when the priest says, *hoc est maim corpin* that this is really the body of Christ, as they do say. It seems to me that the biblical significance of the supper is very simple, that bread which we take signifies his body, the wine which we drink, and it was wine not grape juice. Want to challenge me on that point?

[Question from an audience member]

[Johnson] Fermented. The reason is very simple; you'll read in 1st Corinthians chapter 11 that they were drunken at the Lord's table. It's difficult to get drunk off Welch's grape juice [Laughter], and I love it.

Now I mentioned this because, you know, sometimes we use wine. And occasionally I think three times in six years we've had someone come in and object. And someone objected and wrote a letter saying that this was the first time that their children had ever taken a nip [Laughter] and it was a terrible thing to have taken a nip at the Lord's table. I wonder what they will say to Jesus when they get to heaven, and the Lord Jesus who turned the water into wine. The immaturity of a statement such as that is remarkable, remarkable.

Now if you have conscience about this, and we have done this in Believers Chapel, if you have conscience about this we'd be glad to have a separate place for you, put grape juice there, we have done that. We have had men come in who have been alcoholics and requested that and we have provided them with that, I think that's the proper thing to do, for I am sure that in the sight of God the fact that it is grape juice does not mean that it is not a Lord's Supper. But it is wine.

Now, then, the wine represents the blood that was shed for us. What is the purpose of the Lord's Supper? Well it is to commemorate the death of our Lord Jesus and it is also to be a means of evangelization. Paul says, “As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do proclaim, (the word is really *keruso* which means to preach,) preach the Lord's death till he come.” I have seen people saved through the Lord's Supper.

I'll never forget a few years ago a man came in the Lord's Supper with some of his children, they did not partake. That week afterwards they went to a camp nearby and I happened to be out on Friday night around the campfire circle. When the camp was coming to a conclusion a little girl about thirteen or fourteen years old stood up and said,

“Sunday morning my family brought me down from Oklahoma, I attended a church and I observed the Lord’s table but my father did not allow me to participate, I realized I was lost. And through this week I have come to receive Jesus Christ as my personal savior.” I heard her give the testimony. She was converted through the preaching of the word and the beginning, apparently, or at least a major force was her attendance at the Lord’s table.

The pool requisites for participation, I’m sure we would agree that first of all one should be converted. Normally conversion was followed immediately by baptism and they did not wait and when we get into our building that’s what I hope we’ll do. Sunday morning if you get converted -- not you, I presume you are converted -- but if you generally speaking are converted through the preaching of the word and want to be baptized before Jesus comes again, and he may come in the afternoon, you know, then come and request baptism, acknowledging your conversion we’d be happy to baptize you that night. I would presume that in addition to conversion and water baptism from the teaching of Paul in 1st Corinthians 11 that while we have the right to partake of the Lord’s table the moment we believe in Jesus Christ we should not partake if we are out of fellowship with him. As Paul tells us in that chapter we are to judge ourselves if we are not to be judged. And if we eat and drink of the Lord’s table unworthily, now everybody is unworthy. Unworthily; that is, out of fellowship with him, then we eat and drink not damnation, judgment to ourselves.

Now that is a very serious thing. In Believers Chapel, of course, we leave the question of your conversion up to yourself, unless we know you well and know you are not genuinely converted. And if you’ve come you are free to participate. By participating you affirm your faith in Jesus Christ, you make that confession.

The necessity of the observance of the Lord’s table, 1st Corinthians chapter 11, in verse 25, says this, “After the same manner also he took the cup, and when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” Do you notice that imperative? “This do ye.” I would like to

drop it at that, it seems to me that the words of our Lord or the words of the apostle are strong enough. And since this is a present imperative, "This do ye," I would assume that observing the Lord's table should mark the Christian's life as one of its characteristic features. I do not believe that if you do not observe the Lord's table every Sunday you have sinned. I do not find that in the Bible. As a matter of fact the Bible doesn't tell us to observe the Lord's table every Sunday. It simply says, "This you are to go on doing." The frequency of the observance of the Lord's table is left to your desire. Jesus said, "With great desire have I longed to eat this Passover with you." And he longs to observe the table with us. If we long to be with him perhaps we shall observe the Lord's table often. If we do not or if we cannot it seems to me that the Bible does not say that we have sinned but nevertheless it expresses that which should be characteristic of the believer. If we don't do it at all, if it's not a practice of our lives at all, I cannot see how we have done anything but sin. It's a simple commandment. It's easy to fulfill. People often come to me and say, "I'd love to please the Lord." Well that's one thing you can do. No question about it, it pleases the Lord. It's like being baptized.

In fact I, as you know, I'm very troubled and frustrated about some Christians who talk about very high sounding spiritual phraseology, Keswick teaching which I'm not against, mind you, necessarily, depends on the teacher. But talk about in great spiritual language, of spiritual experiences, and neglect the simplest little things which the simplest believer can carry out. Now you must forgive me if I have a question about the spirituality which can talk about great spiritual experiences and neglect the simplest statements of our Lord Jesus.

Now I want to exercise patience. Let me give you an experience. I hope I'm not speaking harshly, maybe some of you regard me speaking harshly, please forgive me. It took me five years after I was a Christian to discover what the New Testament really said about these things. My Christian brethren were confused themselves, they didn't help me. I wandered around in the wilderness, knowing what the Bible said. Now this to my

shame, after five years of Christian experience I came to understand what the Bible taught. It took me eighteen years to begin to practice it. Now if God has been so gracious to me, in my waywardness, not willing to practice what I knew was the teaching of Scripture deep down in my heart then I shall have a little patience with you. Six months at the most [Laughter]. No seriously, I want to have patience because God has had patience with me.

Now our times up, I have not finished. I wanted to say just a word about the objections to the frequent observance of the Lord’s table. You may wonder why Believers Chapel observes the Lord’s table every Sunday. It isn’t because we think you have sinned if you are not there. It is because we feel that if a believer wishes to observe the Lord’s Supper on any particular Sunday he should have an opportunity to do it. And therefore there is always the opportunity on Sunday to observe the Lord’s table in Believers Chapel. Now we do believe that there must be an open meeting. Next week we shall talk about the meeting of the church, but as far as the supper is concerned it is up to you, and we want to keep it that way.

Now for just a moment or two any very pressing questions? [name redacted]

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] As far as I can tell the Bible does not give us any indication that that was practiced. It seems to me that the Lord’s Supper is a corporate act of worship. In other words, when the whole body is together, when the church meets, and therefore I would not say that that is totally wrong and sinful in some case where, for example, people are bedridden cannot observe the Lord’s table I see no objection to some of the brethren, particularly the elders, going remembering the Lord in that way. But as a general practice it seems to me contrary to the spirit of the New Testament. Other questions?

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Who does the baptism? The elders. And I presume that they would be willing to have others besides elders perform, right. I would think, [name redacted] if you were identified with us finally and completely in every way [Laughter] that it's possible that someone led to the Lord we might ask you to perform the baptism. And, of course, if you have not been baptized we'd be happy to baptize you. Yes [name redacted]

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] You have apparently not been here all the time [name redacted]. I tried to answer this question twice and point out this; that we should follow the New Testament as a general practice, I believe. However, we have freedom when there is no specific principle that is violated by our action. Consequently, if we wish to vary and we do not violate a New Testament principle, we have that freedom. I am convinced that generally speaking following the New Testament even when no principle particularly is involved may be the better thing. At least that's the first thing I would think of. But if a principle is violated by an action, of course, then we cannot do it.

Now many of our actions today practiced by churches violate principles. They are wrong. We have freedom in other areas. Consequently as I mentioned, it's not necessary for me to greet you this morning with a holy kiss. I may shake hands with you. No principle, it seems to me, is violated by that. So I don't consider it an ironclad thing that we should do that. Does that answer your question? Yes.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Apparently this arose out of the connection of - we really oppose - did you say seventh day?

[Comment from the same audience member]

[Johnson] Sunday is the eighth day - or the first day of the week, rather. Israel, of course, observed the Sabbath, the seventh day. Now the Christian church began from the beginning by meeting on the first day of the week. Paul states that in 1st Corinthians chapter 16, “On the first day of the week, lay by you in store,” he’s talking about giving. It apparently arose out of the fact that our Lord appeared in his resurrection on the first day and then in his appearances later on to the disciples they were on the first day of the week, he met with them. And out of the fact that he was alive and that he met with them on the first day there arose the practice of observing the first day rather than the seventh day. Now it was a tremendous change for Israel, of course, and the evidence that it existed is a strong evidence to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I would presume that there is no real scriptural requirement that we meet on the first day. It is a custom or a tradition which does not seem to be erroneous, but it was apparently connected with the resurrection. In other words, if we met on Saturday night that’s really when they met, by the way, Saturday night, not Sunday morning. See the first day began on the night and so they met on Saturday night. If Believers Chapel really carried out everything apart from that principle I was just talking about [name redacted], see that’s when we really ought to meet. But I don’t think we violate any principle by meeting on the morning of the first day rather than the night before. If we tried to carry out everything we’d have to meet on Saturday night. Times up...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]