



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 3:5–17

1 Corinthians

“The Church’s Ministry, Rewards, and Responsibility”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, I think it’s time for us to begin. Let’s open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for another opportunity to look into the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the inspiration of the Word of God. We thank Thee for the Holy Spirit who has been the moving force in the writing of the Word of God. And we thank Thee for the perfections of the truth that has been communicated to us through the Word of God.

We ask, Lord, that Thou art be with us in our studies. We pray that our hearts and minds may be responsive to the Spirit’s teaching. May he instruct us in the things of the Scriptures in such a way that we are edified and built up in our faith and become more submissive to Thee. We know, Lord, that we need that. We need to be submissive to the truth of God, and we know that we are not naturally that.

We thank Thee for the new birth, for the new life, for all of the marvelous work that has been accomplished for us to ultimately bring us into a relationship of obedience eternally to Thee. We look forward to that. We thank Thee for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and pray that that hope, too, may brighten our daily lives. We thank Thee now for each one present. We pray Thou blessing upon each. Be with us as we study together. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for tonight, as we turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 3, verse 5 though 17, is The Church’s Ministry, Rewards, and Responsibility. One only has to think about the title and then

reflect upon the passage that we’re looking at to realize that here is a solemn and serious word from the Apostle Paul for those who are responsible for ministry in our churches today. And that includes not simply those who stand behind a pulpit, but those who teach in our Sunday school classes, our elders who exercise the oversight over us, and the deacons who serve with them, and any who seek to represent our Lord Jesus Christ and proclaim his Word. Surely the idea or ideas that the apostle sets forth are very important for us who seek to stand as representatives of him and teach the Word.

There are several things, of course, that immediately appear to all of us, and that is that a gifted Christian, for example, is one who has the spiritual gift of utterance, or a gifted leader, such as an elder who has been appointed by the Holy Spirit to his office. The Christian gifted individuals are not to be fawned over. They are not to be praised and adulated with praise belonging to God alone. After all, they do not have a corner on the truth, not any of them. And the only one who does have that is the Lord God in heaven.

There is a distinction that the apostle makes here in this passage between leaders and the flock. It’s not specifically said in so many words, but it’s surely implied. And I’d like to make again a point—just say it because we don’t have time to defend it—that the distinction between those whom he regards as leaders or having authority, that distinction is not the distinction of a one-pastor organization such as a senior pastor and a flock. As I have said over and over again—and no one’s challenged me yet on this; I’m looking for a person to challenge me on this—maybe everybody in Believers Chapel is convinced about it, and that’s why there’s been no challenge—but in the New Testament there is no such office as the pastor of a church as one who has administrative authority in the church. There are shepherds, there are pastors, but they are not an individual who has administrative authority over the church, especially one.

Now, much of our Christian-professing ministry gathers around that idea. That is, that there is one person who is called the pastor. A term now that is frequently used that has come into existence in my day: senior pastor, administrative authority resting with them. The apostle, as we will discover later in this epistle, does not give any support whatsoever to that.

But the idea of leadership, he does express, and it’s under the form of gifted individuals. He talks about pastors or shepherds. He talks about prophets. He talks about people who have the gift of teaching, gift of prophecy, and so on. So the idea of a distinction between certain ones who have certain forms of leadership and the rest of us is implied but not that specific relationship which is so popular and has been for generations. He really—the distinction that he speaks about is distinction of elders and gifted individuals and the flock. And I am sure that when we study the Scriptures, we will discover that that is the case.

If leaders are elevated too greatly in the popular mind, they can do almost anything, and large numbers of their followers will trail along unquestioningly. We all know that. We have seen that in almost every kind of organization. We marvel how so many educated individuals prominently in authority in Deutschland, men highly educated, could follow so unquestioningly Adolf Hitler.

Now, you might say, Well, that is in the political world. Well, we have the same thing in the spiritual world. We have individuals who follow a Jim Jones to South America and commit suicide. And even in that the great state of Texas, we have the illustration recently of the Branch Davidians and David Koresh. So we know that it is possible for outstanding leaders to have tremendous and illegal authority in many cases. So we want in the Christian church to notice that the apostles and our Lord guard against that. We don’t pay enough attention to it, in my opinion.

Paul recognizes his authority as the role of a servant of the Lord. He looks at himself as a fellow worker with Apollos and others. He’s just a servant. He doesn’t go around publicizing the things that he has been able to do like our modern evangelists who tell us how many decisions they’ve been able to get and carry on with the various other things that they have been able to do. One thing that is different also is that when the apostle does talk about individuals who have found the Lord, become disciples of the Lord, he traces their conversion to the work of God. He does not trace their conversion to the will of man. That’s very important because that’s essentially what the Bible says. The Bible says this, ‘Blessed is the man whom Thou, the Lord, chooseth and causeth to approach unto Thee.’ The decisions that are decisions, are decisions that begin with God. They

don’t begin with the evangelists. They don’t begin with the Billy Graham or any other evangelist.

They begin with God. It is God who transforms the human heart. There’s no reason for me to say I led so many people to the Lord, and publish that in such a way that you will spend more money and support my organization. So in the background of these verses, all of these things come to my mind.

Now, I want to read verse 5 through verse 17. And the apostle writes this—he’s just said in verse 4 “when one says, ‘I am a Paul,’ another, ‘I am of Apollos,’ are you not carnal?

“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers;”

Incidentally, that does not mean, most of our New Testament scholars agree, that we are fellow workers with God, as if he’s a co-laborer with us, but rather the apostle is talking about Apollos and himself. They are co-laborers, but they are both under the Lord God. Now he says that,

“You are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any one builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work, which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is

burned, he will suffer loss; yet he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, whose temple you are.”

That last verse, in my opinion, contains a very serious translation error, but we’ll talk about it when we get to it.

Now, first of all, then in verse 5 through verse 9 the apostle speaks about the character of minister and ministers. We’re talking about, as we’ve said, builders; that is, elders and gifted men and the builders and their works are in view, not a believer and his personal spiritual life. That’s not the primary thing that the apostle has in mind here. He’s talking about people who work for the Lord in the local church, and especially, of course, he’s talking about the church in Corinth. He talks about them as God’s ordered servants. Who then is Paul? Who is Apollos? They are ministers through whom you believe.

Incidentally, he does not say he brought them to the Lord. He said, We are simply instruments by whom you believe through the preaching of the Word of God. So ministers are those through whom they believe. So to understand fully what Paul had in mind, we could go back to Acts chapter 18, verse 1 through 8. In fact, it might be a good idea to read those verses because they let us know what happened in Corinth, and it’s good to be reminded of it in this particular context. I’ll just read the first eight verses of Acts chapter 18.

“After these things Paul departed from Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome);”—sounds like modern day, doesn’t it? The Jews persecuted by the Gentiles—“and he came to them. So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed

with them and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers. And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded both Jews and the Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. But when they opposed him and blasphemed, he shook his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’ And he departed from there and entered the house of a certain man named Justus, one who worshipped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized.”

So the apostle now, writing to the church, says, We were ministers through whom you believed as the Lord gave to each one. I planted; Apollos watered, but it was God who was responsible for the spiritual blessing. I planted like a farmer. Someone, Apollos, came along, watered the seeds that I planted. But it was ultimately God who was responsible for the blessing. Something we have to remember, all of us in our personal witness, in our teaching ministry, whatever we may be involved in: if there is going to be fruit, real fruit, it will come from God, not from man.

I’ve had people come up to me and say, You’ve saved me. And, of course, that tells me immediately {[he is]} not a very good student of the Word of God, although Paul did make a statement somewhat similar to that. But it’s obvious that it was said in a certain way that he quickly clarified. But when a person tells me that, of course, I know full well he doesn’t know too much about the Bible. Because if he has been saved—and I am assuming that he is—he has been saved simply by the grace of God.

Paul emphasizes the one who is over everything so that neither he who plants is anything nor he who waters, but God who is giving the increase. Now, he who plants and he who waters, they are one. They serve the same goal, the same end, and each one will receive his own reward according

to his own labor. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field. You are God’s building. So we are fellow workers, Apollos and I, and you are God’s farm. It’s interesting that he thinks of this body of believers like a farm. You are God’s farm. And individuals are coming and watering the farm and plants such as the individuals coming to life are growing. And then he also says, You are God’s building, another metaphor that he uses. So we are a field, the local church. We are a building. But it’s God’s. That’s the important thing. He’s the divine master.

The interesting and the important word is the word that he repeats three times in verse 9. We are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field. You are God’s building. The ministers then are simply then fellow workers with one another. But the person who owns the farm is the Lord God. He owns the farm. He owns the building. We belong to Him.

Now, moving from that, as you might expect, since he has just mentioned building, he moves to discussion of the one and only foundation. We can say he moves from the farm to the construction site now because we are under construction still. Verse 10, according to the grace of God. Grace portrays how the chief of sinners views his apostolate to the Gentiles. He doesn’t think of this as something—well, like an office concerning which we think highly of or great things of, he thinks of it as a gift of grace from God. This man, the chief of sinners, is now the apostle to the Gentiles. And this office, obviously, brings Paul to the praise of the divine grace that touched him, the persecutor of the faith, and transformed him into this marvelous instrument of the Lord God by God’s grace, by God’s power.

I look at something about—like that and I say, May I never forget that God called me to the preaching of the Word of God. When I was in the insurance business in Birmingham, Alabama—I know a lot of people would say it was good you got out of Alabama. Well, no, I don’t think so. It’s a great state. I was born there. I love that state. And I like its football team, too. But it was there in Birmingham, Alabama, that God put his hand upon me. And I look now after all of these years, and I just say to myself, “Never forget the marvelous grace of God that touched you and transformed your life, a marvelous grace.” I could never thank God enough. I understand what Paul means when

he says, According to the grace of God—not fully, because his office, of course, is the greatest that one could have in this age, minister to the Gentiles. But I understand the nature of it and the glory of it, by the grace of God that was given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation. The laying of the foundation.

Now, he says the foundation, of course, is Christ. He defines it as a wise master builder, I’ve laid the foundation and another builds on it. By the way, it may be—and I say just may be that when the apostle says, I have laid the foundation and another is building on it—because it’s present tense—that he may not be praising too highly the person who is building.

Now, he’s mentioned Apollos. And he’s thankful that while he planted, Apollos watered. He puts that in a past tense. But now he’s talking about some who are building on that foundation. And some of the better commentators have suggested that what he is talking about here is someone or ones from the other individuals who are disturbing the Corinthian church. For example, remember they had said—Paul had said some of you say, “I’m of Paul;” some say, “I am of Cephas;” some of Apollos; and some say, “I am of Christ.” It’s suggested by the students of the New Testament that perhaps when he says here, and another is building upon it—not built, reference to Apollos, but is building—he acknowledges that those that are saying they are of Peter may be building, but he’s not altogether happy with the sense that they have brought to the congregation of division in which individuals worshiping, or at least, thinking highly of one and thinking less highly of others of God’s servants. So he may indicate by that that he’s not altogether happy with what is there. So is one of the Peter party the one he refers to? Well, I’m not sure, but it has been suggested that perhaps he is referred to there.

A modern reader may be puzzled how the foundations of the church can be both the person of Christ and a theological doctrine. Because he says here, I’ve laid the foundation, and the foundation is the Lord Jesus Christ, for no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ. Some people like to say, Well, why do you say doctrine? Why do you say a statement?

Well, in the first place, if you remember, when the Lord called—when the Lord spoke to Peter and the apostles and asked who he was, Peter responded and said, “Thou art the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.” And so right in the beginning, the apostles acknowledged in a theological statement who our Lord was. We still have people—I hope not in Believers Chapel. We still have people who want to distinguish between the person of the Lord and doctrine about Him. I say it over and over again because I really want it to sink in. If you say something like that, you only reveal that you don’t yet have an adequate knowledge of the Word of God. If you say, I am interested in a person and not in doctrine, I say immediately, “*What person?*” and ask you to define that person. But when you define it, you cannot define it if you were really sticking to your view. I believe in a person but not a doctrine. You cannot define it because you define him by theological statements, or maybe you don’t want to use the word “theological.” To say I define him by statements, I say that’s a theological statement. So that’s what we have.

Now, if we would just remember that in the beginning Christ said that upon this rock I will build my church, and the rock was Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God, then right at the beginning we have the church founded upon a doctrine, a doctrine that finds its personal being in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. One cannot separate the person of Christ from truths about him. It’s common of a person to think—think of a person as something different from his mind. People say—Gordon Clark likes to point out he was a Christian philosopher. He says, “People say I have a mind.” But he asks, “Is it not better to say, ‘I am this mind.’ Are you not your mind, or is your mind not part of you? If not, what are you?”

Now, a mind is what thinks. Our minds think. That’s what makes it a mind. If there were no thought in our mind, well, then we would be mindless. And who wants to be mindless? That’s even a word we commonly use. He’s a mindless individual, not a correct thought in his mind. If there were not thought, there would be no mind. We would be mindless. There would be neither person nor mind, because if you’re a person, you have a mind. Therefore you think. The Lord Jesus Christ then is what he thinks.

If you ask who are you of our Lord, he will tell you out of his divine mind what he is. He’s the *{logos}* of God, the Word of God. And all of the things bound up in the work of Christ are bound up in who he is: the doctrine of the atonement. That’s part of the being of our Lord ultimately. What he thinks, what he does, all of those things make up his person as well as his work. And when Paul says the foundation is Jesus Christ, he means the Christ of the Word of God, the Christ who died on the Calvary’s cross for our sins. That’s the foundation. And if you will look at the Epistle to the Corinthians, you will notice that right at the beginning, what did Paul say he preached to them? A person of Christ and no doctrine? No. He said, I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified, the crucified Messiah. Look at first chapter—look at the second chapter, especially, all of that is spelled out there.

Now, so when we talk about person of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us not be, to my mind, ignorantly turned aside from realizing that our Lord and his identity is bound up in the knowledge of truth, specific truth about him, that is, expressible in statements, statements found in the Word of God.

I was reading, this afternoon, a paragraph from William G. T. Shedd’s book—well, it’s really in another book also now, but it was *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy*. Shedd is a Presbyterian preacher, theologian, outstanding man who lived—did his primary ministry at the end of the 19th century. But he has an illustration in the book that I was—I thought was right on the point of what we’re talking about. He said, “An ignorant, but well-meaning member of a Christian church was once asked how a certain minister had impressed the congregation by his preaching. The congregation were more than usual susceptible to religious impressions,” which means, of course, that they liked experience, the kind of thing we see in so many of our evangelical churches today. Experience. Experience is the thing that people respond to.

“So the good man had this fact on his mind,” Shedd says, “the answer to the inquiry, he said, he didn’t do well at all. He came down and preached a doctrine sermon right in the midst of the interest,” unquote. Shedd said, “We fear that this notion of doctrinal preaching is ill-adapted to

promote the best interest of a church is more common than it ought to be among those who commanded to account those elders’ work, quote, ‘worthy of double honor who labor in the Word and doctrine and who have bidden to see that, quote, the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.’”

That’s why we’re interested in doctrine, because we’re commanded by the Lord to see that we do not have blasphemy against the doctrine of the Word of God. And the elders, who are worthy of double honor, are those who labor in the Word and in doctrine.

Now, Shedd goes on to tell us why sometimes we’re not interested in doctrine. He says, “There are essentially two reasons. The first is the aversion of the heart to God’s revealed truth.” Now, that, of course, would apply to people who are unsaved, especially. They don’t like to hear doctrine because that forces decision. And truth is set out, and we are expected to respond to it. But he says, “A second objection to doctrinal preaching (I won’t give you-all that he said about the first objection) springs from the natural indolence of the human mind. It causes more mental effort to listen to a well-reasoned sermon than to a flowery one that starts with no premises and comes to no conclusion. We do not believe that it is a complete definition of sin to say that it’s laziness. But it is safe theology to say that every sinner is lazy.”

Now, remember, years ago I—when I was in Dallas Seminary teaching, we had a man come from Garland. He’s still preaching. Well, he was a very interesting speaker to hear him once. He danced across the whole of the platform, back and forth, jumped up and down and for 20 minutes, you know, that goes over pretty well. We were tired of theological lecture perhaps, so Greek and Hebrew, more likely, in the preceding hour, and looking forward to another hour of Greek and Hebrew. It was funny for us and enjoyable to see a fellow who didn’t require anything more than to be looked at while he danced on the platform and said some rather inane things. [Laughter] It’s true. It’s true that we don’t like to think when we come to church because we’re not today too well suited to it from our experience.

Now, the apostle says in verse 10, “according to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation...” And now verse 11, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

That “other” indicates, of course, that a building that is to have the approval of the Lord God and be a foundation for the work of God must have Jesus Christ in its foundation. This, incidentally, [is] why we have to be careful when we preach the Word of God. And we’re not allowed to be stupid and foolish if we are following our Lord when we get in the pulpit. We are responsible to proclaim the Word of God as it is found in Holy Scripture. That’s our responsibility. He says, We’re God’s fellow workers. We are God’s field. You are God’s building. And Paul says, I’ve laid the foundation. Let each one take heed how he builds on it, for there is no other foundation than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. So we must preach him.

Now, the rewards and responsibilities are set out in verse 12 through verse 17. A building may be built with different materials. The labor, the work of the servants, teaching, serving, may be in—may be shoddy workmanship. The material may be inferior. So what material, what kind of labor must be put upon this building? So in verse 12, he talks about the ultimate test. He says, “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each man’s work, of what sort it is.” The ultimate test is of course the Day. That is the coming of the Lord and the judgment. Probably the judgment seat of our Lord Jesus Christ set out in 2nd Corinthians chapter 5 and referred in the very next chapter in verse—referred to in verse 5 of the next chapter of 1 Corinthians, “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise shall come from God.”

So the coming of the Lord and the judgment seat of Christ is the ultimate test for all that we do in serving our Lord. The Sunday school teachers, the elders, the gifted men who teach the Word

of God, those who evangelize, they all must look forward to the day when the reality and the genuineness of what they have done will be made plain by the Lord God. He calls it the fire.

Now, this has nothing to do with Purgatory. Purgatory is a doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. And the doctrine essentially teaches that with all of the other means for the forgiveness of sins that the Roman Catholic Church has managed to devise for its sacramental system, you might, nevertheless, pass into eternity with still some sins unforgiven. And it’s in Purgatory that the final remains of our sins are paid for by the fire of Purgatory. Paul does not, of course, have that in mind at all, though he uses the term “fire.”

As a matter of fact, as you well know, the Bible does not teach that there is such a thing as Purgatory. It’s not necessary for believers. It’s not necessary for those who are true members of the church of Jesus Christ because the apostle or the individual who wrote the Epistle of the Hebrews says in chapter 1, verse 3, who, being the brightness of His glory and the express image of his person—why does he bother with these doctrinal statements? And upholding all things—smile. [Laughter] Smile. Thank you—“upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Sins have been purged. This is the only Purgatory of the Bible, and that is our Lord Jesus Christ’s work on the cross, Jesus Christ and him crucified, the one foundation. This fire is the fire that has to do with the laborers of individuals who profess his name. The fire consumes the draws and leaves the precious metal, which is the gold.

Now, Alan Greenspan said something about gold. And the *Wall Street Journal* reported, I believe, yesterday—I’m sorry, it was February the 28th, the day before yesterday. In it he made an interesting statement about gold. I confess, I knew that gold was a metal that did not corrupt very easily, but I did not know—I did not know what the Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board said as true. The editorial says someone asks him if gold prices weren’t just a product of mob psychology. Incidentally, this is not said there for the benefit of gold bugs, but this is what was said. Mr. Greenspan answered, “Not mob psychology,” he said, “I don’t think so.” Gold is a different type of

commodity because virtually all of the gold that has ever been produced still exists.” Isn’t that interesting? Almost all of the gold that has ever been mined still exists. I confess, that stopped me right there. Therefore, changes in the level of production have very little effect on the ongoing price, which means that it’s virtually wholly a monetary demand phenomenon. I want to get into that. What I’m talking about is simply the fact that the apostle, when he says, now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, each man’s work will become clear. Build with gold, the mines, work abides, the results of your work abides, the effects of your work abide.

There will be a few people in heaven who say, I’m here because of you. And in my case, when I get to heaven, I will say to my benefactor, my evangelist Donald Grey Barnhouse, I’m here because of you, and so on down through the years I’ve—the Christian movement. So the fire will declare it.

Now, notice carefully the words. He says in verse—let me see. Verse 13 he says, and the fire will test each man’s work of what sort it is, of what sort it is. Not how much it is; of what sort it is. So it’s the genuineness of our work; that is, something that is done in the will of God that counts, something done in response to the movement of the will of God in our hearts. Not what we advertise in our evangelistic papers that we send out or in our Bible teaching papers that we send out or what we say one to another in which we put a little bit of praise upon ourselves, have them fawn over us a little bit. We are simply fellow workers, and God’s ultimate judgment will determine what is genuine and what is not, of what sort it is.

Donald Carson—I’ve referred to him before, because he’s written a little book that touches some of these things in 1 Corinthians. He says, “If the church is being built with large portions of charm, personality, easy oratory, positive thinking (I don’t have all of these things, just charm and personality [laughter] but) managerial skills, powerful and emotional experiences and people smarts, and without the repeated passionate spirit, anointed proclamation of Jesus Christ and him crucified, we may be winning more adherents than converts.” Note the difference, an adherent, not a convert.

Not for a moment am I suggesting that managerial skills are unnecessary. Donald, why did you have to say that? Or that basic people skills are merely optional. But the fundamental nonnegotiable, that upon which the church is no longer the church, is the gospel: God’s folly, Jesus Christ and him crucified. That’s why we proclaim Jesus Christ and him crucified in Believers Chapel, because that’s the nonnegotiable of the work of God in the preaching of the truth of God in the getting out of the message.

We would like—I say we. I think the elders would agree and the deacons would agree. And those who teach the Word, I know, would agree. I would like to feel that in Dallas, this city, would know that if they came to Believers Chapel, they would get Jesus Christ and him crucified and not entertainment or any of the other things that so characterize our churches, our professing Protestant Christian churches today.

Well, he goes on. I must hurry. He says in verse 11—I better stick to chapter 3. Verse 11, for no other foundation can be laid—we’ve already mentioned that. The day will declare it. Then in verse 14 he will talk about three types of builders and rewards. If any man’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. Good material brings a reward. No difference, incidentally, among the Lord’s sheep. They all will be in heaven. But there is a difference among the Lord’s servants. And a reward will be given for some that will be larger than others. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

Having becoming a believer in Jesus Christ, he has inherited eternal life, and, therefore, he will be in heaven. There is a difference, then among the Lord’s servants. Sinners are judged at the cross. Sons are judged in this life. Servants are judged at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ.

Now, in verse 15 he talks about the unwise. “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss, yet he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” So these individuals who are going to suffer loss, they are believers, they will be saved, but they will be saved as if passing through fire.

Now, I mentioned a little while ago, the great responsibility that all of us have—I conceive this to be a responsibility, to teach the Word of God. Our Sunday school teachers, they have responsibility. They will be judged in that day concerning their ministry. You personally, if you do any kind of teaching ministry or even in your communication of the gospel, you will be judged at the judgment seat of Christ with reference through your faithfulness and earnestness in the proclamation of the truth of God.

This is a message for all of us, for our Sunday school teachers, for our elders, for our deacons, for those who sit under the hearing of the Word of God. And it would be certainly, really, a most disastrous thing if a person suffered complete loss, although he himself were saved, he has nothing to show for all of his Christian ministry, all of his Christian life, nothing to show. I surely would not want to have that be my experience.

I must tell you something. Years ago, I—I was in Believers Chapel in Dallas, Texas. It was on Fitzhugh Street. That was the first Believers Chapel that I know about. And I was either a young faculty member, just become an instructor, or else I was still a theological student, but I attended the church on Sunday morning. And the Bible teacher that morning was T. B. Gilbert. He was a well-known teacher, evangelist, and planter of churches among the Christian brethren. And his message—I don’t remember anything much about his message except it had to do, evidently, with the judgment seat of Christ because I remember his illustration. His illustration was a dream that he had had.

And Mr. Gilbert said that in this dream he dreamed of his experience of the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. And he said, I remember having the hope of a substantial reward as this experience of the judgment seat of Christ was played out before me. He said, “All of my works were brought out by angelic beings. And they were all piled up on something like a platform there.” And he said, “It was a very big-appearing pile of works.” And he said, “Then an angel came out and struck a match and put a match to the last big pile of works.” And he said, “It began to burn.” And he said, “If you have ever seen a haystack burn, it burned just exactly like it. There was a fire and then the haystack sank; some more fire, it sank again; more fire, it sank again; and, finally, it burned all up.”

And then he said, “An angel came out with a little wisp broom and a dust pan, and he said swept up a few little things like that, and that was all that was left.” [Laughter]

That illustration has really stuck with me. It was amusing. I hope it’s not an anticipation of what’s going to happen to me, the Lord warning me ahead of time of what’s going to happen. But it’s going to happen to some, evidently. But the last two verses are even more significant. Here are those foolish people, those foolish people who come in the midst of a Christian church and are not believers, not earnest believers. They want to corrupt the things of the local church.

And so we read in verse 16, “Don’t you know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” If anyone—this is the same word that is used in the next line translated “destroy.” If you corrupt or if anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy such as thou art you. This is the *{lex talionis}*, the law of retaliation in operation. If you come in the local church among the believing element as an unbeliever, and you seek to corrupt this church and cause the church to turn away from the one foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ, God will destroy you. You destroy the church; he will destroy you. That’s precisely what he says here.

There are people who do that, you know. There are people in our Christian churches who bring into membership of the church the unsaved by baptism, though they haven’t been born again. They have not believed. They come in because their brother is a member or their father is a member or their cousin is a member. By family ties they are brought into the Christian church. By education, because they’re highly educated and they’re friendly to religion, or they’re wealthy individuals and they can contribute greatly and, in fact, do contribute greatly to the Christian church. But in so doing, they come in and ultimately the Christian church becomes a hollow shell. It’s no longer Christian at all. The destruction of the church is taken very seriously by the Lord God because the local church, the church was a holy temple unto the Lord.

It’s so important to remember what the apostle is talking about here. And if you read through the epistles—we’re not going to do this. I’ve got some texts here in which the apostle refers to specific situations in which that precisely has been done.

As the Old Testament concludes in Zachariah 14, verse 12, speaking about the future, the specific statement is made that there will be no Canaanite in the house of God. And he never intended for the church to be indwelt by and characterized by unbelieving people.

I have a question here I would like to try to answer, and then we will have to stop. And the question is regarding—regards predestination. Oh, I hate to talk about that, because that’s a doctrine. I’m interested in a person. I’m also interested in a doctrine.

The question is: Does this—and the reference is to Ephesians 1:4 and 5, 2 Timothy 1:9—magnificent texts—1 Peter 1:20. Do these passages relate to individuals or to mankind in general?

They relate to individuals. They relate to believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. When the apostle writes to the Ephesians, for example, he refers to them as ones who have been elected, and they are believing people. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 4 and 5 is a text that is cited to it. Listen to it. The apostle says, “Just as he chose us (the Ephesians) he chose us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and without blame before him and having love without predestined us to the adoption of sons by Jesus Christ, who himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”

In 2 Timothy chapter 1 in verse 9 the apostle writes again—a magnificent verse. The person who selected these verses has selected three magnificent verses. There Paul says, “Who has saved us (as he writes to Timothy), and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.”

1 Peter 1 in verse 20 I believe refers essentially to the same thing. These texts refer to individuals. There is no such thing as a corporate election because a corporate election, even if it were true, would involve the same principles involved in the election of an individual. It would raise the same moral problems; that is, what human beings think are moral problems, raise the same philosophical problems. If we say God chose the whole church, sovereignly, you still have the same

problem to wrestle with, as if he chooses each individual. But the Bible speaks of it as an individual election.

Thank you for the question. I, again, ask others who have questions to bring them to me, and I will try to answer them. And I forgot to bring Nancy’s question with me tonight, so we will have to put that off for another week in answering then. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the opportunity to study together. We thank Thee for these great passages that the apostle wrote to the Corinthian church, a young body of believers who are growing in the things of the Lord but who, at the same time, like so many of us, have gone off into some byways that are causing difficulties in the church.

Deliver us, Lord, from the kinds of divisions that were characteristic of that church. Deliver us from factionalism, which destroys so much of the work of the Lord in our Christian churches. Help us to remember that the Apollos, the Paul, the Peter, and others are simply God’s workers. They’re working together for the one goal, to honor the one who is the founder—responded thou art the Messiah the son of the living God. And so right in the beginning...[audio ends]