



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 4:6–13

1 Corinthians

“Augustine’s Insight for Living”

TRANSCRIPT

Continue the text tonight that has great historical significance. And if you—if I had not told you that, you may not have caught it. And even if I’d told you that, I’m not sure that you would be able to pick out the text that has great historical significance. But if you noticed my title for tonight, “Augustine’s Insight for Living” you would know at least that it came from him, most likely. And of course it does. That’s the sense that is so important historically. Well, if the clock is right, it’s time to have a word of prayer and begin our class.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the Word of God, and we thank Thee for these great truths that are found within it that have great significance for the history of civilization and particularly for the West, of which we are an extension. We thank Thee for the greatness of the work of the gospel in Europe. And we thank Thee for the way that it has come to the United States of America over a couple of centuries or so. And we thank Thee for the way in which it has reached to us. And we recognize that we do stand on the shoulders of others, and still others, until finally we reach the apostles. And even they, as they say, stand on the shoulders of the prophets. And all of us stand under our great triune God who is responsible for all of the blessings that are ours as Christian men and women.

We thank Thee for the Word of God. We thank Thee for the way in which thou hast preserved it for us. And we thank Thee for the inspired teacher, the Holy Spirit of God, and we pray

that our hearts may be responsive to him. Enable us to truly work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for we know that it is our great God in Heaven who works in us, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure. We ask Lord that Thou will be present in a special way in this service.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Augustine’s name was Aurelius Augustinus—that’s at least his Latin last name. But Augustinus is really the English name Austin. So his name was really Aurelius Austin. So if your name is Austin, then you’re in the line philologically from Augustine. Augustine lived in the 4th and 5th centuries being born—I didn’t look this up, believe it or not—but I think it was 354 A.D., lived for seventy years to about 420 or so. So his life spanned the change from the 4th century to the 5th century.

The greatness of Augustine is not so much in all that he did but in certain things that he did, and one thing specifically. In fact, if we didn’t know about this one thing and if this was not one of his great emphases, then we would not regard him as being a great man. Because to the end of his days, he was committed to the sacramentalism of the church, the Roman Catholic Church, of which he was a part, and so there was a confusion there with the great principle of grace which he is the one who, probably more than anyone else, explicated down through the centuries until the time of the Reformation. Both Luther and Calvin got their teaching on divine grace from Augustine.

So it’s not surprising to read then that Augustus, in the minds of many evangelical theologians—good men who know the grace of God like Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield—have spoken of him as the greatest Christian man between the Apostle Paul and Martin Luther. He wrote, Warfield did, that “He was strikingly called incomparably the greatest man whom, between Paul the apostle and Luther the reformer, the Christian Church has possessed.”

Now, obviously the reason for that must be in the light of the confusion of sacramentalism, in his mind is the—will be the fact that he understood more than any of the fathers to that point in the light of what he wrote, the doctrine of the grace of God. So it’s on that—for that reason that he spoken of as being the greatest man from the Apostle Paul to the time of the Reformation.

Now, great, of course, we mean in the sense of being the tool for the means by which the doctrine of the grace of God has come down to us. Tracing it to Augustine’s view of grace, Professor Warfield also said that “The Reformation was the ultimate triumph of the doctrine of grace over his doctrine of the church; grace (and these are his words specifically) indispensable, prevenient (that means it precedes the activity of the human being who responds to the gospel), irresistible, indefectible, and eternal.”

A man whom Augustine used as a foil, so to speak, for the unfolding of divine grace was a Britisher. His name was Morgan. His Latin name was Pelagius from which we get the term, Pelagius, as a constant name. Pelagius is a Latin term that’s related to the word, sea, and so the English name Morgan is related to sea. But he was the one. He was a British monk who came to Italy and engaged in controversy with Augustine, or Augustine engaged in controversy with him. He was a good man. He believed in the kinds of things that people would call righteousness. And so he was not an evil man in the sense that he was the kind of man that you could criticize as being an evil man. He was a good man, an upstanding man, but unfortunately his doctrine of God’s grace was contrary to the Word of God.

He denied the ruin of the race; being enflamed when he heard Augustine’s statement: “Give (as a word to God) give what Thou commandest and command what Thou wilt.” And that stirred him greatly because he thought that was so wrong. Give what Thou commandest and command what Thou wilt. Because it seemed to trace the activity of man ultimately to the power and wisdom and will of God, which he denied.

He denied the necessity of grace. He believed three corollaries of that doctrine. All might be sinless if they choose. And, in fact, he suggested that there might have been several people in the Old Testament that lived an essentially sinless life. I imagine—I’ve forgotten the three names that he has suggested as possibilities. I believe one of them was Joseph. I believe I’ve mentioned once before that there used to be in evangelical circles in this part of the country, discussion of whether Joseph is

revealed as a sinner in the Bible. And, in fact, many have said reading the story of Joseph, one gets the impression that he is presented as a man without sin.

There’s nothing that you can find in his life, and people scurried around for a while 25 or 30 years ago, maybe a little longer than that, in Texas and in the theological circles associated with the seminary to find something in Joseph’s life that you could criticize and say was sinful. And finally Bob Thieme found something. He said that when—it was either the baker or the butler I’ve forgotten which; I should have looked that up because I am sure you think I know all about this. I don’t—but I do remember the baker and butler because I read about the story three times last year when I went through the Bible. But anyway, when the baker or the butler said to Joseph as Joseph was leaving, Remember me when you get back into your place of authority, that that was a—when Joseph said that to the man who was released, that was lack of trust in the Lord God which seems to me to be a rather small point. And if that’s all that was wrong with Joseph, he was still a man who lived on a rather high plain. In fact, he did anyway, but he was not a sinless man.

Well, Pelagius denied the necessity of grace. All might be sinless, if they choose. There is no such thing as original sin. There is no need for prevenient help for man’s weakness; that is, for the work of the Spirit of God before we turn to him or to make it possible for us to turn to him. We talk about that as irresistible grace or effectual grace. He denied that. In other words, Pelagius stood for the plenary—the full—ability of man.

But the Bible says Christ came to save sinners. Augustine said this, which I think is a great statement, “Take away diseases, take away wounds, and there’s no reason for medicine. If the great physician came from heaven, a great, sick man was lying ill through the whole world. That sick man is the human race.” And I confess, I read that the great physician—yes, that’s true—the great physician comes because we are sick. We are sickened unto death. And Augustine was given the insight to understand that. Luther said, “If any man doth ascribe ought of salvation even the very least of the free will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace and hath not learned Jesus Christ aright.”

Now, the struggle between Pelagius and Augustine was over—one of the main problems was over activity of the will. Is it that men have free will? Or is it that they do not have free will? And Pelagius argued for the freedom of the will and Augustine argued scripturally for the bondage of the will. That’s why Luther—that’s where Luther learned his doctrine of the bondage of the will and wrote his great book called *The Bondage of the Will*. That’s where Jonathan Edwards learned his scriptural understanding of the doctrine of the will and wrote his book *The Freedom of the Will* in which he set forth the bondage of the human will before the Lord God.

Now, Chuck Swindoll wrote a few years ago a book called *The Grace Awakening*. I confess I’ve not read every page in it. I took it; I read some of it to get the flavor of it; then thumbed through it looking for a discussion in some depth of the place of the will in our salvation. I did not find it. And I’m not suggesting that what he said in his book is not true. But what I am suggesting is this: if we’re going to write a book on grace, there has to be a significant section of it dealing with the doctrine of the will of man because this is really the point at which the doctrine of grace of God becomes so confused in the minds of so many evangelical Christians, because to them, to deny the freedom of the will is, on the face of it, obviously wrong because everybody says that we have a free will. But if we read the Bible, we discover that that is not only not biblical, it is actually something that cuts right at the heart of the grace of God. And so many texts that one could cite, that I’m not going to engage in the citing of them, but I’m sure that they’ve been cited enough for you so we won’t necessarily have to do that.

Anyway, our primary—our passage tonight is primarily a passage that illustrates the apostolic sense of living under the grace set free by a crucified Messiah. And when we come to the key text, I want to say a few more things of what—about what Augustinus—Augustine has said concerning the grace of God.

Now, in verse 6 through verse 8 we have the triumphalist Corinthians for remember, they’re individuals who rejoice in how much knowledge they have; they understand the mysteries of salvation; and not only that, they have their favorites. There are some there who are of Cephas and some of

Paul and some of Apollos, and then there are those who are related to some of us at Believers Chapel who just simply say we are of Christ. Isn’t that nice? We are of Christ. We’re not Baptists. We’re not Presbyterians. We’re not Anglicans. We’re not Lutherans, we are of Christ. So easy to be proud in the things that we really may find from Scripture so far as the principles are concerned.

So the Corinthians were proud of the things that they had come to understand, and they were divided among themselves. They were factionalists. And the apostle writes this very strong letter to them to remind them of the principles of biblical truth that are contrary to the factionalism that is so often found in our churches, was found in their churches. They actually seemed to think that things were so good that perhaps the coming of the Lord might be regarded as being near. We have people who think that today, too, but—and they may be right. I cannot say they’re not right. But what Paul says to them is something I think we all need to remember when we talk about the people who minister to us and the Christians we know, and try to set up, unconsciously often, different factions within the one body of Christ.

So verse 6 through verse 8 Paul says:

“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.”

Have the others said, he doesn’t understand the grace of God? I understand the grace of God. He doesn’t understand the grace of God. I think there’s a way in which you can say that. But we have to be very careful that we don’t say that in such a way that we create factions; we create divisions. We can say something like that in a way that is so critical that we defeat the truth that we are seeking to have made plain. So Paul says in verse 7:

“What make you different from another? What do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? You’re already full, you’re already rich, you have reigned as kings without us. (Now, that could be rendered you have begun to reign as kings without us.) And indeed I could wish that you did reign; that you had begun to reign, that we also might reign with you.”

Ah. What a shaft. The apostle has said. It would be nice if you had begun to reign then we could reign with you; rather than you with the apostles, the apostles with you.

In theology, there is what is called futurist eschatology in which we look toward the future. To see what the Bible has to say about the future we read Daniel. We read the book of Revelation. We read the prophetic portions of the Gospels and those prophetic portions of some of the epistles of the New Testament, the second epistles like 2nd Thessalonians and 2nd Peter, those epistles that seem to major on eschatology. And we look into the future. And our imagination sometimes takes over, and we seek to set dates for the things that lie ahead of us.

Now, I don’t think the people in Believers Chapel do that. If they do, they haven’t listened to the people who’ve been teaching the Word of God here because that’s one point that’s been made constantly; that we do not seek to set dates. But futurist eschatology is eschatology that centers on the coming of our Lord.

Now, theology today has invented a new term called realized eschatology or inaugurated eschatology. It’s very common, very popular with more liberal professing Christian professors, teachers, and preachers, because it’s an attempt to, in one sense, to fight the emphasis on the future and the talk about the coming of the Lord, which to some people is a mistake—it’s not a mistake to me. I think that’s something we ought to talk about. We ought to have as a sense of imminence in our—imminency in our thinking about the coming of the Lord because the apostles did. But there is a way in which we can overdo that.

And so in order to combat that, those who have held to this view have sought to stress those passages of Scripture that stress what we have already—what has already happened to us as a result of our Lord’s work on Calvary’s cross. Now, I’ll just give you one passage, not to waste too much time on this, in Colossians chapter 1, verse 13 and 14 the apostle writes to the Colossians:

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of his love (we’re already in the kingdom, so Paul says): In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

That would be called realized eschatology. Now some, to be a little more specific and a little finer, will say inaugurated eschatology. It’s kind of like your position. Your position is in Christ, and you’re in the kingdom because you’re under his authority. And that is, of course, a truth. The balance between the emphasis on the future and the promises made to the nation Israel and the promises made to the church in relation to Israel are very important, in the Word of God, but it’s also important to realize the things that have taken place because the blood has been shed; atonement has been accomplished; and we particularly who are believers at the present time, 1994, where we stand in the divine program.

So evidently the Corinthians had what some of the interpreters have called an over-realized eschatology. You can say an overly inaugurate or an over-inaugurated eschatology. They not only looked to the future and looked to the present, but the present is so significant for them that they have already begun to reign. They’re in the millennial kingdom right now, is the idea the apostle is underlining here. So Paul says:

“We have deliberately transferred to me and to Apollos these things for your sakes.”

Now, what does that tell us? That tells us that actually the problems were with people of different names. It wasn’t with Apollos. It wasn’t with Peter, although Peter and his disciples may have had something to do with that because the way the apostle refers to Peter in this epistle would seem to suggest that at least some of Peter’s followers have not reacted properly to the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ. But at any rate, the men who were causing the trouble, Paul has not mentioned their specific names. He said I’ve transferred them to me and to Apollos when he said some are of Peter, some are of Paul, some of are—of you are of Apollos and some of you of Christ. So what he’s saying then is I’ve deliberately written it this way because he didn’t want to mention the names of those who were causing trouble in this letter.

So he has deliberately transferred the—to—transferred their names to his own names. And notice what he says about them: “that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written.” Now, that evidently was a kind of an epigram, that is, the kind of statement that was common in the local church. Don’t go beyond what is written. Some have suggested common little expressions that we use: “Keep to the book.” That is, keep to the Bible. Or, I have a friend, Dr. Walter Kaiser of Trinity Seminary, who likes to say, “Put your finger on the text here, keep your finger on the text.” What he means by that is keep looking at what the Bible says. Don’t get too far away from it. Keep your finger on the text.

And perhaps the reason Paul says this is because they seem, perhaps, to be taking the position that their ideas were the biblical teaching. It’s easy for people to get into that habit, isn’t it? And particularly a person that stands behind a little pulpit like this and preaches all the time. It’s very easy for us to think that since we are teaching the Word of God what we say is really truth, truth. We have to remember that we are fallible human beings. And what we say may not be the truth when we think that it is the truth.

He goes on to say, too, that none of you may be puffed up on account of—on behalf of one against the other. Now, puffed up is a favorite Corinthian word. This term is used six or seven times—I didn’t count it specifically—but six or seven times in the Corinthian letter. And I think it’s

even mentioned in the second epistle, but it is mainly in 1 Corinthians so that one might think that this is a characteristic sin of the Corinthians. They were puffed up. They were proud. When the psychologists came and asked them to measure up in self-esteem, they found there was no business there. They had to go somewhere else. Those fellows had self-esteem (equals pride). They had it. They had, in fact, Paul says, too much self-esteem. They were puffed up.

Now, John Calvin has a statement here I’d like to read and note he says that pride or self-glorification is the cause and starting point of all controversies. “When each person claiming for himself more than he is entitled to, have en—entitled to have is eager to have others in his power.” That’s really true. I am—have been in the Lord’s work now since 19—well, fifty years, over fifty years, and this has been done so often in the history of the evangelical church. A man gathers some disciples around him. And he not only gathers them around him, but they are almost taught not to listen to someone else. I have a friend who likes to tell his congregation: don’t listen to anyone but me. One man; one pastor. That’s his doctrine; one man, one pastor. And that’s the point. That’s what Paul is talking about when he talks about controversies here and how people like to have others in their own power.

So I hope you don’t go out and say, I am of Johnson. Oh, that would—that would really be bad. You could at least say this, even though it’s wrong, I’m an apostolic succession because Peter was Bar Jonah, son of Jonah, which means, of course, John’s son. And so Lewis is an apostolic succession: Johnson. But that’s all. [Laughter]

Now, here’s the text—this is the text that Augustine thought was so important. And, in fact, he traced his understanding of the doctrine of the grace of God to it. Verse 7, look at it.

“For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? (That’s the point: what do you have that you did not receive?) Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?”

Now, Augustine wrote a work, he wrote many works, but he wrote this one on the predestination of the saints. And he consens—confesses within it his former error, his error concerning the grace of God; because he thought that men did have a free will, and that the understanding they had of truth came from the exercise of their free will, first of all; and that God blessed the decision that was made of their free will.

But listen to what he says: “It was not thus that that pious and humble teacher thought, I speak of the most blessed Cyprian (one of his teachers) when he said that we must boast in nothing since nothing is our own. And in order to show this, he appealed to the apostle as a witness where he said, ‘For what has thou that thou has not received, and if thou hast received it, why boastest as if thou hadst not received it?’ And it was chief, (now that was the close of Cyprian,) and it was chiefly by this testimony that I myself also was convinced when I was in similar error, thinking that faith, whereby we believe in God is not God’s gift but that it is from ourselves.”

I had an evangelical paper people sent me. I just read the recent issue of it, just four pages, and in it: the answer to the question about faith that saves. The individual said the Bible doesn’t say specifically that faith is the gift of God. Now, if you’re looking for a text that says: faith is the gift of God—no—but literally scores of other places, that’s the truth. And right here. If you have something, do you have faith? You got it from God. It was the gift of God. And he says don’t boast about it. So it’s not something you’ve manufactured. It was something that was given to you.

Listen for this, Augustine goes on, “I was in similar error thinking that faith, whereby we believe in God, is not God’s gift but that it is in us from ourselves and that by it we obtain the gifts of God whereby we may live temperately and righteously and piously in this world. For I did not think that faith was preceded by God’s grace; so that by its means would be given to us what we might profitably ask; except, that we could not believe if the proclamation of the truth did not precede.

In other words, what he’s saying is: I did realize you must have the gospel first or the truth preached, but I didn’t realize that God and his grace had to work in my heart before I came to faith.

In other words, God not only gives us the Word but he gives us the faith by which we believe the Word of God. That makes a whole lot of difference about how we understand the grace of God. Makes us realize how thankful we ought to be. Every one of you poor souls sitting in this auditorium that is a Christian, how thankful you ought to be that God, in his marvelous mercy, gave you the faith to believe his Word. Gave it to you. Gift. Free grace—wouldn’t have to say free. Grace is free. Spurgeon used to say that makes grace doubly-sure, something like that. But anyway, we don’t need that. It’s the gift of God. How blessed you are if you have the faith of which he’s talking about.

He goes on to say, “But that we should consent when the gospel was preached to us, our thought was our own doing and came to us from ourselves.” Later on, I have two or three quotes. I like these quotes. I read this some years ago, I went back last—or maybe night before last—and copied out some of these that I had underlined in my text. Later he said, “For we read in the apostles words obtained mercy to be a believer.” He does not say because I was a believer; “Therefore, although it is given to the believer it’s been given also that he may be a believer.”

So we have mercy because it’s given to us to believe and thus to have mercy. Later on, “In the solution of this question I labored indeed on behalf of the free choice of the human will that God’s grace overcame, and I could only reach that point where the apostle is perceived to have said with the most evident truth for who maketh thee to differ, for what has thou that thou has not received? Now, if thou hast received it, why dost thou glory as if thou received it not? And this is—the martyr Cyprian was also desirous of setting forth when we compressed the whole of it in that title that we must boast in nothing since nothing is our own.

Then a few lines later, Augustine says—he says the text does not allow the believer to say I have faith which I receive not. In other words, you can’t say that. You can’t say I have faith which I did not receive because everything you have, you have received. Some people have to have it said over and over again, that’s why I’m reading it these numbers of times, too. Later he says many hear the Word of truth and some believe while others contradict. Therefore, the former will to believe, the latter do not will. Who does not know this? Who can deny this? We know this. The Gospels give it—

some believe, some don’t. Who can deny this? But since in some the will is prepared by the Lord, in others it is not prepared. We must assuredly be able to distinguish what comes from God’s mercy and what from his judgment.

And so if the word is given out and one believer, one person, responds in faith and the other doesn’t, then one is an exhibition of God’s mercy; the other, the exhibition of God’s judgment. Still further, he says, but he promised children to Abraham. And this man can—and this men—I think I must have copied that wrong—cannot be unless they have faith. Therefore, he gives faith, also. If he promised that Abraham would have children, then he must make provision for the faith by which they become Abraham’s children. And incidentally, the Bible says you are children of God by faith, children of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ. It’s because God gave you faith, just as he gave Abraham faith.

Augustine often puts this text to skillful use, Calvin says, because he read Augustine. In contending against the Pelegians—if there’s a Pelegian here, I hope you’re very uncomfortable, very uncomfortable. Calvin says, “He often put that text to use; in fact, he cites it constantly. It meant so much to Augustine that whatever excellence there is in men is not implanted by nature, so that it can be attributed to nature or heredity, nor is it procured of our own free will so as to put God under our control.” Oh, that’s an interesting thought, isn’t it? In other words, if we insist that men cannot receive the blessing of God until they exercise their free will, what are we saying? We are saying that God cannot act until we act. God cannot act until we act. We must, of our free will, believe, then God can act. What kind of doctrine is that? What kind of doctrine of a sovereign deity who, in his sovereignty, is no longer sovereign? But man’s will has become sovereign.

So—nor is it attributed to nature or heredity nor is it procured of our own free will so as to put God under our control. But it flows from his mercy which is pure and free. For there is no doubt that here Paul places the grace of God over against the merit of worthiness of men. And I know you’re thinking: my goodness, why is Dr. Johnson talking about these theological things? Well, I’m talking about them because that’s what you need. You need this. You need to understand this. If you

don’t get anything, you get this. You will appreciate the marvelous grace that God is exercised in your salvation. And, furthermore, you will see that there are a lot of us in the evangelical world—I’m not denying their salvation. I’m not smart enough to be able to pick out who is a Christian and who isn’t. It’s amazing to me that people have come to Believers Chapel, for example, and have heard the gospel here for some years and today their heart is stone to spiritual things. That’s amazing. But it is within the evangelical company that there is a lack of understanding of this fundamental fact.

Now, this is an evangelical seminary that I’m talking about right now which had—no longer has this, I don’t think, maybe they do have it, I don’t know—but had a chaplain who sent out little words every week or two to the students to read. And frequently these things were little exhortations, just a page long. I’m going to read you one of them, not all of it. Well, it’s not long. Maybe you can listen to it.

“Blessed are the balanced” is the Scripture text at the top. Now, that’s not a Scripture text. He got it as a quote so I’m—I don’t want to say it’s a scriptural text but he put it up. Blessed are the balanced. Now, there’s a place for balance. Don’t misunderstand me. He put that there. “This canonical, un-canonical beatitude from the perceptive pen of Paul Reiss is a word in season and for all of life especially, the Christian ministry whatever form it may take. The records of the redeemed are replete with examples of those who ignored this beatitude and therefore brought suspicion and prejudice to their work. Martin Luther’s quote ‘scornful, dismissal of the Epistle of James as an epistle of straw’ has colored the attitude of most Protestants ever since toward this remarkable book. ‘The extraordinary mistake Luther made in regarding James as antagonistic to Paul and his teaching as contradicting that of justification by faith still persists,’ cites Herbert Stephenson.”

Now, he goes on to say as a something—a lot can be said about that because Luther did say some other things that indicated he understood the truth of what James is talking about and what Paul talks about. For all of his—well, my paper’s not too clear there—the reference was capable of intemperate judgment so something and so are we. Like Ephraim we may become cakes half-baked.

Perhaps the 18th century minister John Fletcher who lived closer to the distinguished reformers than we are saw the lack of balance. Now, John Fletcher was a very godly man, was a Methodist, but a very godly man. I won’t take anything away from him because many of the men that I would think of as men of the doctrine of the grace of God respected John Fletcher, which means that what we are talking about is it’s possible for a person who loves the Word of God and loves our Lord but who doesn’t understand fully the grace of God may, nevertheless, be a godly Christian.

Anyway, he says, “Who lived closer to the distinguished reformers than we are (he means in time) saw this lack of balance in a letter which he pays tribute to the balanced insights of Thomas Cranmer. Fletcher wrote, in somewhat strange English, ‘All men be also to be monished and chiefly preachers that in this high matter they are looking on both sides (that is, both looking to the doctrines of grace and the doctrines of justice) so a-temper and moderate themselves that neither they so preach the grace of God with heated Augustine that they may take away thereby free will, nor on the other side so extol free will with heated Pelagius that injury be done to the grace of God. Brethren, the plea is a balance.’”

I can only say regarding the chaplain, he didn’t understand the grace of God. You cannot say I believe in the free will of man, and I believe in God’s grace and not be contradictory. Now, you can do it. There are many who would do it. But their understanding of the grace of God will be hindered thereby. And this man did not understand that.

Now, notice what Paul says in the 8th verse: “You are already full. You boast as if you have not received the things that you have some to understand. You are already full. You have already become rich. You have begun to reign as kings without us, without the apostles.” Think of that. That must have been a shocking statement. You have—you who were brought to the knowledge of the Word of God through my preaching, you have begun to reign, and we’re not with you. You passed us by without us. And then, and indeed I could wish—the apostle was capable of a good bit of irony—and I could wish that you have begun to reign, that you did reign, that we might also reign

with you. The apostle—that is to me, it seems, he is capable of a little scorn for these individuals. They have already begun to reign.

In the Greek text—you can see it in the English text, too, I think. You are already full. Now, the already is in the emphatic position in the Greek text so we say *already* you are fool—full. *Already* you are rich; already. What were they looking for? They should have been looking to the coming our Lord Jesus Christ and the entering into the kingdom of God upon the earth. But *already* these individuals are in the kingdom. Already they are full. And so the idea of the kingdom was a place—was a kingdom in which men would have the things that they lacked. They would have all the food, all the pleasure, all the luxuries, and they are in that kingdom before we are. This is really an over-realized eschatology. They thought they were in the kingdom already.

Now, I’m not going to look at some text that might be a parallel with this and contribute to it. We don’t have time to do that, but I want to go on now to the 9th verse. The apostle says—I entitle this: “The Grim Facts about the Present Kingdom. Notice.

“For I think that God has displayed us the apostles last, as men condemned to death: for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels, and to men.”

This latitude, angels and men, define the meaning of world—to the world, both angels and men. Some throne Corinthians, some throne which you’ve mounted. We don’t have any throne like that, the apostle says. As far as we’re concerned, we’re in a procession. We’re in a procession to the place where the people in the city meet like the arena. And you know what we are headed for? We’re at the last, the last of the line because we’re like gladiators that are doomed to die. And we’re going to our death.

In fact, if Paul has in mind the Roman triumph, in which after a general has won a great victory he was given a triumph, a parade in the city of Rome with all of the people involved, the leaders of those that they have overcome in a long parade and finally the general, and then they

would have some things that would happen in the arena. Individuals would be thrown to the beasts. And Paul talks about fighting with beasts in the 15th chapter of this, whether that has something to do with it or not. I’m not going to say anything about it now.

But at any rate you can see that what Paul regards as the present life is anything but a kingdom, in the sense in which they understand it. He says: “God has displayed us last, the last of the apostles, as men condemned to death for we have been made a spectacle to the world both to angels and to men. The only glorious line—the only glorious thing that one can say about this is that we are following in the same train of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and that would be glorious. That would be.

But the Corinthians are—they are so shallow. You notice also that the apostle ascribes his situation to the providence of God. Notice: but—or for—I think that God has displayed us. You might think he would talk about how the Romans and how the Greeks and how all of the others, the Parthians and the rest of those people who had persecuted the Christians, that they are the ones who have done all of this. No. It’s God. It’s God who has done it ultimately. And so it is providential, and he understands it as providential. These individuals who have a private millennium of their own look at us and see what true Christian living is.

Now, I don’t have time to go into the details, and I don’t think it’s necessary, verses 10 through 13, but now he will speak *ad hominem*. He will say we are morons for Christ’s sake. I’m not—that’s not really the way to translate that. *{moroi}* is the Greek word; *{moros}* is the word from which we get moron. And it’s to that extent that one can make the connection. But we are fiends, *{moroi}*, we are fools for Christ’s sake. You are wise in Christ living in your little millennium. Living in your puffery, your puffed-up condition; living in your I am of Paul or I am of Apollos or I am of Christ. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. I wonder if he added that because they said that, we are wise in Christ. We are united to him and so we’re wise. We are weak but you are strong. You are distinguished but we are dishonored.

Now, we are fools for Christ’s sake. Is he? Who’s the really wise group? Is it the Corinthians? No, they’re the fools. They’re the fools. It’s the apostles who are the wise ones. Providentially God is using them for the glorification of the Son of God and the salvation of men. He continues to the present hour. We both hunger, and thirst, and we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless. Homeless, now that’s a—that’s a word for today, isn’t it? You reckon Paul and his crowd would be under the bridge downtown? Well, possibly. Possibly. If so, those people under the bridge down there would get some good preaching. They really would.

Homeless: characteristically the homeless person has no repose; he has no clothes; he is a vagrant. That’s what the apostle says they were; they were vagrants. Well, he goes on, and I wish we could spend more time on that but we can’t. Verse 12, and we labor, working with our own hands. No salaries; they lived by the grace of God and by faith in God’s provision because Jesus said that he would provide the needs of his saints. We labor, working with our own hands. We could turn to a number of passages where Paul lays great stress upon that. He did not become a burden to those to whom he ministered the Word of God lest they think that he was in it for their money.

Being dif—being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed—I like that being defiled, we bless. So in the midst of all the suffering, they are praying for those who are persecuting them. We bless being persecuted; we endure being defamed; we entreat; we’ve been made as the filth of the world, the off scouring of all things until now. One of those words has been translated, scapegoats. It’s uncertain really that it should be. But if that were correct, and there is an honest doubt about it, New Testament scholars feel it’s possible, some of them do, and some feel that it is not. If the scapegoats is a correct translation, it would lay stress upon the fact that they are like sacrificial goats like the scapegoat of the Old Testament. In other words, what they are doing is something that is sacrificial and benefiting the church of Jesus Christ. And that would be in harmony with what Paul says in Philippians—in Colossians 1 in verse 24 where he writes:

“For I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the church.”

And so, perhaps he is mentioning its vicarious service for the society, the Christian society; the church of God.

John Calvin has some words about the willingness of Paul to be humbled. He says, “When he says that he undergoes persecution by enduring it and prays for his slanderers, he means not only that he has brought down and humbled by God through the cross, but that he is also endowed with a willingness to be so humbled. In this perhaps he censures the false apostles who were so effeminate and soft that they couldn’t bear to be touched even with someone’s little finger. And speaking of their work, he adds ‘with our own hands’ to make it clearer how contemptible his occupation was.”

I’d like to say something to Believers Chapel and to us; to me; to you that I think we need have—we need said to us. And I don’t mean simply Believers Chapel; I mean the evangelical church. Have we forgotten the banner under which we serve? Have we forgotten the cause of which we are a part? Paul said, I determine not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified. Have we forgotten that? The crucified Messiah and the daily denial of self-interest; that’s part and parcel of discipleship of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We’re not following in the apostle’s feet if we’ve forgotten that we are individuals who live and move under the flag of a crucified Messiah.

The world’s opposition to Christianity and the Bible grows; you cannot help but see that. In our society it’s almost illegal in any official gathering on any official circumstances to say something that’s specifically Christian. We can talk about faith, and we can talk about helping others or Christian doctrines and Christian truths, but to mention Jesus Christ and him crucified as the grounds of men’s salvation and the only ground, that’s illegal in our schools. So—but that doesn’t mean we don’t have to stand up for the truth. We stand up for that truth.

Are we more like the Corinthians than Paul’s company? Are we guilty of a kind of deep betrayal of the cross of Christ because we have not the boldness to reach out and touch others and

bring them in to the church of Jesus Christ? Let me tell you this, that discipleship, true discipleship is the winning of a soul for Christ through the gospel and bringing them into the family of God.

So when you win someone to the Lord, bring him into the church so that he may be nourished by the Lord and the Scriptures in the context of a believing church. That’s what it is to truly evangelize. It isn’t to get a person to say he’s a believer in Christ and say, I won a soul, and mark that up on your piece of paper and you having won them. No. The winning of a soul is not concluded ideally until they’re brought in among the other believers and become a part of the church, the local church of Jesus Christ.

Is it possible to mention repentance in Believers Chapel? I believe, and I think you believe—you who are here tonight, that it is possible that we are not above repentance. We are not above confession of our sins. We’re not above confessing our lack of boldness; our lack of reaching out; our lack of honest discipleship and attempts to win people to Jesus Christ and to bring them under the ministry of the local church which the apostles considered to be the home of the family. May God help us to respond to the Word and be just such types of disciples. Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful and thankful for Thy Word, and we acknowledge, Lord, that we are so far from the spirit of those mighty men that thou didst and thou with faith and grace and the decision to give themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, then and forever. Oh, God, we thank Thee for the insight thou didst give to Augustine. We thank Thee for the sense and the marvelous grace of God which has moved our wills, our rebellious wills to turn to Thee and to Jesus Christ, our crucified Savior. Help us, Lord, to truly witness for him in a way that will honor his name.

We pray for this church. We pray for these who are present here. We pray for those in the other room; and our young people and we ask, Lord, Thy blessing upon them. May Thy hand rest upon those who teach the Word here, upon Dan, upon Wilfred, Randy, our Sunday school teachers, all who administer the truth, and may the fruit that pleases Thee result.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.