



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 6:1–11

1 Corinthians

“The Litigious Society—Shall We Join It?”

TRANSCRIPT

So let's begin with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege again to study the Scriptures. We thank Thee for our Lord and Savior. We thank Thee for the devotion to the will of God that characterized his life and still characterizes that as our great high priest at the right hand of our Father in heaven. We thank Thee for his atonement, the blood that was shed for sinners, such as we are. And we thank Thee, Lord, for the ministry of the Holy Spirit who has pointed us to him who died for sinners and who has made it possible for us to enter into the experience of eternal life. We thank Thee for the joy that is ours and for the assurance that is ours by virtue of the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

How marvelous it is to reflect upon our great triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—each of the three persons committed to the accomplishment of the divine purpose and we significant individuals with respect to that purpose. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the blessings that are ours and for the confidence that we have of the divine providence that guides and guards all of our steps. We pray for this church, for each member in it. We pray for its ministry and ask thy blessing upon all of those who are members and those who teach us. We pray for them. We ask Thy blessing upon them. We pray that Thou will supply all of the needs, give our elders wisdom and direction as they exercise their oversight over us.

And we pray, Lord, that Thou wilt bless the other ministries of the Chapel. Bless the staff, those who work in the tape ministry, and those who have other forms of service to our Lord here through this organization, this church organization. We thank Thee for it. Guide and direct us. May our Lord be honored in this testimony.

We ask for Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.

[Message] Well, the subject tonight is taken from 1 Corinthians chapter 6, “The Litigious Society—Shall We Join It?” And I’m going to read verse 1 through verse 11 for our Scripture reading of chapter 6, and I hope you will follow along with me in your New Testament.

You’ll remember the apostle has been speaking about the necessity of discipline. And he has been rebuking the immorality that existed in the Corinthian church. And a very, very serious case of it, as he said that man has his father’s wife. And so illicit intercourse with a mother-in-law is apparently what is involved, or a stepmother, we’ll put it that way.

Now, in verse 1 of chapter 6, the apostle continues on the theme of immorality because he says,

“Dare if any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life? If then, you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren, but brother goes to law against brother and that before unbelievers. Now, therefore, it is already an utter failure for you, that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? (The word usually translated defrauded, but that’s the force of it, to be cheated.) No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren. Do you not know that the

unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived neither fornicators or idolaters or adulterers nor homosexuals nor sodomites nor thieves nor covetous nor drunkards nor revilers nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of our God.”

This generation, of which we are apart, could certainly be stigmatized as the litigious generation. The lawsuits accompanied by original and unique defenses are the coin of the day. We have now murderers, confessed murderers, suggesting that the real problem is not with them; the real problem is with the neighborhood in which they are found. Now, no one doubts that some of those ways in which we have been brought up do contribute to some of the problems that we have, but ultimately responsibility is ours. But today we live in the age in which responsibility is not very acceptable.

We turn to another aspect of society and think of the class action lawsuits. Perhaps many of you involved in them in which individuals have associated with, for example, the savings and loan crisis. And because of the evils of men in high finance, class action suits abound. And we know that our age is entitled by many, not individuals who are expounding the Scriptures, as the age of litigation. So ‘litigious society’ is a term that many feel does describe something very significant about the society of which we are apart.

Now, evidently the Corinthians, as Calvin suggests, “had,” I’m quoting Calvin here, “an excessive eagerness for litigation and this arose out of greed.” The urge to litigate, and to litigate in Corinth, was litigation against one’s own brother in order to gain something, some fundamental something that we want. We describe it as greed. It is something that pertains to all men down through the centuries. But it was existing in Corinth, and it was existing and has been existing in Christian church down through the years.

Many years ago, a church that I used to go to, preach in, quite a bit, Berachah Church in Houston, was rent by division between two important families in the church. And they were in process of legal difficulties with one another. And that went on for a period of time. I don't remember. It's many years ago. It was twenty-five years ago, so I don't remember how that came out. But in spite of the fact that leadership in the church approached the men who were involved and pointed them to this passage, they still were in litigation with one another.

As a matter of fact, we have even had it in Believers Chapel. A number of years ago, one of the men who was a teacher in the chapel, threatening to sue someone who was working for him because he was not doing the job that he should have done. Couldn't help be sympathetic with the teacher, not because I was one of the teachers, but simply he had hired someone in the Chapel who was not doing the work that he was supposed to do. And he was so frustrated that finally he approached him and said he was going to sue him if he did not do the work. So the things that the apostle speaks about are things that are appropriate for us to consider.

The Corinthians were going to law with one another. Lawyers, of course, are people who attract a great deal of attention in our day. I even looked out over the audience to see if any are here. There usually are some because we {[have]} some sterling lawyers in Believers Chapel, but they attract a great deal of attention. And I would like to say to them that there is biblical justification for your salvation. If you read the 3rd chapter of Titus, there is a lawyer who is a member of the church of God. And so lawyers can be saved. We start with that. [Laughter]

Thomas Jefferson once said, “It's the trade of lawyers to question everything, yield nothing, and talk by the hour.”

John Keats said, “I think we may class the lawyer in the natural history of monsters.” He'd evidently had some bad experience.

And even William Shakespeare said, “The first thing we do, let's kill all the lawyers.”

J. P. Morgan, one of our greatest financiers, said, “I don’t want a lawyer to tell me what I cannot do. I hire him to tell me how to do what I want to do.” And I think we can realize that that, no doubt, happens many, many, times in our society today.

Henry Braum said, “A lawyer is a learned gentleman who rescues your estate from your enemies and keeps it himself. [Laughter] I like that one. That seems to be pretty good.

Clarence Darrow said, “The trouble with law is lawyers.”

And Benjamin Franklin sums up my few little quotes by saying, “God works wonders now and then: behold, a lawyer and an honest man.” Well, we have honest men who are lawyers in the Chapel.

Now, the apostle, here in these verses that we’ve read, is going to deal with those who are carrying their quarrels to the courts. And he begins with a question, “Dare any of you having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?” Now, if you’ll look at this in the original text, there is an indication, if you can even see—you can probably see it from the English text, you’ll notice there is no “therefore” or “on this account” or “but” or anything like that beginning chapter 6. And this asyndeton—that is, there is no connection, no obvious connection would indicate that the subject of chapter 6 is similar, perhaps even the same, as chapter 5. In other words, we have now a reaffirmation of the principles of chapter 5. The judicial competency of the church is in view in both places.

The question the apostle is laying before the church in chapter 5 is, you are responsible to exercise discipline. You are supposed to carry out God’s law for discipline. And now again in chapter 6, the same subject. And so he doesn’t say therefore, he just goes on and says, “Dare any of you having a matter against another, go to the law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints. And evidently, the way he puts it, “Dare any of you,” and that’s emphatic in the first verse, the position of that little clause, suggests perhaps that they were already dimly aware of the fact that they ought not to go to court. And so he says, “Dare any of you,” as if to say, you either should know that or you know it and you’re not doing what even you recognize as being the right thing to do.

So the Corinthians then were taking their quarrels, their legal quarrels, before individuals whom Paul calls “the unrighteous.” Now, this expression “the unrighteous” means unjust. I think probably some of your translations will have unjust. That’s the meaning of the word. This is not unjust in the sense of the 9th verse, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God, don’t be deceived, neither fornicators nor idolaters nor adulterers nor homosexuals nor sodomites.” It’s not in that sense that he’s using the term unrighteous. The sense in which he is using it here is in the sense of verse 6 where he says, “But brother goes to law against brother and that before unbelievers.” So the righteous that he refers to, the unrighteous in chapter 6 verse 1 is a reference then to unbelievers, “Dare any of you then, you believers go to law before the unrighteous,” that is, the unbelievers who have not been justified by God’s grace through Jesus Christ, that which he will talk about in verse 11 at the conclusion of this particular section.

It might be interesting for you to know that every Jewish community—and you must remember our early church was largely Jewish. On the day of Pentecost, it was when the church had its special new experience of the coming of the Holy Spirit and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit, that body of people was largely a Jewish body. So the church began as a Jewish body. Every Jewish community throughout the Roman Empire and even beyond the frontiers of the Roman Empire had its own *{beyth-diyin}*. That’s a Hebrew expression. I give—transliterated for you, but *{beyth diyin}* means house of judgment. And so it was a kind of a law court, but it was a Jewish law court which they themselves used to settle their own judicial problems. That was the way by which they were competent in the administration of the affairs of the Jewish people.

So you might expect then, the early church, which was largely Jewish and was greatly influenced by the Jewish people, even when the time of the apostle’s ministry began to have a knowledge of what it meant for them to exercise judgment among their own particular people in the problems and quarrels that arose among them, because they did not want to go before the Roman Empire and the judges of them who were unsympathetic to both Jews and to Christians. So we’re not surprised then to see that the apostles suggest that the early church ought to act like a *{beyth*

diyn}, a house of judgment, for the believers. And I think that’s probably what he has in mind, but we cannot be absolutely sure. The apostle doesn’t say that, but in the light of the fact the Jewish communities that head these houses of judgment, this is something so similar that I think that must have been upon Paul’s mind.

Now, having said this, “Dare any of you having a matter against another go to law before the unrighteous, (that is the unjustified) and not before the saints...” Now, the apostle will answer his question. And he will answer his question, and in his answer there will be, I suggest, a couple of things that he has in mind. In the first place, he feels it’s very necessary for them to settle their own disputes, because if they go before the unbelievers who don’t understand, then the church will suffer the bad name that would come. They would be in a sense, to use one of our expressions, “airing their dirty linen” before the Romans and others when it was not necessary, and the unbelievers love to do that.

I know that none of you want to read about Bobby Tilton’s troubles, because you’re not really interested in that at all. Look at you all smiling, because you are reading those things. Any particular group of believers or any kind of church that’s in difficulty, the Christians immediately go to that particular thing and read that and then they look at the first page. It’s just human nature. And so I’m sure that the apostle wanted to preserve the good name of the Christian church and the society in which they were. And therefore, they should not be known as a quarrelsome body of people. And there isn’t any evidence they were quarrelsome, but this was his way or preventing that.

And then another thing: if they did continually go before the unbelievers for judgment, then they are likely to suffer wrongs. And one can see that in the story of the New Testament, the ultimate wrong of course, the wrong committed with reference to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But the apostles themselves were individuals who were hunted for the testimony that they had. The apostle talks about this in chapter 4 when he says, “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. We are fools for Christ’s sake; we are weak, and so on. So the apostle wanted to prevent those things from happening.

Now, his rebuttal takes the form of an expression which he uses three times. So it’s easy to outline the passage. Notice verse 2, “Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?” Verse 3, “Do you not know that we shall judge angels?” And verse 9, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” So, he’s going to answer his own question, “Dare any of you to go to law before unrighteous and not before the saints.” And the first reason why you shouldn’t do that that Paul cites is saints are going to judge the world. Don’t you know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

Now, if it’s true that we are going to be a judicial body and shall have the whole world to judge, probably he has in mind the fact that all judgment has been committed to Jesus Christ our Lord says, and we are his co-assessors. The ancient courts had the judge and they had others who sat by the side, the assessors, and they were part of the court. And so we are evidently going to be part of the court because we belong to our federal head, our covenantal head, the Lord Jesus Christ. So if we are to judge the world, it would be intolerable that we be debarred from the trivial kinds of things that are to be settled by the saints among themselves.

Now, Paul’s argument may puzzle us. I think if you think about it a moment, you might have some pretty good objections to it. If he says the saints will judge the world, and if we take that to be a reference to the future, the saints will judge the world, then because we judge the world in the future, does that mean that we are competent to judge the world now? Someone could say that’s in the future. It’ll be different from what you are now. And if you are going to judge the world, what really effect does that have on present judgment? Why does that make you so competent to carry out judgment now? That’s not an easy question to answer. I don’t know but one commentator who’s discussed it. But it struck me as being a natural question. If it’s true we’re going to judge the world, then why does that make every Tom, Dick, or Harry a judge in the Christian church, when many of them obviously don’t have a great deal of competence.

Gordon Clark, who’s written a little book on 1 Corinthians and has something of a legal mind, he’s a philosopher at least. He suggests that perhaps we are to think of it like our chief justices of the Supreme Court or our justices of the Supreme Court. We might not expect a person who is a member of the Christian church to have the competence of a man like Scalia or Rehnquist the chief justice, particularly if he’s had no training. We wouldn’t expect that. But, he said, in the case of Scalia and Rehnquist when they were about twenty-five years of age, they didn’t have the competence either to do what they’re doing now. But probably, he suggests, that at age twenty-five Justice Rehnquist would be a great deal more capable of settling legal questions or questions of judgment than you or I would at age twenty-five, and that’s probably true. So he suggests that there is a certain kind of judicial mentality that certain people have and others don’t have.

But anyway, Paul says, “Don’t you know that the saints will judge the world?” And if we are to sit with Jesus Christ and judge the world, we ought to carry out the more trivial matters that we are responsible for in the day-to-day life of the Christian church. So what this means, my Christian friend, is specifically this: if you and other believers have problems, if you have disagreements, if there are ways in which you and your fellow Christians are struggling and perhaps even fighting, those things ought to always be taken to the elders of the church and not to the world. First of all, to the elders of the church, and ask for a settlement of the disagreements by the elders of the church. And if we’re not doing that, we’re in violation of 1 Corinthians chapter 6 in verse 2. It does happen in all of our churches and so it’s something for us to keep in mind.

Now, Paul says secondly, that the saints will judge angels. He says “Don’t you know that we shall judge angels?” Now, there are different ways in which this text can be taken because unfortunately some of the words may be taken as indicatives or even interrogatives, but I’m just going to expound the text that I have here. “Do you not know that we shall judge angels, how much more things that pertain in this life?” So he goes on to say, “If then you have judgment concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge, the world, do you appoint them instead of your fellow believers? I say this to your shame. Is it so that

there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between the brethren? I say this to your shame.”

He said previously in this epistle, remember “I don’t want to shame you,” but there are certain things that he wants to shame them about. And he goes on even to say in verse 7, “Now therefore it’s already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another, why do you not rather except wrong?” In other words, says an even better way to deal with these questions than going to the elders, suffer wrong. What a strange thing. It’s better to suffer wrong than settle the question before the elders. It’s almost as if he’s saying there is a high road that a Christian preferably should follow.

Now, where did the apostle get that? Well, I think he got it from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Listen to what he says. Matthew chapter 5, verse 39, “But I tell you not to resist an evil person, but whoever slaps you on your right cheek turn the other to him also. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. Give to him who asks you. And from him who wants to borrow from you, don’t turn away.”

Now, those principles that our Lord refers to here are principles, it seems to me, the apostle is suggesting here, already it’s a failure if you go to law with one another, you’re already involved in failure when you do that. “Why don’t you rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be defrauded?” In other words, it’s a step back in biblical sanctification to sue at all, even before a believing court. You’ve already stepped back from what is the highest of the Christian ways. In verse 8, “No you yourselves do wrong and cheat and you do these things to your brethren.”

Somehow or other, I’ve lost my copy of H. A. Ironside’s book on 1 Corinthians, but I had in some old notes of mine a reference to, I think, a statement that he made about rights, and we live in the day of rights, don’t we? Everybody’s got rights. There are some rights people have that they never dreamed about—even they didn’t dream about until some lawyer suggested it to them perhaps. But at any rate, we have so many rights today. And Ironside has a statement about rights that is

apropos to the life of our day and I think particularly for Christians. He points out that if we got our rights, we would either be in hell or on the way to hell, but Christ came to get his wrongs that we might be delivered. So the apostle follows in a very similar path that, “You do wrong and cheat, you who do these things to your brethren.”

Now, the third answer is the answer of verse 9 through verse 11. “Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” Now, the appeal here of course is to wider principles. And he’s preparing for what he’s going to talk about in the last few verses of this chapter, verse 12 through verse 20. So he, first of all, points out their position and then he reminds them of what has happened to them. Verse 9 and verse 10, “Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don’t be deceived.” Well, evidently, there were some who were thinking that it would be possible to get to heaven just because either they are living or else they had some knowledge of the biblical truth and insisted that they were believers when their lives were anything but the life that flows out of the believing man or woman. So Paul says, “Don’t be deceived, fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites, thieves, coveters, drunkards, revilers, extortioners, they will not inherit the kingdom of God.” So that’s what the Corinthians were, incidentally. That’s what they were. They were a company of this type of body with all of these different things.

Now, of course we are—we could be called the age of adultery, too. We could be called the age of fornication because these sins are so common. They’re plastered all over our newspapers. They’re all over our TV screens. It’s obvious that we are living in a very immoral society. And there are individuals in the professing Christian church who speak about being Christian but their lives are so far from what Paul is talking about that it strains credulity to believe that they could belong to the family of God. So Paul is very strong, “They shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”

It’s surprising to me—I must confess, it’s surprising to me that so many people in the Christian profession, profession, Christian profession, seek to include the homosexuals in the family of God when the apostle speaks so plainly about them. Now, he mentions here homosexuals and

sodomites. The catamites, the sodomites, they are not going to inherit the kingdom of God. Back in Romans chapter 1, he writes similarly when he states in verse—it’s about verse 26 or 27, he says, “For this reason God gave them up to vile passions, for even their women exchanged their natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men leaving the natural use of the woman burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due.” And it’s very, very difficult for a Bible teacher to keep from saying this is the reason for the AIDS epidemic. I don’t know. I’m just a human being. I don’t have any omniscience. I didn’t have to tell you that, did I? [Laughter] You knew that. I don’t know but one cannot read those texts without thinking our living God in heaven is carrying out his perfect will and purpose. And what has happened is likely or may be just precisely that.

But now he’s talking about people who are within the Christian company, evidently. He says, “Such were some of you,” so they know about them. And he warns them that the unrighteous are not going to inherit the kingdom of God. Now, I have an article I clipped out of *Christianity Today* from November, last November. And the title of it is “Homosexuality Debate Strains Campus Harmony.” Homosexuals at Christian colleges press for acceptance. Now, mind you, press for acceptance as Christians on the campus. At Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, a bitter debate lasting several weeks followed the school’s College Republican’s invitation to an anti-homosexual rights activist to speak last spring. More than a thousand students attended the talk creating a charged atmosphere filled with yelling and violent gestures. One professor called it the foulest event in the school’s history. I don’t know enough about all the details. I’ve read some other things about it to tell you exactly what happened, but it’s obvious that there was a disagreement over homosexuality.

At Eastern College, St. David’s, Pennsylvania, a Baptist school, an angry debate ensued after the school newspaper published an interview last spring with an unnamed homosexual student who said he found no contradiction between his lifestyle and his Christianity. You might expect someone at the University of Texas to say something like that, but this is in a Baptist school.

At Gordon College, where our own Greg Beale teaches at Gordon Seminary, they are not too closely related now but they are related. At Gordon College, another Christian School, a contentious debate flared last spring after a former Gordon student shared how he has come to accept his homosexual orientation and how he feels he’s followed God’s leading by being ordained. This fall the homosexual issue resurfaced at Gordon when an allegedly neo-Nazi student group was implicated in writing offensive graffiti, making threatening phone calls to homosexual sympathizers, and slashing the draped sweaters of women who had written a public letter supportive of homosexuals. This is at Christian colleges. These are not non-Christian college.

And shall I mention it? Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon, lest the uncircumcised Philistines here. At Wheaton College, in Illinois, the Wheaton College Gay and Lesbian Alumni Association has gained a membership of a hundred alumni from classes spanning four decades. Many call themselves evangelicals, including mission workers, church leaders, and Christian college teachers. No need to mention others, but my college is also one involved. In other words, what we are seeing is a definite change in the kind of morality that characterizes a professing Christian. And Paul’s statements that he makes should at least let us know this, that as far as the Bible is concerned, the Bible does not countenance those things.

Now, Paul is going to deal—after pointing out the position of these individuals, “Don’t you know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” In verse 11 he says, “And such were some of you.” Now, I find that so interesting. I find that so interesting for this reason. It is the conscious contention of homosexuals that what they are is what they have been from the beginning, that it is foreordained. Now, they don’t use that term as we do it, but it is fixed that they are homosexuals. This text states something entirely different, “Such were” were, were, “some of you.” They’re no longer that. “Such” that’s inclusive of the whole group, “such were some of you.” This text plainly states that as far as the Bible is concerned, our Lord Jesus Christ has the power to transform human nature and human conduct. So “such were some of you” and will you notice also he says, “were some of you.” In other words, it’s past. Not everyone is there. He says “such were

some of you,” but nevertheless, some were this. And therefore, what Paul says is that those transformations have been made.

Incidentally, with reference to homosexuality, William Barclay who was really something of a liberal church of Scotland minister, who grew up in an evangelical atmosphere and therefore knew a great deal of the things that evangelicals know, has a very significant passage concerning homosexuals that I think it would be helpful for me to read it to you, because it will give you an idea of the society that the early church lived in.

He says as he is talking about these various sins, “We’ve left the last for discussion the unnatural sin, the most unnatural of all the sins, homosexuality.” He said, “This was the sin which had swept like a cancer through Greek life and which from Greece invaded Rome. We can scarcely realize how riddled the ancient world was with it. Even so great a man as Socrates had practiced homosexuality. Plato’s dialogue, *The Symposium*, has always said to be one of the greatest works on love in the world, but its subject is not natural love, but unnatural love. Fourteen out of the first fifteen Roman emperors practiced unnatural vice.

At this very time Nero was emperor. He had taken a boy called Sporus and had had him castrated. He had then married him with a full-married ceremony and took him home in procession to his palace and lived with him as his wife. Then with an incredible viciousness, he had himself married a man called Pythagoras and called him his husband. So Nero had a wife and a husband, Nero. When Nero was eliminated, and Ortho came to the throne, one of the first things that he did was to take possession of Sporus. Much later than this, the Emperor Hadrian’s name is forever associated with the Bithyian youth called Antinous.” No need to go any further you can see the kind of society in which the early church was born and in which they were reborn and the society in which they lived. And it’s not surprising that the apostles and others should speak as they do.

Now, he describes this remarkable change that has come over them in these three important words. And we want to spend a few moments as we conclude on them. He says, “Such were some of

you, but you were washed.” Now, let me stop with that, the first one. There are three: Washed, sanctified, and justified.

Washed. Now this is translated in my version as a passive, but it’s really not a passive voice, it’s a middle voice. And it probably—although there is a question about this—probably should be called a causative middle. That’s very enlightening, isn’t it? So I’m going to translate it for you because I knew that it would not be enlightening to you to, and to tell you the truth it wouldn’t be enlightening to a lot of people that know Greek. But let’s translate it this way: “And such were some of you, but you got yourselves washed.” You got yourselves washed. Not, you were washed. You got yourselves washed, suggesting their approach to the Christian right of baptism. “You got yourselves washed.” Baptism, of course, the act signifying the cleansing that believers experience when they believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the baptism suggesting what has happened to them. And we undergo baptism in Believer’s Chapel and we usually—in fact, I think we’ve always used immersion for our baptism. And we recognize by that an identification with our Lord and his death, burial, and resurrection. And of course the cleansing and justification and the other blessings of Christian life that are related to our being brought to the knowledge of our Lord as our savior. You got yourselves washed.

Baptism is not, of course, the act by which we are saved. Roman Catholicism believes that. They believe that it is through baptism that original sin is removed. Rome, therefore, does not in this respect, in this fundamental respect, qualify as an evangelical organization. Now, what is so striking about this, my Christian friends, is that we have a movement in evangelicalism today to unite in many ways with Roman Catholicism. Isn’t that a striking thing? And listen to some who are involved in it: Charles Colson, Bill Bright, John White, you don’t know him. He’s president of Geneva College. I know him because years ago, we were in a conference together, and he told me that if I ever was up there he wanted me to speak in chapel. So I would consider him an evangelical. It’s The Reformed Church of America, as I remember, the Southern Baptist convention, Christian Life Commission, all suggesting that what we evangelicals should do is to unite with Roman Catholicism. In this respect—

I'm being careful about his—in this respect that we recognize that each other are Christian. And therefore we will not engage in aggressive proselyting of the flocks of the other. And they've signed a little statement to the effect that they will accept each other as Christians. This is the statement that appeared in *USA Today* as a result of the news release: “Leading Catholics and Evangelicals are asking their flocks for a remarkable leap of faith to accept each other as Christians, and then later on, in short to turn their theological swords into a recognition of a common faith.” The statement says, “We together, evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples.”

I can only say that there is a growing theological ignorance in evangelicalism. That is our greatest peril at the present day. How could Charles Colson, Bill Bright, the Southern Baptist Convention, John White, my friend in the Reformed Church, how can they say that we are—we're common, all of us Christians, when the Roman church believes in salvation through baptism and through the sacramental system? Sins are forgiven by the high priest as they carry out the ceremonies with reference to the sacraments of the church. How can we affirm that? Not only would the apostles turn over in their graves, the Reformers would turn over in their graves. Are we to acknowledge that the Pope is our papa, and the Vicar of Christ upon the earth and not recognize that that is heresy? And we know that these men have made evangelical statements. But there is such a thing as making evangelical statements and also denying un-evangelical statements, refusing un-evangelical statements. We must not only state the positives that we believe, but also the negatives that we reject if we are to be true to the words of the New Testament.

“You got yourselves washed,” he says. You were this class of sinner. Some of you, you fell into that category, but you got yourselves washed. Not only that he says—now he does use the passive tense, a passive voice, and he says, “But you were sanctified.” Now obviously they're not sanctified in the sense that they are already holy. He means positionally. That is, that's their status before God. They are saints. These people that were few months, weeks, maybe a few years before were homosexual, adulterers, fornicators, thieves, coveters, drunkards. Now they are saints. They

belong to the Lord. They’ve been set apart for him. They’re a far cry from being the kind of person morally, that they will ultimately be. He wrote to the church in the 2nd verse of the 1st chapter and said to the church of God which is at Corinth, “To those who have been sanctified in Christ, called saints.” They are saints because they are set apart. They belong to the Lord. So they are washed before God, clean, they are sanctified to God, set apart to him, and then the final verb that he uses is justified. “Were justified by God.” Now, we’ve already seen reference to that back in chapter 1 in verse 30 where the apostle wrote, “But of him are you in Christ Jesus who became for us wisdom from God.” What kind of wisdom? Justification, sanctification, redemption.

What does it mean to be justified? Does it mean that we are totally righteous? No, it means we’ve been declared righteous by God in his grace because of what Christ did on Calvary’s cross, and we can be called just or righteous in that sense alone. It, too, is a positional expression in the sense that we’re not morally what we shall be. We’re not as righteous as we shall be, but we have had imputed to us on the ground of what Christ has done a righteousness that is acceptable to the Lord God. {*dikaio*}, the Greek term, means to declare righteous. And so we’ve been declared righteous by virtue of what Christ has done. We have the righteousness of God. Look at me. I’m righteous. A gift, a gift. I haven’t earned it, not at all. In great love and the passion of the desire to have me as his son, God has worked in my heart and given me a standing before him of righteousness. Justified. You have been justified.

It’s so easy, my Christians friends, to erroneously state Christian truth because Satan is very, very clever. Once Karl Barth made a statement which I think is a magnificent statement. He said, “Roman Catholicism and evangelicalism are distinguished by one word.” I couldn’t find that statement in the time I had, but I remember the essence of it. He said, “Roman Catholicism and evangelicalism are distinguished by one word.” What’s the word? “And.” And. Roman Catholicism believes that the Word of God is found in the Bible *and* in the tradition of the church, that men are saved by grace *and* works, and so on. You can go right down the list of the differences between Roman Catholicism and evangelicalism. It’s summed up in that one word “and.” They always want to

add something to salvation by divine grace. So thank you, Professor Barth. You have given us something worthwhile that we can remember: and—and.

So tradition saved by Christ and the sacramental system. Roman Catholicism is a developing body doctrinally. Isn't that interesting? They even have, I think, the unwisdom to speak of the fact that their doctrine is a developing doctrine. Well, my friend, if your doctrine is a developing doctrine, then what you say today is truth may not be truth tomorrow. So I won't pay any attention until the development is complete and you have reached the end of the development.

So, we have been—Paul says, “You were justified.” Sacramental graces are not bestowed through the priesthood of the Roman Catholic Church. The grace of God is bestowed freely as a result of what Christ has done for us. You'll notice at the end he says, “You are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” The apostle loves those Trinitarian expressions, doesn't he? The divine Trinity involved in our salvation.

H. A. Ironside did have an interesting story. I think I have time to recount it for you. He has a statement—or rather he has a story, I should say, about an experience that he had when he was preaching in San Francisco. And verse 11 came up for discussion in his message, “Such were some of you: you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of our God.” He said he preached and a man walked up to him, said a dignified personage came up to me and he said, “Do you know? You got your theology terrible mixed tonight.”

“Did I? I said, ‘Straighten me out.’”

“You put sanctification before justification.” I think I referred to this once before. It's such a good story. I'll tell it again. “You have to be justified and then you get the second blessing.

“Pardon me,” Ironside said, “but you are mistaken. I didn't put sanctification before justification.”

“You most certainly did,” the man said.

“I most certainly did not,” Ironside said. “It was the apostle Paul.” [Laughter]

“Why you cannot blame your wrong theology on him,” the man said.

“I was simply quoting Scripture,” Ironside said.

“You misquoted it,” he said. It reads, “ye are justified, ye are sanctified.”

“No, no,” I said, “read it.” And he began to read, he said.

“But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified,” and then he said “well, there is a misprint here. Wait a minute. I’ll get a revised Bible.” [Laughter] So he got the revised Bible, and he looked at it and read, “washed, sanctified, justified.” He said, “Well, I never saw that before, but all I have to say is the Apostle Paul was not clear on the holiness question when he wrote that.”

[Laughter]

Well, for Paul, the bedrock of moral theology in spiritual life is the Word of God. You’ll notice the questions are solved by the Word of God. Do you not know? Do you not know? Do you not know? That’s the way our Lord did. You read the Gospels. You’ll find that’s what he said. You have forgotten, don’t you know?

For that reason, we shall not join the litigation generation. The fundamental, powerful, holy, and God-honoring life is the saving work of the divine Trinity, and to this the apostle attributes the power that changes sinners and makes them saints, that changes adulterers and makes them pure, that changes thieves and makes them honest, that takes a homosexual and takes away his desire for the same sex, transforms them into men and women who in their lives and testimony and throughout eternity will honor him who shed his blood for them.

It’s obvious that Paul traces all spiritual blessing to what Christ has done. You, I hope, have gotten yourselves washed, have been sanctified, and have been justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God. Let’s bow in closing prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for all that Thou hast accomplished for us through Christ. Deliver us, Lord, from the errors of the day which ultimately detract from the glory of the saving ministry of Jesus Christ. He alone is savior. There is no other savior beside Him. Thou art the only Father. There is no other Father beside Thee, no earthly papa. Thou art the Father and the Holy

“The Litigious Society—Shall We Join it?” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

Spirit. There is no other Holy Spirit but He. We thank Thee. We praise Thee for all that we have become by Thy marvelous grace.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.