



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 15:29-34

“Baptized for the Dead?”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the opportunity again to look into the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the message that they have fundamentally. The message of the gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that he died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that was buried, that he rose again the third day. In token, both of Thy acceptance of what he has done, in shedding his blood, and also in token of the forgiveness of sins for those who believe in him. We thank Thee also again for the word of God, and we thank Thee for the marvelous gift of a God by which our lives may be tested. We ask Lord that the Holy Spirit who also has been given to every believer in Christ may cause us, day by day and hour by hour, to reflect upon our own lives in the light of Thy word.

We thank Thee, Lord, for the forgiveness of our sins, the forgiveness of our sins eternally in what Christ has done. And we shall never, as believers, be judged for the guilt of our sin. He has taken that. But we thank Thee also for the family forgiveness that Thou hast given to us and that, by that, we may maintain a close relationship with Thee. And even though, from time to time we stumble, as we all do, we thank Thee for the way back to our loving, heavenly Father by the confession of our sins and the reception of the forgiveness within the family of God.

We praise Thee, Lord, for the full confession, for the full confession of the faith that we make because it covers not only our eternal guilt but the loss of communion which we all experience. We thank Thee for the provisions of life. We thank Thee for the opportunity again. Give us enlightenment and understanding as we study together.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Well, for those of you who have been here, you know, of course, that we have been studying one of the great chapters of the Pauline epistles, 1 Corinthians chapter 15. A chapter that we think of primarily as being one associated with the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle has, in the first section, verse 1 through verse 11, detailed some of the facts of the resurrection and its relationship to the gospel. He has talked about the importance of that resurrection, that if our Lord is not risen from the dead, then our faith is empty. It has not been placed in a subject that can do what the Scriptures say that he does do. And, furthermore, that our faith does not give us the forgiveness of the sins that are promised in the gospel. And then in verse 20, the apostle launched into a discussion of the order of the resurrections that are set forth in the Scriptures. He was the first, then those that are Christ’s is coming. And then he talked in some detail about the events that have to do with what he calls, “the end.”

Now, at that point, at verse 28, it would seem that he’s passed by the question of the resurrection. But at verse 29, he hesitates. I don’t know whether there’s anything in the Bible that suggests that the writers of Scripture took time out and went into the kitchen to get a cup of coffee. I should have done some research on that and to discover at least, the parallel with our coffee today, but if there is a passage that may suggest that the apostle did something like that, it’s this one. Because having finished verse 28, having it would have seemed gone past the subject of belief in the resurrection, he hesitates, goes for a cup of coffee -- that’s my insertion, you understand -- returns and then further unburdens himself over the absurdity of Christian unbelief in the resurrection.

Now, of course, we today would say, yes, it’s absurd for a believer in Christ not to believe in the resurrection, but the apostle had evidently a mind some in Corinth associated with the Christian body, who did not believe in the resurrection. Because that’s precisely what he says. He says in verse 12, “Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” And while he was pouring out the coffee he thought again how foolish, how stupid, how contrary to the Christian faith for professors of the truth to not believe in the resurrection.

So now he’s going on and the resurrection is in his mind, and he’s going to talk about something that is related to the doctrine of the resurrection. He’s going to argue his case, and he’s going to argue it according to Christian institutions.

Verse 29, he talks about baptism for the dead. We know baptism, as a Christian institution. We are not at all sure of what baptism for the dead means. So he’s going to argue at least according to Christian institutions.

He’s going to argue then in verse 30 through verse 32, on the ground of Christian suffering. What’s the point of Christian suffering if there’s no resurrection? And then he’s going to argue on the ground of Christian ethics, in verse 30 through verse 34. He’s going to point out that the resurrection, belief in the resurrection, demands and has as its indication, a different kind of ethical life.

Now, a few weeks ago in Calvin and Hobbs, which I read every morning, Calvin is posing a question to Hobbs. And he says, “Do you think, Hobbs, that morality is defined by our actions or by what’s in our hearts?” Now if you know Calvin you know, of course, he would like for it to be defined by what’s in our hearts, not what’s in our actions because his actions are never good, so far as I can tell. It’s a very anti-male column, incidentally. He’s always wrong. He’s always wicked. He’s always evil. And, is it Susie? Is always good. She’s always smarter than him. She’s always outwitting him. Now, that’s maybe true to life but still, it’s a sexist kind of cartoon. Well, Hobbs turns to him and he

says, “I think our actions show what’s in our hearts.” And Calvin typically says, “I resent that.” Now, as you can see in this passage, Hobbs is proven to be right and Calvin, of course, is Calvin. That’s what we expect.

Well, let’s begin with verse 29, for here we have the resurrection and Christian institutions. Baptism for the dead, whatever that means. We’ll talk about it in a little more detail. Paul writes in verse 29,

“Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead? (Now, I’ll go on and read the rest of the section we’re looking at, through verse 34.) And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I affirm, by the boasting in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If, in the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage *is it* to me? If *the* dead do not rise, *Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die!*’

Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’ Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some do not have the knowledge of God. I speak *this* to your shame.”

This is an abrupt change from the Pauline focus. He actually is moving from eschatology, which he’s been talking about in the preceding verses, verse 24 through verse 28, to Christology because he will be talking about things that have to do with the salvation that is in Christ. And the immediate thing that catches our mind in verse 29 is this practice of the baptism for the dead. Now, this practice was evidently very clear to the Corinthians because Paul doesn’t explain at all. There is no explanation biblically of what it is. The expression could be rendered baptism in behalf of the dead. For the dead, it could be. There are one or two other renderings, but baptism in behalf of the dead is probably as close as we can get, just looking at the words from the standpoint of

the grammar and the literature. But what it means, we’re not sure. We know this: it was evidently a clear to the Corinthians as it is puzzling to us.

What is meant by baptism for the dead? Do we practice anything like that? Well, if we do, we don’t call it that, do we? We don’t ever use the term, “baptism for the dead.” It’s something that is really something of a mystery. And I must say, even though we’re going to launch into a little bit of a discussion here, that it will still remain a mystery in the minds of most biblical interpreters, in the sense that we don’t know for certainty what it is. There have been as many as thirty to forty different views. There is a man by the name of Hawsley who wrote a work on this topic and he decided -- well, he came to the discussion of thirty-six different interpretations of the expression “baptized for the dead.” He didn’t find them in the Bible, of course, but he was seeking to explain the biblical terms.

So I’m not going to hope to find the correct solution. I just want to pick out some that seem more likely. At least, they’re candidates for possibly being what may have been meant by “baptism for the dead.”

First of all, and probably foremost, in the mind of most students of the epistle, is vicarious baptism. Proxy baptism, some call it. That is, a baptism that is for individuals, for their benefit. Now, in what sense could the words mean -- be used “baptized for the dead” for such a situation? Well, let’s just imagine when people didn’t have the understanding that a person who attended Believer’s Chapel four, five or ten years might have in those days. After all, it’s not surprising that we know more about the Bible than the Corinthians knew about the Scriptures. They didn’t have the advantages we have. Oh, I know, they had Paul there and he could give them, certainly, first-rate information for a while but he wasn’t there all the time. As a matter of fact, he wasn’t there most of the time. So they didn’t have an apostle handy all of the time to answer their questions. We’ve had years and years of the study of the Bible.

Christians, you know, talk about the individuals such as one I will quote tonight and several of the others of the early two or three centuries. They are called the fathers, the church fathers, the apostolic fathers. Actually, they are the children. The fathers of the church are those who, down through the years, have benefited from the training of others and the teaching of others and, therefore, the knowledge of the Scriptures today, is probably much greater. That is, it’s available somewhere, much greater than it ever was in the earlier centuries. All you have to do is to read the early church fathers. Many of them, very devoted to Christ. We’ll talk about one tonight, Ignatius. They were extremely devoted to Christ. They gave themselves for him, but when you read their writings, it’s clear they don’t have a deep understanding of Holy Scripture.

So in what sense could we talk about baptism for the dead? Well, let’s suppose in the early church, there was an individual who was very ill. On his deathbed, perhaps, or on his sick bed, he made a profession of faith. Baptism was very significant. You read the New Testament, and you can see that baptism is a very significant act. And it should be a very significant act. It’s an expression of our faith, and it’s designed by our Lord Jesus Christ to be a benefit to us and also a testimony to others who observe the baptism. But let’s suppose the individual has made a genuine confession of faith, but he’s lingered for a time and then finally he dies not having been baptized.

Well, I can see how someone might say, “Why don’t we have a kind of service in which we vicariously, by proxy, are baptized for the individual who was unable, of himself, to do that.” Now, this fact is mentioned in the second century. Unfortunately, it’s mentioned among the heretics, among the Marianites (phonetic). But, it’s possible that there was such a practice as that and the expression “baptized for the dead” arose out of that. It’s interesting that Paul appeals or reasons from a practice of which he apparently would disapprove, as far as we know. But that’s not uncommon for Paul. He may take the reasoning that lies back of something that he doesn’t himself approve and show that if one reasons about that particular idea, it would be contrary to biblical doctrine. If we can

say that the apostle would not have approved of baptism for the dead, he certainly shows, nevertheless, that serves a specific purpose. If people are baptized for the dead, then they evidently do believe in the resurrection. And thus, those who practice it cannot say we have doubts about the resurrection.

So the apostle then refers to this practice. It may be vicarious baptism. It’s rather interesting that probably the most predominant view among the earlier Christians, the genuine Christians, is that the expression is a reference to Christian baptism as we know it today and not vicarious baptism. The for the dead -- “baptism for the dead”, meant for them, with an interest in the resurrection of the dead. But the key word is missing. The key word “resurrection” is missing. If you said, baptism in the interests of the resurrection of the dead, well, that would make pretty good sense. But, unfortunately, in the resurrection doesn’t occur with this expression, and it does not ever seem to have occurred with it. It could mean, you see, in expectation of the resurrection of the dead, but the word resurrection’s missing. So that is another one of the views. It’s possible, but, nevertheless, it’s not convincing.

Then there are a number of other views. I’ll mention three others. I’m not going to mention the thirty-six, mainly because I don’t know the thirty-six. But there are several others that are rather common. For example, I have one in the edition of the Bible that I’m looking at right now that is one that’s quite commonly suggested. For example, it may mean baptism on behalf of the dead to fill up vacant places in the church when those who are believing people have died and have gone on to be with the Lord. We all know that churches miss that. In fact, in Believer’s Chapel, over the past year and a half or two years, we’ve had a number of people who’ve gone into the presence of the Lord. We’ve celebrated that in their memorial services and thankful for their faith, for their contribution to this particular church, this assembly. But we miss them. We miss them, and we miss their contribution. And so the idea of being baptized and taking the place of some who’ve gone to be with the Lord, who’s going to take my place? You need a Bible

teacher for Wednesday night, for example. Whatever. I would hope that there would be some feeling of -- it would be nice to have a replacement of a Bible teacher. I feel that way about all of the other teachers myself. So baptized for the dead might mean, in expectation of the resurrection of the dead, or it may mean on behalf of the dead to fill up the vacant places in the church.

There’s a very interesting story that Dr. Ironside has in his book -- which I remember years ago reading this and I looked at it again this afternoon. He said that in his ministry, much earlier in his ministry before he wrote the book, he had been at a particular place and there at that particular place, he had conducted a funeral service. It was a great many years before he said. But the individual who had died had, for a number of years, been a bright witness for Christ in the part of the city where he lived. He brought up his family in the fear of God, Dr. Ironside said. I’m sure he said that in his message, too. And one of his children was a missionary in the Philippine Islands, and he had grandchildren who attended the church every services but had not yet confessed the Lord Jesus as their Savior. He said as he closed the funeral service, he stopped. And as they were getting ready to have a last look at the face of the brother, the body of the brother whose body had gone on to be with the Lord, he said he felt led to step up to the side of the casket and say, “Just a minute. Before we take our farewell look at the face of our beloved brother, who’s been a witness for Christ in this city for many years, his place will not easily be filled. He’ll be greatly missed by Christians. I wonder whether anyone at this funeral service would like, by the grace of God, to seek to prepare his -- to take his place. Is there anybody here who has heard the voice of the Lord and would be -- would like to come to Jesus Christ and perhaps take up the place that this man has been forced to leave here in this assembly?” And he said, “Would you close with the Lord right now perhaps believing in him, giving yourself to him, being ready to be baptized for the dead?” That’s the way he put it in his illustration. He said he waited for a moment and then a fine, tall, young man, his grandson, arose from his seat, came forward, turned



around, faced the audience and said, “Today, I accept my grandfather’s Savior. I want you to pray that I may be able, in some measure, to take his place.” And then he knelt by the side of the casket and gave himself to the Lord. And the next Sunday night, Dr. Ironside said, “I baptized him for the dead.”

Well, that may be the meaning of what Paul is talking about, but there’s no certainty of it. It’s surely true, though, that when individuals do believe in a local assembly, take their place in the assembly -- in the assembly, that’s precisely what they do. And it wouldn’t be amiss to express in an audience like this because they’re probably some who are not believers in Christ, that the invitations goes out to you, also, to give yourself to the Lord, to give yourself for service to him in the local church, and take the place of some of those who have recently departed from Believer’s Chapel in continuing the testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ. That’s one possibility.

In fact, my Bible that I’m reading has a note here that says, “The argument is, of what value is it for one to trust Christ and be baptized in the ranks left vacant by the believing dead if there is no resurrection for believers?” So evidently, that’s the kind of interpretation that was suggested here.

It’s also possible that other interpretations may have been the interpretation of what was taking place in Corinth. It’s possible that baptism for the dead is baptism on the testimony of those who have died. It’s even possible to repunctuate the text, but I won’t go into that because it would be too complicated and you couldn’t follow it just in a few moments.

As you know, of course, the Mormons have this as one of their key passages because they practice what they call baptism for the dead. For them, baptism for the dead is the baptism of an individual for someone else who has already died. And those baptisms which, as Mr. Pryor mentioned Sunday night in our meeting, are carried on right over here, just a block from us. Those baptisms that are -- that take place, they are baptisms by which individuals, in a sense, act as proxy for those who have died and by

paying a certain amount of money for the privilege, they also are baptized for individuals and guaranteed thereby, the salvation of those individuals.

There is no indication of any -- in the Scriptures at all of anything like that. Of course, the idea itself, of being able to be baptized and being the means of salvation for someone else, is contrary to the Word of God. And the idea of being baptized and having individuals converted, who are already did, who have not come to Christ by grace through faith, which is the way by which we come to the knowledge of the Lord, is also contrary to the teaching of Scripture. Such a baptism would be a magical kind of thing by which you undergo a rite and, therefore, the benefits are yours by virtue of undergoing the particular rite. That’s R-I-T-E. The particular rite, the particular sacrament or ordinance. That kind of salvation is a salvation by works. So there is no justification for that.

Dr. Ironside also had a wide experience in his ministry because he was an evangelist and a Bible teacher who did a lot of traveling, and he had a lot of experiences. He used to come to Dallas Theological Seminary and, at least in the early years of the seminary, he was there for a month and taught twice a day for a month. When I was there, he taught twice a day for two weeks. And so for many years, I heard him speak and then he would speak around the city, too. In fact, he spoke at the old Believer’s Chapel, which was over in east Dallas many years ago. I would say now, it’s close to fifty years ago. And I went over to hear him then -- heard him at that time.

Well, Dr. Ironside had, I’ll say, very interesting experiences. He’s written a little book, “Random Reminiscences.” If you ever see that book -- we may have it in our library, we ought to, probably do, you ought to get it and read it. It’s just marvelous reading. His experiences were unusual. He said that in one of his experiences, he came across a young Mormon elder. And the Mormon elder told him that he believed that the members of the Mormon church were saving more souls through being baptized for the dead than Jesus Christ ever saved through dying on Calvary’s cross. He mentioned a very

wealthy lady who had come out to the temple and had been baptized in Salt Lake City over thirty thousand times. Every time she was baptized, she paid a sum of money into the church. She was using all her fortune for such work and had been baptized for all her family and the relatives who had died and many of us. Then after she had been baptized for all the people she knew and all in her family, she then felt it necessary to go into history and into literature and to be baptized for famous people.

And according to Dr. Ironside, she was baptized for Alexander the Great. Will we see him in heaven? She was baptized for Nebuchadnezzar. Well, that was unnecessary I think. Nebuchadnezzar, as far as I can see from the Old Testament, probably was a believer, and we will see him. But she was baptized for Julius Caesar. She was baptized for Napoleon Bonaparte. And in order not to leave out the women, she was also baptized for Cleopatra, among others, many others. And the elder told Dr. Ironside, according to Dr. Ironside, and I’m quoting, “I believe in the Day of Judgment it will be proven that this lady, though being baptized -- through being baptized for the dead, has saved more souls through being baptized for the dead than Jesus Christ.”

So one of the funniest of the unusual experiences is the view that, since the preposition “huper” which is used here, is the word that basically means “over.” It’s not often found in that sense but that’s its fundamental meaning. So to be baptized “over the dead,” I can see how an individual might say that. That may mean that you went by the casket and you stood over the person who had died, and you prayed for them or you were baptized for them and that would have benefit for them. Baptized over the dead.

Well, it seems that the Marianites, at least one of the earliest, the earliest were the Marianites. The Montanist might also have been. But it seems that the Marianites had a practice when an individual had died but had not yet been baptized, unfortunately had died like I mentioned the most common interpretation of the text. Since he had not been baptized, they had a little ceremony by which an individual went into the room where the body was, and then also, in part of the ceremony, was another person, would then get

down under the body of the person who had died, and the ceremony would be something like this. A person would go in, speak to the dead body and say, “Do you wish to be baptized?” Now, the dead body did not reply, of course, but the person under the bed who was representing that individual might reply, “Yes, I wish to be baptized,” in which case, that person would be baptized in behalf of the person who had died.

As you well know, the way you’re responding to it, there isn’t anything in Scripture -- there isn’t anything in the history of the early church that supports that practice in the earliest stages of the New Testament church. That, that grew up in the second century is not found in the New Testament at all. All that we read is that Paul uses the expression, “baptized in behalf of the dead.” And it may be in the light of the testimony or it may be in order to complete their testimony by vicarious baptism. That’s about as far as we can go.

Now, having said that, verse 29, one of those verses we wish we knew more about but we don’t. The apostle goes on. He’s still upset. He still has his cup of coffee in his hand, but he’s still upset over the fact that there are professing Corinthians who have doubts about the resurrection. Do you think we would have any in Believer’s Chapel? Well, it’s possible. It’s possible. It’s possible we have someone in this auditorium right now who really has doubts about the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. I hope not, but it’s entirely possible.

And so Paul says, “And why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?” In other words, look at Christian suffering. And in those days, practically every Christian suffered for his faith. The worst that we can suffer today is that our friends will scoff at our belief, either to our face or more frequently, behind our back. They will scoff at the fact that this person believes the Bible. He really believes the Bible. Just believes the Bible as it is written. And they have little expressions by which they try to make it as hard as possible for you. He believes the Bible word by word. He uses the literal interpretation of Holy

Scripture, which means just exactly what it says. Now, that’s right. It’s exactly what it says. Of course, using proper hermeneutics.

But Paul is arguing in a different kind of context, but it’s still true. Why risk one’s life for untruth? No one likes to be scoffed at. No one likes to be thought foolish. No one likes to be thought unintelligent. I certainly don’t. When I read in the papers things that people say about those who believe the Bible, that disturbs me. It upsets me. But in the final analysis, it’s the word of God for which we stand that really is fundamentally, that on which we rely for all eternity. Those great facts of the word of God represent my hope, my hope for the future. Nothing else. I know myself too well. There isn’t anything else that would provide a safety net for me. Only the word of God. Only the promises of Jesus Christ.

So when scientists say certain things that are contrary to the Holy Scriptures and when others, psychologists, philosophers, and others say things contrary to the Holy Scriptures, there comes up before my mind -- Martha and I had a little discussion this afternoon about it -- there comes up before my mind, the Lord Jesus Christ. He believed the Scriptures. He believed nothing but the Scriptures. In the final analysis, the Scriptures were his authority. He spoke of individuals that they didn’t know the power of God, nor the Scriptures.

And when I think of Carl Sagan or whoever it might be, and I think of him as over against the Lord Jesus Christ, as a hope for my future, there is no comparison. There is no comparison. When I breathe my last, I hope it will be, Lord, receive my spirit. I hope that it will be because fundamentally, my hope for time and for eternity is in Him, the Lord of glory revealed in the word of God as the one who offered an atoning sacrifice for sinners. I qualify. That’s what I am. A sinner. But the greatness, the moral glory of the Lord Jesus Christ is so remarkable that there isn’t a person in this universe that could ever compare with Him. And the apostles themselves, who are candidates and the prophets

who were candidates to compare with him all say they rely on him. So why risk my life for untruth? I wouldn’t do that.

Baptism is the proclamation of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have been baptized in token of my faith in Him. To deny the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ makes a great deal of the Christian life absurd. Why should we live as we live if the resurrection is not true?

Notice what Paul says in verse 30 through 32. “Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour?” Incidentally, in the original language, that’s a construction called the accusative of the extent of time, and that every hour means precisely what Paul means. He was always in jeopardy. Always. Even when he was sleeping, in jeopardy. His life was in his hands and the hands of the Lord ultimately, but always, perilous. Oh, you have doubt about that? You have doubt that he could really say, “Why do I stand in jeopardy, every hour?” Let me read you just a few verses from the same individual, that he wrote a little later to this same church. Talking about the Judaizers he said, “Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool. I am more in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure.” Think of this now. Everyone of these things, these are plurals, “in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths, plural, often. From the Jews, five times I received forty stripes, minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once, I was stoned. Three times, I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeys, often in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and toil and sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness besides the other things what comes upon me daily, my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak and I’m not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?”

Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? Why do we stand in jeopardy all throughout the days of our lives? Because of the truthfulness of the resurrection of the body. The resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That’s why we bear the shame of being identified with our Lord Jesus Christ. It’s what we believe about him and what he has done for us.

I so thank God that in the marvelous grace of God in eternity past, there was my name in the lamb’s Book of Life. Samuel Lewis Johnson, Jr., there. You don’t know what a comfort that is. The longer you live, the sooner you come to the presence of the Lord.

He goes on to say, “I die daily.” “I die daily.” This is something the apostle constantly suffered for, the doctrine of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was constantly assailed by the enemies of the gospel. Many of them, they thought they were his friends. That is, they acted as if they were his friends. But no, they were enemies to all of them. I die daily.

He says in verse 31, “I affirm by the boasting in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I die daily.” The boasting in you. This for him was worth many deaths. That is, the fact that he had men who believed the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and churches had been formed. This was boasting for Paul. By the very boasting of the work of the Lord and the hearts of the saints, he was encouraged. You know, it’s a great encouragement to anyone who preaches the gospel and then to receive the word, “Through your preaching of the gospel, I came to the knowledge of the Lord. There’s nothing quite like that. And those of you that personally speak of your testimony to the Lord and personally represent him, know what that means. Individuals who can say -- who come to you and say, “Through your preaching, through your testimony, I’ve come to faith in Jesus Christ.” He boasted in them. Well, really, of course, he boasted in the Lord, but they were the instrumentality for his boasting.

John Calvin has an interesting statement here. He says, “This is an oath.” He doesn’t talk about the difficulty of that but others have. “By which he intended to stir up

the Corinthians to pay more attention to what he has to say in connection with this particular point.” He might have expressed himself like this: “My brothers, I am no philosopher pouring out a tirade of words in the study. Since I expose myself to death every day, it’s imperative for me to think in earnest about the life in heaven. Believe, therefore, a man who is thoroughly experienced.” That’s what Paul claimed to be really.

In Calvin’s words, “I’m thoroughly experienced.” If you want to believe someone who has had all of the experiences that really make up the kind of life that a Christian should live, I am that kind of person. In verse 32 he says, “If, in the manner of men I’ve fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me if the dead do not rise? Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.”

This is a great little passage because Ignatius was the third bishop of Antioch, according to tradition. Peter was the first bishop of Antioch. Evodius was the second bishop, according to tradition. And if you know about Ignatius, he lived in the earlier part of the -- last part of the first century, earlier part of the second century and he was condemned to death. And he was condemned to death to die in Rome in the amphitheater with the wild beasts. And on the way, the trip that he took from Antioch of Syria, he took through Asia Minor, up to Troas, and then ultimately to Rome, and he wrote seven epistles. In one of the epistles, he wrote to Rome. He went into Rome, according to tradition. He was martyred in approximately 110 AD. We’re not sure exactly the time, but it was in the rule of Trajan, who ruled from 98 to 117 AD.

What is interesting about it is the statement that he makes. Incidentally, the reason he wrote these letters, and especially the one to Rome, mainly that one, he wrote the one to Rome to tell the Roman Christians, “Don’t do anything for me because I’m going to be martyred there, and I don’t want you to take away the glory of martyrdom from me.” So he said, “Don’t do anything.” That’s why he wrote it. Well, this is what he wrote.



In the fifth chapter -- there are short chapters of his letter he writes, “From Syria to Rome, I’m fighting with wild beasts.” This is the exact verb that Paul uses here. “I’m fighting with wild beasts by land and sea, by night and day, bound to ten leopards, L-E-O-P-A-R-D-S, leopards. I have to spell it out. I’m a southerner. You might not understand my language. Leopards. It’s the first time incidentally in either, I think, French or another language, I’ve forgotten, that the term leopard was used. Latin, I believe. But at any rate, leopards. I’m bound between ten leopards. And readers of his epistle have puzzled over it, but they feel that it is probably a reference to a company of soldiers that happened to be called that. Leopards. That is, a company of soldiers, he goes to say, using the very word “tagma” which we have here in the earlier part of this epistle, each in his own order. Each in his own order can be a company -- each in his own company in the resurrection. Here, he’s in the company of some soldiers, and he says about these soldiers, this lends an aura of reality to it. He said, “They become the worst for kind treatment.” So the more kindly he treats them, the worse they treat him.

Perhaps he was thinking about what Paul wrote here. “In the manner of men I’ve fought with beasts at Ephesus.” This is, undoubtedly, a metaphorical use of the term because he says, “In the manner of men. After the manner of men, I’ve fought with beasts.” So he’s talking about the way in which he has had to fight for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He’s fought with beasts at Ephesus.

And then in verse 32, “If in the manner of men I’ve fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me if the dead do not rise?” Six times he’s used the expression, “if the dead do not rise.” This is the view, evidently, of some. So you can see, he’s disturbed by this. Six times. “If the dead do not rise.” These are the consequences.

Now, finally, I said something about Christian morals. And so in verse 33 and verse 34 the apostle issues some warnings. “Do not be deceived. Stop being deceived. Evil company corrupts good habits. Awake to righteousness and stop sinning. For some

do not have the knowledge of God.” Now, he said something stronger than that and I’ll mention it in a moment. “I speak this to your shame.”

Now, if you’ve got a Bible and these quotations are marked by italics, you’ll notice in verse 32, he says, “If in manner of men I’ve fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantage is it to me if the dead do not rise? Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die.”

This is a citation from Menander’s lost comedy, *The Tice*. It’s not the first time that Paul quotes from heathen writers.

Now, I have a Christian friend. He is, if anything -- I haven’t talked to him recently. If anything, he is more committed to just the Bible than almost anyone I know. And he attributes a lot of his salvation to me, and we’ve been friends for a long time so he doesn’t mind talking back to me. I like to help people like that. I have one who constantly with me but I like others too. And this person some time back, jumped on me for quoting from other people. Just quote the Bible. The Bible only. Don’t quote those other things. They’re not -- they’re not things that are inspired of God. Quote the Bible. Well, that’s probably pretty good advice. And it took me aback, so I didn’t reply as I should have at the time, by reminding him that the Apostle Paul did quote occasionally, on occasions like this, and that evidently, Paul thought it was okay.

Well, I looked at what Paul had to say about -- Calvin -- of what Calvin had to say about this. And this is what he had to say. To do so, he makes use of a saying of the poet Menander for we are at liberty to borrow from any source, anything that has come from God. And as all truth emanates from God, there is no doubt that the Lord has even put it into the mouth of unbelievers, whatever contains genuine and sound teaching. He says, “I prefer to -- that we look to Basil’s Oration to Young Men,” which evidently was a fuller treatment, I haven’t read that, for the treatment of this theme. Therefore, since Paul knew that this saying was familiar to the Greeks, he chose to make use of it rather than to express the same idea in his own words so that they might listen the more readily.

So when I see my friend, I’ll remind him of this, if the subject comes up. Now, you know I would not be the kind of person that would start the discussion, so I’ll have to wait for a long period of time. But if anyone does ever suggest it’s wrong to quote someone else outside the Scripture, just remind them that the apostle did, that Calvin approves of it. What else do you need? In other words, whatever is truth, we’re free to use from whatever source for the simple reason that all truth comes from God.

Now, Paul concludes by saying, “Don’t be deceived. Evil company corrupts good habits.” Evil companionships mar good morals, it has been rendered. Or bad company spoils noble characters.

Now, that is very significant for Christian morality. The person who goes -- makes friends with that which is evil is providing for himself difficulties and trials that may affect his own relationship to the Lord. So the apostle says, “Look, even the world knows that. Evil company corrupts good habits.” When we’re talking about the doctrine of the resurrection, it is a moral matter. You see, what lies back of Paul’s thinking here is that the individuals who do not believe the resurrection, who company with those who doubt the resurrection, are likely to be affected by them. And so, consequently, evil company may affect you.

Incidentally, that affects your children. That’s very important for your children. Your children should be exposed to the word of God and to other believing children for encouragement, for strengthening. If you fire -- throw them into the company of unbelievers constantly, then you can be sure that the statement of Menander is going to be true of them. Evil companionships mar good morals. Bad company spoils noble characters. Your own children will be bringing home to you things with which you cannot agree, which cause difficulty and trial. The Bible is not being foolish in suggesting that the Christians should have love for one another and fellowship with one another and be in the company of one another. They need the strengthening each of one another.

Stop sinning. The word that he used incidentally, “awake to righteousness,” is an extremely strong word. It’s an expression that’s been translated something like, “sober up.” Sober up. So “awake to righteousness. Do not sin. Some do not have the knowledge of God.”

Strictly speaking, what Paul says is not, “Some do not have the knowledge of God.” That might suggest that they are somewhat innocent. They’re somewhat indifferent. They’re somewhat neutral. But, actually, what Paul says, is that some have ignorance of God.

Now, there is a difference between not having knowledge and having false knowledge. That’s the emphasis of the apostle. And so he says here, “awake to righteousness.” Wachen recht auf, “wake right up,” is the way Luther renders it. “And do not go on sinning for some have ignorance of God. I speak to your shame.” Into that company fall the some who have doubts about the resurrection of the body.

Well, I think it should be obvious to us that what Paul is saying to us is that those who deny the resurrection, like our Lord says about individuals who do not read the Scriptures, they do not understand the power of God, nor do they understand the resurrection of the body. And there is a danger there. A full faith in God’s saving power of raising from the dead is the same sober attitude of the Christian soul. One well-known commentator has written, “It may be from lack of this, that their tendency to libertinism, earlier seen in the epistle, has arisen.”

Leon Morris, one of the finest of the Christian professors of the present day, is certainly right. Paul is discussing a doctrinal question but to him, it’s clear that unsound doctrine means moral failure. That’s why it’s important for us to listen to the teaching of the word of God, for more is involved in it than theology. Morals. Moral failure. Moral defection. Moral indifference to the things of the law. They’re all bound up in this particular thing. Christian doctrine. Christian theology. That’s why in Believer’s Chapel,

through the years, it has been one of the major themes of the preaching of the word here. Thankfully still is.

If there is, in our audience of course, an individual without the faith in Christ of which Paul speaks, no better time to come into the family of God than right at this moment. Baptism is the next step. Whether it’s baptism for the dead or not, I don’t know. But faith and then baptism is a proper way to enter into the fellowship of the believers in the Church of Jesus Christ. May God enable you to do that. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee and thankful for these marvelous words. The apostle surely had experiences that were remarkable, but many of the saints in the centuries since that time have had similar ones and have remained faithful. O God, enable us to remain faithful, not only to the message but to the one concerning whom the message speaks, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We worship Thee for him and through him.

For his name’s sake. Amen.