



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 9:14-33

"Wrath Vessels, Mercy Vessels"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Romans chapter 9, verse 14 through verse 33 is our Scripture reading for today, Romans 9:14-33. The apostle writes having just finished saying, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated,"

"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, 'Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.' Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say unto me then, 'Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?' Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, 'Why hast Thou made me thus?' Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that

he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,”

(Now you'll notice that that's a form of question that does not have an apodosis or a conclusion. So we have to supply something like, "What becomes of your complaints of injustice?" "If God willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared unto glory, what becomes of your complaints of injustice?" Now he's just mentioned vessels of mercy and he identifies them in verse 24.)

“Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? As he saith also in Hosea, 'I will call them my people, who were not my people; and her beloved, who was not beloved.' And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, 'Ye are not my people'; there shall they be called the sons of the living God. Isaiah also crieth out concerning Israel, 'Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved': for he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth. And as Isaiah said before, 'Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodom, and had been like unto Gomorrah.' What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, who followed after the law for righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”

You see, the real problem is shall we read the Bible. That's really the solution that Paul offers to all of the questions, shall we read the Bible. Shall we study the Scriptures. In them we have the way of life set forth plainly. May God bless this reading of his inspired Scriptures.

[Prayer removed from audio]

[Message] I think if there are passages from the word of God that we would, as teachers of the word, not like to preach upon, Romans 9:14-33 would be high on the top of the list. It is a very difficult passage. It is a passage over which there has been a great deal of discussion. The apostle's language is not the reason for the difficulty. It is plain and clear. But what he is saying is, of course, very difficult for us as human beings blinded by sin to properly appreciate. The subject for this morning is, "Vessels of Wrath and Vessels of Mercy." The apostle, we have been trying to point out, has pictured an election of grace in chapters 1 through 8 of this epistle. It's a remarkable presentation of the free grace of God and justification, but Israel is lacking from among the number. With the exception of a brief little section in chapter 3, the apostle has not considered the question of the promises of God that have been made to Israel, which are the primary things about which the Old Testament speaks. And so, the question naturally arises, "What about these promises?" Has the nation, contrary to every other individual who has been the object of the love of God, been able to separate herself from God's love? And, thus, it seems that either Paul's gospel is true and the promises have been nullified or else the promises are true and Paul's gospel is false and Jesus Christ is an imposter.

We've said before a couple of times that the apostle's answer is not an either/or but a both/and, and as he unfolds the theodicy in Romans 9 through 11, that will become evident. The promises are true. The promises have not been nullified and Paul's gospel is true. Jesus Christ is not an imposter. The failure of the present generation in Israel, in Paul's day, is not contrary to the word of God. He has said, "For they are not all Israel who are of Israel." There are two kinds of

Israelites, believing Israelites and unbelieving Israelites, and the promises were given to the believing Israelites.

Now that is evident, Paul says, if you just read the Bible. In fact, if Paul were now preaching he would say, "If you just read the Bible like Lewis keeps telling you [laughter] things would come out fine because if you read the Scriptures you will see that it is in Isaac that thy seed shall be called not Ishmael. Both were sons of Abraham and it is Jacob whom I have loved and not Esau though both were the sons of Isaac." So in the history of the Old Testament a selection took place. There is distinguishing grace, in other words. And so, the fact that Israel the nation is not in this group of people who have arisen from among the elect is due to the working of the distinguishing grace of God." "There is a remnant, he will say in a few chapters, "according to the election of grace." But, nevertheless at the present time by virtue of Israel's rejection of the promises, they form a minority among the people of God.

You see one of the problems we have, and I must confess I have this problem too, I'm not suggesting that you have it and I don't have it, but one of the problems is that we are children and God is a Heavenly Father, and it's not often that children understand as much as their fathers. And one can meditate on this passage for a lengthy period of time and finally you will come to the conclusion that there are things that God has revealed that are here before us, but we don't really fully understand all of the implications of them. Donald Grey Barnhouse, in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, said that he had meditated for a lengthy period of time upon this passage and he was looking, he said, for a human illustration that would cover the great revelation of this truth. He said all illustrations ultimately fail and that, of course, is true.

But he suggested an imaginary case that might reveal to us the problems that sometimes we have with passages such as Romans 9. He said, "A small boy has a pet dog, which he loves very dearly. He plays with that dog every day and the dog is constantly with him. And, in fact, the dog sleeps beside him at night. And so, the little boy and the dog are just constant companions almost like two brothers. One day, the boy opens the door of the family garage just in time to see the father

holding a dog and a pistol to its head, and he hears the shot and he screams and rushes toward the dog, but the dog has instantly died. He turns to his father and says, 'You killed my dog! You killed my dog! I hate you! I hate you!' And the father carries the boy into the house and says, 'My son, I will tell you why I had to kill him,' but the boy said, 'I hate you! I hate you! You killed my dog!'"

Now that's, of course, an absurd illustration for us because we can think of a number of reasons why it was necessary for the father to kill the dog. But, the absurdity that we see in the human illustrations, we often fail to see in the facts of life when children such as we are, incompetent by reason of the fall to reason as God reasons, object to the things that God does. Of course, as it turns out in the illustration, the reason the father killed the dog because there was a mad dog in the neighborhood and that dog had bitten his dog, and it was to save other lives that the father had slain the dog of his own child. The son nevertheless carried the hatred of the father in his heart for a long time until he finally came to an understanding of why his father had killed his dog.

Now when we turn to divine things, we often reason as if we were parents instead of children, but the Bible says we are children. The Bible says we have a Heavenly Father and, furthermore, he's an infinite Father, and being an infinite Father, he is infinite in wisdom, infinite in grace, infinite in love. It's not surprising that we don't understand everything that our Heavenly Father does. And so, it is helpful for us when we come to a passage such as this to remember a simple illustration like that and remind ourselves of the fact that we are children. As a result of the fall in the Garden of Eden, our understanding has been affected by sin. In fact, it is impossible for an individual naturally to come to the knowledge of the gospel. You see, the Apostle Paul says, "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. They're foolishness to him, neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned." But even after we've come to the knowledge of the gospel, our minds are still affected by sin. Theologians call it the noetic effects of sin. That is, the effects of sin that touch our mind. And it is the work of sanctification throughout the whole of our Christian experience to enable us to think more and more the thoughts of God after him.

Now Paul has just said, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." I've even heard of people who say, "I hate a God who says things like this." Contemporary New Testament scholarship has often looked at passages such as this, even evangelicals, and have said, "Well, now of course, we can generally follow the Apostle Paul, but when he speaks about women, and when he speaks in Romans 9 about the sovereignty of God, we cannot follow Paul there." And so, they pick and choose among the Pauline writings those things that best harmonize with human reason. "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." The question is, "Is God righteous in his sovereign choice? Was he right when he chose Jacob and when he hated Esau?" That's the question.

Now I think the apostle had dealt with this question for many times. I would imagine that in the preaching of his gospel, he had frequently have people come and object to the things that he was saying. In fact, if I were a preacher, if I were a preacher of the gospel of the grace of God, and I did not get the objections the Apostle Paul got to his preaching, then I would know that I was not preaching the same gospel that Paul was preaching. If I and my preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ was able to make things so plain that as you listened you never said, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Well, then I would know that I had not made grace as plain as I should have. Because if you come in this audience and you do not know anything about the Lord Jesus Christ, and I tell you that men are saved not by what they do, but by what Christ has done, that you are saved apart from human works, apart from joining the church, apart from your prayers, apart from your culture, apart from your education, apart from your good citizenship, you might go out, as many do, and say, "Well, then, one can live as he pleases. Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" If you're not inclined to say something like that, you're not getting the full message of the grace of God in the apostle's message.

And then if I say to you, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated," that is the word of God. And if you do not respond, "Well, is there unrighteousness with God?" How can God judge us? If when I preach the free distinguishing grace of God and talk about election there is not something within you at some time or another that has not risen up and said, "Well, then God's not righteous.

He's making choices based on his own whim." As I heard someone in the Chapel was saying not too long ago, "God evidently is just saying, 'Eni Meeni Mini Mo' and he's picking some and he's not choosing others." So you see, if we don't have these things then the message that we are proclaiming is not the message of Paul. The message of Paul draws these questions, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" "Why does he still find fault?" "Who has resisted his will?" So when you hear me preach, for example, and you go out and I hear, "Well, so and so said under their breath, 'Well, I don't see how God can judge anybody'" that doesn't upset me. I'm upset, of course, that you have not responded. I'm upset that the sovereignty of God has not yet at this point included you within his plan and brought you to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. But, I'm not upset over the message because I just say, "Paul, you and I are having the same response. Evidently I'm preaching something that's very similar to that which you preached and similar to that which the Lord Jesus Christ preached. 'Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated.'"

Now the apostle looks at this question that arises out of his statement from the God-ward side and the man-ward side and first from the God-ward side, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." Now remember, we must right at the beginning state this, that God is not responsible for man's predicament. Man needs salvation not because God is responsible for his lost condition. The Scriptures say man is responsible for his lost condition. Ever since Genesis chapter 3 when man fell, he has sought to blame God for his difficulties. Now Paul says God does exercise mercy with absolute freedom and it's not unjust for him to do so, for God is just.

Now if you are speaking to people who accept the Bible, how would you respond to the question, "Is there unrighteousness with God?" Well, you would turn to the Scriptures would you not? If you believe the Scriptures and I believe the Scriptures and the Scriptures says, "Jacob have I loved. Esau have I hated." And you say, "I've got a little problem with that." How would we solve it? Well, if we both accepted the authority of the word of God, we would go the Bible, wouldn't we? Well, that's what Paul did because his readers accepted the authority of the Bible. And not only did Paul go to the Bible, he went to the Bible and picked two most beautifully appropriate passages.

One that had to do with Moses and the other that had to do with Moses' natural opponent who was Pharaoh. Listen to what he says, "For he saith to Moses, What shall we say then? Is their unrighteousness with God? God forbid." Even the idea is false. God is just. But he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." He's sovereign in his mercy, sovereign. He has mercy upon whom he will have mercy. He has compassion on whom he will have compassion. He's absolutely sovereign in it. So then, let's conclude from what that text says, Paul says. So then it is not of him that willeth. Now, wait a minute now, Paul, you evidently don't believe in free will. "No, I don't, with reference to the doctrine of salvation," Paul would say, "It is not of him that willeth." Now this is very important and I keep repeating it because you know it's possible to sit here for a long time and not get what's being said. The other night, it wasn't too long ago, an individual who had been in this audience for seven years they said came up to me and said, "For the first time I understand the doctrine of election." Seven years so there's still hope. [Laughter]

Now it's Moses and the conclusion Paul makes is, "So then it is not of him that willeth." You see, the great mass of evangelicals today, unfortunately, because this was not true a hundred and fifty years ago, two hundred years ago, the great mass of evangelicals today believe that it is of him that willeth. That the ultimate decision is a decision of our free will. That is, that we have the power of ourselves to decide for the Lord or to decide against him. That the will is rather neutral, not affected by the fall, but is able of itself to make a decision for God. Now we've been talking about it so much in Believers Chapel that I always feel like I'm going over the things that everybody surely must have grasped by now, but I know it's not so. They are not grasped. But you see, of course, that if it is true that our sovereign free will is the origin of our salvation, God is not the origin of our salvation. Salvation is not of the Lord, it is of our free will and God.

In fact, we really ought to write free will with capital letters. Capital F and capital W because what we really have is so many semi-gods as there are people; free will. Paul says our salvation is not of him that willeth. That's plain isn't it? It is not of him that willeth. In fact, the Lord Jesus said,

"No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him." No man can come. Forget about Lewis Johnson for a moment and think that you are in the synagogue and Jesus is speaking and he says, "No man can come to me, except the Father who has sent me draw him." Would you like to stand up in a meeting like that and say, "But wait a minute, we have free will. We can of ourselves come." You see what a contradiction with the word of God that is? Not only is it a contradiction of the word of God, but it's a contradiction of grace, because then we can say our salvation is of ourselves as well as of God. That's the serious part about it. It's a contradiction of grace.

Now I don't deny that there are people who, in spite of the contradiction with grace, are confused and don't understand how those two things contradict. And they will say, "We have free will" and then in the next breath say, "I am saved by the grace of God," but that's a contradiction. That's unclear thinking. They are saved, but they are confused. It is not of him that willeth. I'm laboring the point because I don't want to have you leave this auditorium and think that Paul and our Lord teach free will. Our difficulty is that our inability to respond is a self-acquired inability and, therefore, we are responsible. People often think, "If we cannot respond then how are we responsible?" Well, our inability to respond is something we have acquired by virtue of our sin and, therefore, we are responsible.

Now the apostle does not stop by saying, "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." That's the origin of our salvation, a merciful God. He turns to the opposite side of mercy, which is judgment, and he says,

"For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, 'Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.' (He reasons now from the quotation in which God spoke to Pharaoh.) Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

Ah, that's difficult isn't it? Whom he will he hardeneth, "Jacob have I loved." It's God who shows mercy in his sovereign will, "Esau have I hated." Whom he will he hardeneth. It is God in his sovereign power who rejects. Now this is hard teaching isn't it? That's difficult. Do you feel something deep down within you that says, "Well, how can God judge men, if they are unable to come? If it's God who makes his choice in mercy and if it's God who hardens in his sovereignty, how can he possibly judge us?" Isn't that natural? That's natural for human wisdom. That's what happens. Paul says, "You will say to me then," he knows exactly what's going on in our minds; he's thought about this many a time. He's had to wrestle with people like you, like me. You will say to me then, "Why doth he find fault? For who hath resisted his will? How is it possible to resist the will of God?" Now, Paul, how can you get yourself out of that?

Now it's a loaded question because it implies that God is responsible for man's lost condition. Lying back of it is that. Now notice how Paul answers it, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" As a matter of fact, Paul doesn't even seek to give us a lengthy explanation, he just repels the suggestion, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" The fact that you, a created thing, stand up and reply against the Creator? Why the very idea is ridiculous. The creature cannot challenge the Creator, "Who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, 'Why hast Thou made me thus?'" So the apostle deals with the attitude that produced that objection.

What is the proper attitude? Well, the proper attitude is when we read, "Therefore he has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will hardeneth," is to say, "Even so, for so it seemed good in Thy sight, Father." To acknowledge we don't understand everything yet. The Father may shoot the dog, and we be puzzled, but the time will come when we fully understand or when we have a better understanding. Our God in heaven is just. He's loving. He's merciful. We don't reply against him. And, further, we should remember we are vessels. Listen to what he goes onto say,

"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? What if God, willing to shew forth his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction?"

God is the sovereign Creator. He has the right to do with his creatures what he wills.

Now, actually, God has been very kind. He's exercised longsuffering. Notice verse 22, "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, has endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." Actually, God without the necessity of being such, has been longsuffering. He has endured with great longsuffering these vessels of wrath that have been created down through the years. He's not compelled to deliver Abram from worshiping stones down in Ur of the Chaldeans or looking up at Nannar the moon god and regarding that god as the true God and thus offending the true Creator. He didn't have to save Abraham. He bore with Abraham all those years that Abraham insulted the God of heaven with great longsuffering, and then reached down and selected him and made him the keystone of his plan of redemption that led right down to you and to me. He wasn't compelled to save the thief on the cross. He wasn't compelled to save Jacob. He wasn't compelled to pass by one of the thieves and select the other. He wasn't compelled to transform that murderous Pharisee by the name of Paul and make him an illustration of the sovereign mercy and the grace of God. He didn't have to do that. In fact, he didn't have to save you, and he didn't have to save me. He has a perfect right to go right down this first pew and select one person and pass by the next and select the next and pass by the next. That's within his sovereign right. The fact that in this case he's chosen both of these is his sovereign right too. I know them. [Laughter] And, furthermore, if he passes by us, as we look at Scripture, we can say, "He would have been perfectly just in passing by me. He would have been perfectly just in passing by me."

Now he states here in verse 22, "He's endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." This text doesn't say that God did the fitting, and some have because of the participle is a passive participle have said, "You see, the text does not say that God fitted them." I

should like to say simply this, that's not stated in the text. That's an implication that some have drawn from it. I'd like to say this that God had the right if he desired. And, as a matter of fact, in chapter 11 that appears to be what he does say. But at any rate, it does not say that here. It however in the 23rd verse does say he prepared vessels of mercy, "And that he might make known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy, which he hath before prepared unto glory."

Some people frequently say, "Why has God permitted sin in the first place?" Well, that's an interesting question and one that, of course, we are children. We don't know the full answer to, but to know God is the greatest thing that can happen to men. To know him. If he had not determined that sin exist in this universe, we would never know him as a merciful God, as a gracious God. The angels do not know him as a merciful God and a gracious God. That's why they're so interested in what's happening down here on the earth. The Apostle Peter said, "They peer into the things of salvation." I think they must speak to each other. What does all that mean? What does that mean? There's Lewis Johnson, born in Alabama. Grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, America's most historic city. [Laughter] Lived a life just like the rest of these people, but suddenly under the preaching of the gospel he's transformed and now, in measure at least, he's grateful and thankful to this Lord God, and leaves the insurance business and begins to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. How do you explain something like that? What does he mean when he talks about grace and gratitude for what God has done? You see, there would be no comprehension whatsoever by us of the grace of God if sin had not been determined to exist in this universe. The angels don't know about it.

In fact, God in distinguishing grace passed by the fallen angels and has redeemed men. We don't get angry over the angels not having an opportunity to be saved, do we? That shows the self-centeredness frequently of our objections to God's plans and program. The angels know about his judgment, however, and they would never know of his judgment were it not for the permission of sin. So we know God in his mercy and grace and we know God in his judgment by virtue of the

determination that sin exist in this universe. That's why it exists in this universe, I think. It exists that we might know him better.

We know God better than Adam did in the Garden of Eden before he fell for we know something he did not know then that God is merciful, and gracious, and that on the basis of the sacrifice which he has provided, he saves some of this lost generation of fallen men. So he's prepared us, prepared us as vessels of mercy. That's prevenient grace. Do you know what that means? That means he makes the unwilling who cannot of themselves will to be saved, he makes the unwilling, willing, hallelujah! That's what he's done. He makes the unwilling willing. Doesn't that thrill you that he reached down in the midst of some of our human hearts and made us, who were unwilling, willing and we responded? That's sovereign grace and salvation.

Well now, what shall we say to all of this? I passed by the quotations from the Old Testament in which the apostle points out that there is a remnant who are to be saved and that that explains what has happened. Why Israel is not in this elect company as a nation yet. And then in verse 30 through 33, he turns to the other side of the question. He has emphasized divine sovereignty. It's natural that he should turn to man's responsibility, for we are responsible. We are responsible even when we preach the divine sovereignty, we are responsible, because we are responsible for our sin. God determined that sin exist in his universe, but we are responsible for our sin.

He says in verse 30, "What shall we say then?" That the Gentiles who followed not after righteousness have attained to righteousness even the righteousness which is of faith." In other words, "Well, Paul, that in a sense is almost like the power of negative thinking, isn't it?" Those that did not seek after righteousness have found it. That's not so surprising. That is exactly our situation. "There is none that seeketh after God, no not one," but now we have found God because he has come into our lives in prevenient grace and he has moved in our hearts so that we have sought him and we have found him by his grace. But as for Israel who followed not after the law of righteousness, they have not attained to the law of righteousness. "Why? Paul says, "Because they

sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at the stumblingstone; Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed." Israel's problem, of course, is simply that they stumbled at the stumblingstone of Jesus Christ because they were seeking to be saved by their works, and every person who thinks that he's saved by the things that he does will find Jesus Christ an unnecessary addition to our human life. Why do we need a Savior who died for sinners when we are able to save ourselves? Why do we need Christ? So the apostle says, "They have stumbled at the stumblingstone. They have not attained."

Dr. Barnhouse in his commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, speaking about the fact that the Gentiles attained and Israel did not attain, commenting upon the two different Greek words that are used there in their force, says that he thought he could illustrate the difference between the two by an illustration of a cartoon that he saw in a national magazine some years ago. It was the scene in a boardroom of an industrial company where the President of the company was standing before his subordinates. And on the wall behind him was the portrait of a man dressed in the style of the previous generation, but by the likeness, one could tell that it was the father of the President of the corporate now. And the salesmen were all gathered around the President and he was scowling very fiercely at his salesmen and he said, "The trouble with you men is that you have no initiative. By the time I was 30 years old, I had inherited by first five million dollars." [Laughter] Well, of course, there is a big difference between inheriting five million dollars and earning five million dollars. When the text says here that the Gentiles had attained unto righteousness, it does not mean that they attained it by works. They attained it by inheritance, by the sovereign working of God through which he gave them righteousness. And Israel that has been seeking in their self-righteousness to be justified have not found it for we cannot be saved by the things that we do.

Let me conclude. It is almost twelve o'clock. You see, we are like little children and we want to have the last word with God. We want to tell him how to operate his universe. And so, when we read of distinguishing grace, and divine election, and divine reprobation, then we raise all

kinds of question like a little boy does to a father shooting a rabid dog, "It's unjust for God to elect only some." My dear friend, salvation is not a matter of justice. I'm so thankful I don't stand before God and say, "God, I want justice." What I need is mercy and grace. Election prevents no one from entering heaven. We are lost because of our own sin. The fact that God is merciful to some does not mean that others have any rights with reference to him.

I remember many years ago when my two children were living at home, my son came in, because the neighbor next door was very much taken up with my daughter who was much younger, and gave her something. And I can still remember my son coming in and saying, "Why doesn't Lou give me something?" because he was giving our daughter something. Well, of course, it was sovereign grace on Lou's part. Election is inconsistent with human freedom. We have only a limited human freedom. We do not have human freedom. Oh, I know I got up this morning and I looked at two or three ties and, finally, I chose this one. Not a very good choice [laughter] I admit, but nevertheless I chose this one. I didn't feel any compulsion choose the blue tie with the strange design on it. [Laughter] That was about as free a choice as I can find, but when I get to heaven, the Lord will say, "By the way, you didn't choose that tie. I work all things according to the counsel of my own will. You thought you were choosing it. You made your own decision. You got what you wanted, but it was determined that you would choose that tie this morning.

In fact, this tie was absolutely immortal until I chose it this morning. Since breakfast it's not so immortal [laughter] because I usually leave a spot on it. We don't have freedom. We don't have total freedom. We can jump out of a fifty story building and at the twenty-fifth story we can say, "I will to be back on top again." But, it won't be long before we'll discover we don't have freedom. We don't have freedom to be born in a particular place, a particular people, into particular circumstances. We don't have freedom. We have certain measures of freedom. Limited measure within divine sovereignty, but in spiritual things it is not of him that willeth. It is not of him that runneth. It is of God that showeth mercy. Election inconsistent with human freedom, we don't have human

freedom. Election is inconsistent with human responsibility, so we hear, but our inability is a self-acquired inability.

If, for example, we should have the draft instituted again and a young man should not want to go into military service, and should learn that the regulations say that if he cuts off his hand, or if he has a hand off, he's not eligible for military service. If he should go out and cut off his hand and then as he was examined point out the fact that he did not have a hand, but in the course of the conversation, the military should learn that it is he who gave himself that inability, I am sure they would have some things for him to do. A self-acquired inability is what we have when we are sinners.

In the final analysis, I am absolutely certain of this, I may be wrong. I don't know a specific text that says this, but it seems to me the whole of the Bible teaches it. That in the final analysis, God will save every individual that he can possibly save consistent with his wise purpose for a redeemed humanity. And, furthermore, the Bible says that he is going to save the world in the end. There is going to be a vast amount of redeemed humanity when the program of God is over. In the final analysis from the human standpoint, Henry Ward Beecher was right, "The elect are the whosoever wills. The non-elect are the whosoever won'ts."

Now we may tell you a whole lot about the theology of that, but in the final analysis that is true. The elect are the whosoever will's. The non-elect are the whosoever won'ts. That's the human side. And so, when the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is preached, the word of God goes forth, "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." So I say to you, whosoever of you will, take of the water of life freely. Provision has been made for sinners. If God has brought home to you the conviction that you are a sinner, you may have the fullness of a free and complete salvation by fleeing to the cross of Jesus Christ. Flee, come to the sovereign God who exercises wonderful mercy in saving sinners, but if you don't come and you won't come, you have what you ask. So how can you have any complaints against this sovereign God? Come to Christ. Receive the full and free

salvation, and as you come and you're saved, you'll have the wonderful experience of knowing, I am one of the elect.

The apostle said he could tell the elect. He wrote the Thessalonians and he said, "I know that you're elect." You know how? Oh, well someone might think, "Perhaps Paul was different. He had insight. Wasn't he caught up to the third heaven?" Yes, he was caught up to the third heaven and he was told that he was not to utter anything about what he saw up there too. But he said to the Thessalonians, "Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election." How did Paul know they were elect? Did he have special knowledge? Was he able to enter from time to time into the throne room of God and get a good look at the Lamb's Book of Life? No, no. Do you know how he knew? Oh, he says, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake." He knew they were elect because they responded to the gospel message that he gave, that's how he knows. That's how anyone knows. When the Holy Spirit works on the unwilling and makes them willing and they respond in grace and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a transformation, and when that transformation takes place that is the evidence of divine election. Oh, that everyone of you in this auditorium had responded to the wonderful gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, who offered himself a sacrifice for sinners. Come to Christ. Come to this great loving, merciful God who desires to have mercy upon whom he will have mercy. May God help you to come. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, Thou knowest that we have been discussing things that are very difficult for children, but, O God, if there should be some here who have not yet come, O may the unwilling be made willing. May the self-righteous flee their self-righteousness. May the workers flee their work...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]