



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Various

“ECT Agreement, Part II”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are looking, in these two messages, at the document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* and I hope you read the four pages that I wrote. They are in some ways a little difficult but, nevertheless, important because it is the viewpoint of a number of people that what we are seeing is possibly, and in some cases in reality, a departure from the gospel of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. Not ostensibly, not clearly to many people, particularly to those who are not very clear on the doctrines of the word of God in some depth. But what is being set forth in that document is essentially this; that it is possible for us to recognize as genuine Christians those who have come to a knowledge of God according to their profession through sacramental salvation.

Now what I mean by sacramental salvation is that the essential element in the decision that is made by which an individual comes into faith and the possession of eternal life is not faith alone, but faith plus the undergoing of the experience of the sacraments. Now in the case of the Roman Catholic Church there are seven sacraments. We have had forms of sacramental salvation outside of the Roman Catholic Church. There are a number of churches, we may not recognize it because we're not as familiar with their doctrines, perhaps, as we ought to be, that believe that faith alone is not sufficient. Faith alone in Jesus Christ crucified is not sufficient for the possession of

eternal life, but one must also undergo baptism, and that it is through water baptism by which we enter into the possession of the forgiveness of sins. We have churches like that just a few blocks from where we are at the present time, probably. There are many of them. But sacramental salvation, if you think about it for a moment, takes away from the glory of Jesus Christ because the saving work of our Lord alone is not that upon which our faith is grounded and upon which our salvation is grounded, from which alone we receive eternal life but also the sacramental work that we experience being baptized.

Now in Rome there are seven sacraments. And so the document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* is a document which purports to be a way by which, in fact it's an agreement by which Roman Catholics and others, evangelicals is the name attached to them, may agree that they are together believers in Christ and brothers and sisters together. That in the opinion of many people, not just me, in the opinion of many people is false doctrine.

Now we looked last week at some of the aspects of this in connection with the Council of Jerusalem in which the Apostle Peter, you remember after a great deal of discussion, made the statement in chapter 15, and verse 11, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.” In other words, it's not necessary that a person be circumcised in addition to believing in Christ. In fact, if one undergoes a sacrament then the glory of Christ's saving work alone is destroyed. The grace of God is no longer being proclaimed but a combination of faith and works is the means by which we enter into life.

It seems so silly for us to make a big deal over such a little thing as that because we are expected to be baptized in testimony of our faith, why does that make so much difference? Why is Paul so upset about this? Why are the other apostles upset by it, but particularly Paul? Why does he speak so strongly? He says, with reference to the Galatians who were brought to faith by him and others, he says in chapter 1 of Galatians, verse 6 through verse 9, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called

you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.” Now they were still believers in Christ, they were still believers in justification by faith, what had they done? They had simply been exposed to a gospel that insisted that faith is not enough; one must be circumcised in order to be saved. We saw at the Jerusalem conference, that was the question I just read a moment ago, of Peter finally speaking for the group there, said, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved even as they.” And Paul has the same kind of disturbed mind over the question of adding something to faith alone, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, (some of you may have the Authorized Version which has, I think, ‘Another gospel,’) which is not another.” But those two words in Greek are different, they are being called, “To a different gospel, which is not another.” It’s a different gospel, it’s not another of the same kind, it’s a different kind of gospel if you add something to the requirement of faith. So evangelicals, the Christian church historically has believed in justification by grace as Peter stated it in the Jerusalem conference, “Through the instrumentality of faith alone,” not faith in the sacraments, but faith alone.

In fact, Paul goes on to say,

“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed, (accursed, not regarded as theologically weak, but accursed,) As we have said before, so say I now again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

So it’s very startling that *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, the document, the declaration signed by individuals from the Roman Catholic Church, very important and also by evangelical professors in our theological seminary should be regarded as an advance. How could James Packer sign a document like that? But Dr. Packer is not the only one. There are Baptists, there are Presbyterians, there are Anglicans, as Dr. Packer,

who have signed that document saying that this document, the declaration of evangelicals and Catholics together is sufficient grounds upon which we may unite and recognize each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, although it is well known to them that one branch of them believe it's necessary to be baptized in order to enter into the blessings of eternal salvation. I find it very difficult to understand. I find it very difficult to understand that we should look at a document like that and not realize it is contrary to the New Testament. The only way by which I and others can look at that and realize what is happening and speak about it is to say there is misunderstanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Now in that little page, four pages that I wrote for you, I made the point that the problem with Roman Catholic's doctrine of sacramental salvation involving all of their sacraments and beginning with baptism is the fact that their understanding of baptism is different from your understanding, probably, and my understanding. Roman Catholics believe that when a person is baptized he is not declared righteous by that act, through that act, but the righteousness of God is infused into him, is poured into him. So in other words, the righteousness of God is absolutely the product of the work of water baptism. It's by water baptism that righteousness is poured into us, according to their doctrine. Evangelicals have believed that when a person believes in Jesus Christ, upon that faith alone there is reckoned to him by God a righteousness that is acceptable to the requirements of heaven.

Now what happens in Roman Catholic theology then is that the sacraments take the place of the Holy Spirit because it's the work of the Holy Spirit to enlighten us, to build us up in the faith, to teach us, to instruct us, to bring us further along in the knowledge of our Lord. In Rome it is the work of the sacraments to do that. For example, it's a very grossly mechanical kind of system but to put it this way, the sinner is renewed by baptism. It's by baptism that righteousness is infused into him. He is strengthened by confirmation. He is nurtured by the Eucharist; that is, the Lord's Supper.

He is restored to health by penance. He is dismissed into eternity, prepared for its awful solemnities as one has put it, by extreme unction. Baptism is his birth, confirmation is part of his growth: the Eucharist, the food; penance, the medicine; and extreme unction, the consummation of the spiritual man.

Now I think you can see from this that what we have is a system of work after work in order to attain the benefits of eternal salvation. And those things, that is the beginning, the growth, the food, the medicine, the consummation, or in Christian theology in evangelical thinking, the work of the Holy Spirit after we have come to be born again it is the work of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us, to build us up in the faith through the word of God and through the experiences of life. So what we have substituted for the personal relationship of the Spirit is a series of sacraments.

Now this morning we don't have a whole lot of time. I didn't intend to say so much in the introduction but I looked out here at this audience and saw a few of you and decided that maybe it would be good to review a few of those things for us so we know exactly where we're going. Now I'd like for you to turn with me to Galatians chapter 5, and we will look at the passage there. But I remind you that what Paul is saying is that the gospel the Galatians have been taught by some of the Judaisers who've entered in among them after he preached the gospel to them is not the gospel he preached, it's a different gospel.

If you say that the gospel -- I'm speaking for Paul -- if you say that the gospel is faith alone in Jesus Christ and then if you add the requirement of circumcision in order to be saved, you have corrupted the gospel. You now have a gospel of faith plus works. Remember last week I mentioned the fact that circumcision is a work. It is a physical act, it is performed in the presence of witnesses, it is a material act, it's performed with a material instrument, the knife. In other words, all of the things that go to make up a work are in circumcision; so that if circumcision is required then we have a works salvation. True, it's a works and faith but if you add any works to faith you've corrupted faith alone.

So now in chapter 5, verse 2 through verse 5, I want to ask and answer just a few questions in the time that we have. Chapter 5, and verse 4, the apostle makes this statement, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.” When a couple of the commentators come to this point in the Epistle of the Galatians they have some interesting little expressions. For example, Timothy George, a Southern Baptist who incidentally signed the document *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, that is the second, the addition to it, *The Gift of Salvation*. Timothy George, when Paul says, “Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing,” translates this expression as, “Mark my words, I Paul tell you,” indicating that Paul is thinking very seriously at this point and emphasizing what he’s saying. “Mark my words, I Paul tell you, you who attempt to be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace.”

Herman Ridderbos, a Dutch professor in the land of Holland, in his commentary, a fine little commentary, says that this point as his title for the section, “For the last time, it’s everything or nothing.” In other words, it’s either faith alone or if it’s not faith alone then it’s nothing because you have a works salvation. And the first question is this, can a Christian fall from grace because that’s raised here by the point Paul makes. You have fallen from grace. This raises a big theological question. Of course it’s a question that is debated by those who fall into the general category of reformed people; that is, Presbyterians and those who hold to doctrines like once you have come to faith in Christ and have salvation you cannot lose it. And then on the other side, those who believe that you can be saved, truly, and then you can lose your salvation. And this, of course, is one of the texts that they fight over, this particular one.

There was a Scottish theologian by the name of Thomas Erskine who spoke of Calvinism as a sheep in wolf’s clothing and Arminianism as a wolf in sheep’s clothing. There’s a lot of truth in that little psychological comment. Because when a person speaks of the doctrines of sovereign grace that sounds to some as if it is a wolf in sheep’s

clothing, in Christian clothing. And on the other hand when a person speaks about the fact of you may lose your salvation, well that sounds along the other line as a wolf in sheep's clothing. Well the question is then simply in verse 4, is it possible for a Christian to have fallen from grace? Paul is concerned with the method of justification. In other places the Bible makes it very plain that a person cannot fall from salvation. Paul's statement is you have fallen from grace. What does he mean? He means you have fallen from the grace method of salvation. If you insist that it is necessary to be circumcised and therefore being justified by a legal principle, perhaps I should say this too, circumcision is the sacrament which introduces a person to the whole requirement of the Law of Moses. In other words, when a person went to be circumcised he was set under the Law of Moses, all of the proscriptions of the Law of Moses. It was the sacrament of the Law of Moses. They understood it that way. So if I were to be circumcised later in life having been an evangelical I would be saying to them, “I am rejecting what I have believed, to this point I'm putting myself under the Mosaic system, the Mosaic law. So to be circumcised signifies more than the physical act.

As a matter of fact, Paul in chapter 6, and verse 13, says, “For not even those who are circumcised keep the law, but they desire” -- I'm jumping ahead there a little bit there, but here in chapter 6 of Galatians that circumcision doesn't matter one way or the other, notice, “Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation,” chapter 6, and verse 15. So the actual rite means nothing by itself, but when it is undergone in a religious way it signifies is being brought under the requirements of the holy Mosaic law.

Can a Christian fall from grace? Well Paul is concerned with the method of justification. You'll notice he does not say, if, as we read here in verse 4, “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace,” he doesn't say that they have fallen from God, he says, “You have fallen from grace.” You've fallen from the grace method. He doesn't say, “You have fallen from

salvation,” he says, “You have fallen from grace. Grace is not salvation; grace is the principle of the salvation that the Bible teaches. So to fall from grace is possible for anyone who is a believer. It’s possible for you to fall from grace, but fall from grace does not mean salvation for grace doesn’t mean salvation. Grace is the principle of a salvation. To fall from grace is to fall from the principle, to fall into law. So is that plain to you? That’s the first of our questions. So Paul is speaking when he speaks about grace of a method of divine dealing opposed diametrically to the works of the law.

So he doesn’t speak of moral conduct, but methods by which men come to Christ. The Galatians have been urged by the Judaisers to be circumcised in order to have the fullness of salvation but Paul says if you do that you’ve fallen from the grace method of salvation. That would be, in Paul’s words, a disastrous thing for believers to undergo. It’s amazing, isn’t it, that so soon after the apostles have preached to the Galatians we should have individuals who are already departing from the faith that they had proclaimed. Reminds me of John F. Kennedy and his ministry when he was England long before he became president. President Kennedy was a student at Harvard University and when his father was made Ambassador to Britain he took a year off from his studies at Harvard, went over and became the secretary of his father who was the Ambassador to England. And there he wrote a work while he was over there. He wrote the book that we know and title of the book was very interesting because it was entitled, many of you may remember, *Why England Slept*. Now what he was talking about was the fact that during the years of the Germans building up their military forces England was sleeping, Britain was sleeping. The allies, those that later were allies, were doing nothing about the fact that Adolph Hitler with obvious military intent, built up the strongest army in Europe and they did nothing about it. So the title of his book published in this country was *Why England Slept*. That is what seems to be happening in many cases, not in all, in the evangelical church today. How is it possible for so many individuals from well-known evangelical institutions to sign a document like this which in effect says Galatianism is not

really serious, Galatianism is not serious at all, you can preach the gospel and you can preach the gospel just as well through the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church as the kinds of doctrines that are preached in a church like this. It's astonishing, it's really astonishing. It reminds us of the fact that congregations like this when so many across the country are being taught things that do not blow them up in doctrines of the Christian faith. And if you come to church on Sunday morning just to be patted on the back, just to be given some sweet words and not to be told precisely what the Christian faith is, and therefore you cannot have the kind of joy that comes when you understand what it means to be justified by grace through faith then you're part of the problem that evangelical churches have today.

So can a Christian fall from grace? No, a Christian cannot fall from grace. Oh wait a minute, that's what we're talking about, isn't it. A Christian can fall from grace. That's precisely what Paul has said. These are believers, they have fallen from grace. So how do you fall from grace? Do you commit some incidental sin? Do you speak sharply to your husband or to your wife? Is it that kind of sin? No. The way you fall from grace is by falling into law. That's all that's necessary, fall into law. To believe, for example, it's necessary to be baptized to be saved is to fall from grace for baptism is a work and circumcision is a work. Paul specifically speaks of circumcision as being a work and baptism conforms to it in every particular. It, too, is a work. Notice chapter 2 and verse 16, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." Then in verse 21, "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, (he means circumcision, is what he's talking about,) through the law, (circumcision binds you to uphold the law,) then Christ died in vain."

So can a Christian fall from grace? Well yes. He can fall from grace by falling into law. Second question, I won't be as long on this one. Can a Christian fall from salvation?

Well the answer to that is no. Let me just read you a text or two. We turn over to John chapter 10, verse 28 and 29, and here in this wonderful little section the Lord makes these statements, chapter 10, verse 28 and verse 29, “And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” So a Christian cannot fall from salvation but it is possible for a Christian to fall from grace.

There is an old story of a woman who was one day talking with her daughter and the subject of eternal security arose. She pointed out to her that she was absolutely safe according to John chapter 10, verse 28 and 29 which we have just read. “I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand.” She pointed out that she was in his hand. But the daughter quickly took her up on the statement and offered, as daughters constantly do, a little addition. She said, “But suppose he let you slip between his fingers. You’re in his hands, yes, but you may slip between his fingers. She said, “Hallelujah, I’m one of the fingers, for the Scripture says, ‘You’re the body of Christ and members in particular.’ So it’s impossible for me to slip through his fingers.” So can a Christian fall from grace, yes, by falling into law. Can a Christian fall from salvation? No, he cannot fall from salvation.

Now I read - I don’t know why I do this but time really flies when I come over here to Community. [Laughter] I read in the today section of the paper, John Anders column almost every week. I find his columns very interesting, I don’t agree with a lot of them but they stir me up a little bit every now and then. He is a lapsed Baptist. That is, he grew up a Baptist but he doesn’t really believe Baptist doctrine today and occasionally you’ll find instances of that in his article. And he was writing about falling from grace and falling from salvation. Just incidentally he was talking about dancing and how it Baylor you can dance with no disapproval from the administration whereas when he and his family went to Baylor and they’re long time Baptists, evidently, they couldn’t dance. And

he spoke about how his mother really wanted to dance and how she looked at her feet not too long ago and had said something to him about them, said, “These are dancing feet,” but she never could dance as long as she was there. And then John went on in the column to say something about theology. Now he’s pretty good in giving us details concerning the society about us today but he’s very, very, very unreliable in anything that has to do with Christian salvation. He obviously grew up in a Baptist Church and didn’t believe the doctrine. He says, “They call Baptists “hard-shell” but I know of no more liberal policy than the Southern Baptist doctrine of once saved, always saved. It’s the greatest loophole in all of Christendom, a cause for both singing and dancing to those of us who subscribe to the doctrine of slack.”

Well, the Bible does say, “I give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish.” And my Christian friend, it’s not a loophole at all. It doesn’t help those who subscribe to the doctrine of slack because if a person really understands that God has to instead of going to the cross at Calvary, giving up the Son of God for the eternal judgment poured out upon him. That does not lead to the doctrine of slack, it leads to a doctrine of responsive love for one who would love me to that extent. So, can a Christian fall from salvation? No, but it’s not the means by inducing looseness in life, it’s the means by which we are drawn further to trust in faith in him.

The third question, what happens when a Christian sins? Well the sinner, according to the Scriptures, loses fellowship with the father. Amos chapter 3, in verse 3, gives us a principle, general principle, “Can two walk together, if they be not agreed?” And so when a person does sin he turns away from the walk with the Lord God and therefore he does lose the fellowship of the family of God with God in heaven. If you go out as a Christian and you commit an obvious sin and the Spirit reminds you of that fact, then you know immediately that the relationship between you and the Father is not what it was before that sin. You know, and furthermore you fall upon the conviction and that

conviction continues with you. It's very difficult, almost impossible, to live on beyond the conviction that comes from the knowledge that we have sinned against the Lord God.

So what happens when a Christian sins? Well, we lose family fellowship. The Godhead, of course, offers restoration and that restoration is through the confession of the sin that we have committed. Confession is a term in the Bible that means to say the same thing with. In other words, when we acknowledge that what we have done is wrong then confession may take place. In fact, it has to be specific, in the Old Testament in the Book of Leviticus in chapter 5, in verse 5, when a person made confession to the Lord God, Scriptures say you make confession in that thing that is specific, just don't get down upon your knees and say, "Lord I've displeased you," but say specifically in what way you know you have displeased the Lord God. The confession is to be made to God, not to a priest, auricular confession which Rome celebrates was not ever instituted until the 1215 A.D. It's not an old thing. And incidentally the singular term "priest" is never used of anyone in the New Testament other than of Jesus Christ. Priests, plural, for we are all priests and pray, but the priest, one to whom we should confess, is the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Confession is to be immediate, too. Who wants to undergo the conviction that comes as the Lord by Spirit stirs our hearts so we cannot avoid remembering the fact that we are out of fellowship with him. I've undergone that too many times to want to undergo that. It's constantly as the nagging kind of presence of God bringing us to the knowledge of the fact that we have displeased him. But when we confess then, of course, the forgiveness comes.

So let me sum up, then, what I'm trying to say. The Christian then falls from grace only by falling into law. That's the only way you can fall from grace. The Christian cannot fall from salvation. The Christian, when he sins, doesn't fall from grace but as a matter of fact, my Christian friend, when a Christian sins he doesn't fall from grace, he actually falls into grace. That is, the grace of a loving God and Father.

Now may I have about four minutes? Thank you. Is it five plus four or just five? I want to just close with an incident that happened in the life of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, one of the great painters of his day who studied with Rossetti. His paintings are in the Tate Gallery in London. In his later years he went one day to visit his daughter's home for tea and he had a little granddaughter by the name of Angela. And she was allowed to come to the tea table but during the course of the tea table and the time around that table she did something that displeased her mother and her mother ordered her to go to the corner in the room and to stand in the corner of the room looking at the walls. And Sir Edward Burne-Jones was so impressed by the way in which the daughter responded to her mother's rebuke that after tea he went home and he got out his paint brushes and his paints and shortly thereafter he went down to his daughter's house, went in the house, and then painted on the walls of chastisement corner where the little girl had stood with such dignity, he thought. He painted on the wall a mural which became the most precious place in the room. A flight of birds adorn the wall and a kitten played with the tail of its mother. Every true child of God who has ever fallen into sin has discovered that there is marvelous grace in the chastisement which the Lord God has inflicted upon him.

Let me just give you two or three illustrations. Moses: Moses, you fell into sin, did you fall from grace? Moses would answer, “Oh, for the grace of God I played the fool, I grew fat with pride, I unleashed my angry passions, I killed a man, and God sent me off into the desert for forty years. But on the way I came to see that burning bush and when I stood there God spoke to me and told me something of who he is. I am who I am. And not only that, he called me and called me to a ministry. And furthermore, I who had killed a man, he put in my hands the Ten Commandments in which one of the commandments is, Thou shalt not kill.” Oh, the grace of God.

David, you fell into sin. Did you fall from grace? David would answer, “I played the fool, I stayed at home when I should have been with my army, I looked upon a woman, I lusted after and committed adultery with her, and not only committed adultery

with her but to hide that foul deed I brought it about that her husband was also murdered. But God came and painted pictures on my wall, there were green pastures and still waters. And he taught me to sing my sweetest psalms until I could cry, ‘Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.’”

We could talk about Peter who boasted that he would lay down his life for the Lord’s sake and then warmed his hand with enemies when the Lord Jesus Christ was on trial. Then denied him, said that he even never knew the man. But then what Peter became was not only an apostle but actually the leader of all of the apostles. It’s God’s wonderful grace to speak to an individual and to make him what he could never do apart from the marvelous way in which God deals with us.

So what do I want to say to you? I want to say to you, and I want to say this very strongly to you, that when we have individuals who become unhappy with this marvelous salvation that we have in the word of God we, ourselves, who are so easily tempted, too, to turn aside from the word of God need to go off by ourselves, to get down by the side of my bed, our bed, and there to bring our problems to the Lord our confession of our sin and ask him to give us the insight to understand precisely the way in which he is dealing with us in the marvelous grace of a loving, saving, triune God who saves by grace alone through faith alone apart from any sacrament. May God help us to understand that. There may be some here who have never responded to the gospel. We shouldn’t close without reminding all of us that there is one way of salvation, our Lord expressed it, “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh under the Father but by me.” May God in his grace touch your heart. May he be moved by your head. Confess your need and then confess your faith in him, giving yourself to him whom to know is life eternal. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for the purity and the grace of the gospel which Thou hast brought into being through the suffering of the second person of the trinity, our Lord and savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the blood that was shed. We thank Thee for the Spirit who ministers to bring us to faith, to bring us to life, who nourishes the life, who causes that life that comes stronger as the days go by. And we thank Thee for a heavenly Father who has devised this most remarkable plan of salvation for individuals or sinners who need it. We ask Lord if there should be someone in this audience that does not know our Lord that at this very moment they may lift their hearts to Thee and say, “Lord, I know that I do not have life.” Christ has offered life, Lord...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]