



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

“What Must I Do To Be Saved? – I: Terms of Salvation” TRANSCRIPT

Now, it's 7:30 and we have a real good subject to take up tonight. Oh, I forgot. We have one of the men who is listening to the tapes is the pastor of the Southern Baptist Church in which I preached for the entire week. And I had a real good time with him and we went over, he's an old, old friend, at least fifteen years. He's just a young man about thirty-one years of age, but I've known him since he was in high school. And he wrote me a little note on Saturday morning when I left, and he put it in my pocket.

And so I got on the plane in Memphis and I took it out and he says some things in here about coming back to his church, but in it he said -- we had talked about the subject of election and also the subject of free will and Pelagius -- and so he closed the letter by saying, “I love you John Calvinson. [Laughter] In him, Pelagius. H nickname is Wop.” We call him his real name is Wayne but everybody calls him Wop because he's a little short fellow, dark complected. Mississippians and Alabamians would understand why we call him Wop, but anyway he said that “In him, Pelagius Wop.” And that's the way he signed himself. [Laughter] All right, let's begin tonight with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of Thy word and again we turn to Thee with Thanksgiving and praise for Jesus Christ who loved us and

gave himself for us. And we pray as we consider the topic before us tonight that thou will guide us and direct us into an understanding of Thy word. And, Lord, we pray that we may not only simply retain the Scriptures but by thy grace be enabled to share the truth with others. And we commit each one present to Thee for Thy blessing upon us.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Now, tonight our subject is “What Must I do To Be Saved” or The Terms of Salvation.” And this is going to be a two-part series and so I want you to turn with me for our Scripture to Acts chapter 16 and will you listen as I read verses 25 through 34. Acts chapter 16 verse 25 through verse 34. You will recognize this passage, of course, as the well-known passage in which we have the story of the conversion of the Philippian jailor. And verse 25 of chapter 16 we read,

“And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”

Now, we have already discussed the divine side of the question, how do we come to Jesus Christ? And we saw that the answer from that viewpoint is the efficacious and irresistible grace of God. And I suggested, if you’ll remember, during the course of our discussion of efficacious grace that perhaps it would be better to call it infallible grace rather than irresistible grace. But at any rate, looking at the answer to the question from the divine side, how do we come to Christ? The answer is we come to Christ as a result of the work of God. God brings us to Jesus Christ. That is the divine side. And that is divine answer to the question how do we come to Jesus Christ.

The human side of the question is the subject of our investigation tonight. What is the human action which brings us to Jesus Christ? Historically, the Christian church has believed that the human condition by which we come to Jesus Christ is faith or trust. In evangelism today, there are certain movements and certain trends which suggest that this is a very, very important subject for us.

For example, I think in our modern day evangelism there are two errors which bear right upon this point that we are going to discuss tonight. One of them is a false emphasis and misunderstanding of the term repentance. And consequently, we have evangelists saying that we must repent in order to saved and we’re going to see in what sense that is right. And I hope, also, in what sense that is wrong. Unfortunately, in our day, there are those who are insisting that we must repent in order to be saved. And they mean by repentance some outward form of weeping or sorrow or something that is of visible and obvious indication of a repentance of the heart. And consequently that error is an error that we, as those who are at least trying to think the truth of the Scriptures accurately, we must be on our guard against.

Then there is a second error which may be even more prevalent and more significant for us. And that is a false application of the truth of the dedicated life. There are those who are suggesting that the way we come to Christ is by surrender to him. You often have evangelists say, almost always, they do not have any systematic theology

training. They frequently say that in order to receive Jesus Christ the Savior or in a presentation of their gospel they say surrender to Jesus Christ. And you will have them frequently saying the condition to salvation is to surrender to Jesus Christ.

Now, when you look at the New Testament you discover immediately that the term surrender is, in so far as the precise words are concerned in our English version, never used. The term yield is used but the term yield is a term that is addressed to those who are already Christians. And so in my opinion, we should never preach the gospel and offer the gospel to people on the terms of surrender to Jesus Christ for the simple reason that it is something that an unbeliever cannot do. If he could surrender to Jesus Christ then there would be no need for him to be saved. So the very fact that men are saying surrender to Jesus Christ, suggesting that they are to do something which only a saved person can do, is indicative of the fact that they are offering the gospel on false terms.

In addition, as you probably know, there are those who say that in order to be saved we should make Jesus Christ the Lord of our lives. And this is usually accompanied with an attack on so called easy believism. In other words, we are offering the gospel when we offer it on the terms of faith, we are offering it on a basis that is too easy. And consequently to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, as Paul told the Philippians jailor, for example, now that’s not really enough. That’s not accomplishing the task that it ought to accomplish. And one of the reasons the church is weak is because we’ve been preaching false terms, easy believism, and we really should a preach a much more stringent gospel, offering it on much more stringent terms, and particularly, we should say if you do not receive Jesus Christ as Lord meaning that he should be Lord of our lives, make him Lord of your life, you are not really saved. Now, that in my opinion, is a false presentation of the gospel and next Monday night we are particularly going to deal with that.

But we’re going to look at now, tonight, at some of the terms that have been proposed for the reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ remembering that almost all of

them are related to Scripture because, after all, if they were not related to Scripture they would not fool people.

Now, we’re going to discuss then the question of the terms of salvation. Now, when we say the terms of salvation, we are referring to the human basis upon which the saving work of Jesus Christ is received, the terms of salvation. So when we talk about the terms of salvation, we’re talking about the human condition, the human basis upon which Christ’s’ saving work is received. The work of Jesus Christ in saving us is his work of the cross. The terms upon which it is received that expression refers to the human side of the reception of the benefits which Jesus Christ accomplished and made available for us by his saving work.

I may, for example, be selling you an automobile. And at one point or another when you are convinced that this is the car you want to buy, you will say now what are the terms upon which I can buy this automobile. And I say well if you want to put down twenty percent and the balance in equal installments with interest of fifty percent for the next twenty-five years those would be the terms of the purchase of this automobile. And so the terms of salvation refer to the human side of the reception of the saving work of Jesus Christ. So far as the divine side of salvation of our salvation is concerned it is accomplished by our Lord and it is brought to us by the Holy Spirit. God brings us to Jesus Christ by efficacious grace, by infallible grace. But in the reception of that work and it is he, of course, who gives us the faith and induces the faith in the course of its coming to us it comes to us on the terms of the human condition of faith.

Now, as I say, there have been suggested many other terms and I’m going to select about six of them which I consider to be false terms or at least, misleading terms, and we’re going to discuss them because you see it’s very easy for us to present a work of salvation truly as the work of Jesus Christ. And then offer it to men on terms which make it ultimately a false kind of salvation. It’s possible for us to say Jesus Christ did the whole saving work. And we preach the gracious work of Jesus Christ in dying for us, but then if

we should say now it’s yours if you do good works we have nullified the force of the saving work of Christ by the terms upon which we offer it to men.

So it’s entirely possible to agree with a person as he unfolds the saving work of Jesus Christ point after point. Jesus Christ was the Son of God. Yes. Right. He came from heaven the pre-existent Son. Yes. He was born of a virgin. Yes. He lived a holy life. Yes. He was absolutely sinless even impeccable. Yes. He went to the cross at Calvary. Yes. There he died under the judgment of God bearing our sins. Yes. He was buried. Yes. He rose again the third day from the grave. Yes. He lives at the right hand of the Father at the present time. Yes. He shall come again the second time. Yes. He shall establish his kingdom upon the earth. Yes. He’s the eternal son with whom Christians shall be throughout all eternity. Yes. How may we get to salvation? We may get it by believing in him plus doing good works. No. No, we have made the salvation a works salvation by so doing. Or if we would say all of this and say yes, yes, yes, yes how do we get it? Believe and be baptized. No. Again we have made the gracious work of Jesus Christ a work of man as well. So you see it’s extremely important that we understand the terms upon which the salvation is offered to us.

Now, let’s take a look at some of the false terms and remember you’re going to expect that these terms because they are deceptive are going to sound quite scriptural. Now, the fact that they sound scriptural doesn’t necessarily mean that they are scriptural. Remember, Dr. Barnhouse’s warning “The closer that something is to the truth and yet falsehood the easier it is to fool the unwary.” And remember, if I were to reach in my pocket and pull out a so-called silver dollar made out of wood in the shape of a triangle with a picture of Bob Wolfe on it none of you would be fooled. But if I were to reach in my pocket and pull out a round silver dollar, silver-plated, with the proper picture on it the proper dates and everything else you might be fooled. So the closer the terms are to the biblical terms, the easier it will be for us to be fooled.

Now, the first is, believe and do good works. And let’s turn over to James chapter 2 verse 14 through verse 26 which is the basis for the offer of our salvation which is a gracious salvation on the basis of good works. Now, this is a favorite approach of some of the cults and particularly it is a favorite approach of Jehovah’s Witnesses. They frequently will knock on your door and when you speak to them about salvation by faith they will say to you, as they have often said to me, “Ah but did not James say, “Faith without works is dead.”

Now, I’m giving the benefit of the doubt there. As a matter of fact, they don’t usually say that. One of them knocked on our door at Birmingham, Alabama, many years before I even came to seminary. I was in the insurance business and I was working during the middle of the day in those days. And I was in the office and one knocked on the door. And Mary went to the door and I think it was all within the predestinating will of God because I probably wouldn’t have known enough to answer them at that time. She had been Christian before I had been a Christian. And they asked permission to come in and talk to her about the gospel. And according to Mary’s story, she did not allow them to come in the house but she began evangelistic session with them at the door. And during the course of the opening discussion, she gave forth the passage from Paul and she said “Salvation is by grace through faith. And that’s not of ourselves. It is the gift of God. Lest any man should boast.” And one of them said “Ah but Paul also said faith without works is dead.” She said “That wasn’t Paul that was James.” And she said at that point the young man’s face fell and she had no more difficulty with them after that. But since that time that same objection has been raised by Jehovah’s witnesses that faith without works is dead. So how can we offer salvation to men on the basis of faith? Faith without works is dead. It’s faith and works. Well here we do have James saying in James chapter 2 verse 14,

“What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?”

So how can we talk about salvation by faith? We should talk about salvation by faith and works or faith without works is dead. Now, I’m not going to take the approach that Martin Luther did. He said simply that James was a “right stroy epistle.” And he said at the University of Wittenberg we are going to use James to fire our stove. And the reason that Martin Luther said that was because he had a little bit of difficulty in harmonizing James with Paul. In fact, he said he would give his doctor’s beret to anyone who could harmonize James and Paul. And I’m sorry he’s not living because I would like to be wearing Martin Luther’s doctor’s beret around [laughter] but no one apparently won his doctor’s beret so far as I know; although Luther himself when he wrote his common theory on the Epistle of the Romans refers in his introduction to the truth that would have harmonized these too. You see the explanation of the passage is obviously this that when James says, “What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can that faith save him?” That is, the faith that says but does not have works. So what James is speaking against is a kind of intellectual faith that says it believes but it does not have the evidences of it, the inevitable evidences, the necessary evidences of a genuine faith which is good works. All James is simply saying is that faith if it is genuine faith leads to works and there must be works ultimately because this is the necessary outgrowth of it.

Now, if we have faith without this we only have a say so kind of faith. Only the kind of faith that says its faith but it doesn’t have the evidences which are works. So when James says faith without works is dead he’s not denying at all that a man is saved by faith. As a matter of fact, in the first verse of this same chapter, he said, “My brethren, have not the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.” So he knew that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was the banner of the Christian doctrine.

Now, the Reformers, of course, argued this thing out with the Roman church. And they began to proclaim a Latin banner *Sola fides justificat sed non fides qui est sola* which translated is faith alone saves but not the faith which is alone. Faith alone saves but not the faith which is alone. In other words, it is faith that brings us to Jesus Christ but the faith that brings us to Jesus Christ will always produce good works. It will always be accompanied, ultimately, by good works. So faith alone justifies but not the faith which is alone. One of the reasons James wrote what he wrote was because the rabbis, and James was well acquainted with them, had sayings like this one. Listen to this one. “As soon as a man has mastered the thirteen heads of the faith firmly believing therein though he may have sinned in every possible way still he inherits eternal life.”

Now, it is that kind of doctrine that James was attacking. The kind of doctrine which says it believes in Jesus Christ but there is no evidence of it whatsoever. And he is simply pointing out the fact that faith in our Lord Jesus Christ will inevitably have good works. Now, as a matter of fact, he was speaking about something very special. He was talking about the Jewish belief in the unity of God. He says in verse 19, “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.” In other words, if you’re just saying that the banner of faith is belief in the unity of God, the devil could be part of your church just as much as anyone else.

So when we say then that faith without works is dead, we are simply saying that true faith will be evidenced always by good works and that’s what James means here when he says “Faith without works is dead.” So to offer to men salvation on the terms of

belief and do good works as a means for procuring salvation is false because it means that James contradicts Paul or salvation comes by faith. But if we should mean by that believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and that faith will inevitably produce a good works then, of course, we are talking about the biblical faith. The kind of faith that only says, and there is no evidence of its reality. That’s not saving faith. And, of course, that’s something serious. There should be in the life of every one of us some evidence that we really have belief. Now, it doesn’t have to be evident to me. It has to be evident to God, however. I may never see your good works. That’s inconsequential. But there must be good works and God must be able to see it.

Now, James and John both stress this and so does Paul, of course, so believe and do good works. That’s false. We should never preach the gospel to people and say now believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and do good works in order to be saved. That’s a false term. We’re offering them a great salvation and taking it back by saying it’s given on the condition of good works. Paul and James do not contradict each other. As a matter of fact, they use terms in a little different senses. Both Paul and James use the term faith. Both Paul and James use the term works. Both Paul and James use the term justify. And they use the term faith in a different sense. They use the term works in a different sense. And while they don’t use the term justify in a directly opposite sense they locate the significant points in justification at a slightly different point.

For example, when Paul says, “We’re saved by grace through faith” he means living vital faith. When James says, “We are saved if we have faith plus works” he means not only an intellectual faith but a faith that produces. So faith for James is a kind of dead faith unless it has works. When Paul says we are saved not by works of righteousness, he refers to the mosaic works, the commandments. When James says we must have works, he doesn’t refer to the Ten Commandments. He talks about Abraham offering up Isaac and he talks about Rahab receiving the messages and sending them out some other way. He’s not talking about the commandments at all. And when James talks about

justification, he talks about Abraham offering up Isaac as evidence that the faith back in Genesis 15 was a genuine faith when he said he believed the Lord when he saw the stars in the sky. Paul says Abraham believed the Lord and has reckoned him for righteousness. He refers to Genesis 15. James refers to Genesis 22. One refers to the root that produced the good work of offering our Isaac. The other refers to the offering up of Isaac, the fruit.

Now, if I could illustrate it, you know people use terms in the same sermon in different ways. We have to watch ourselves in looking at the Bible. Let’s just for a moment. I’ve often used this illustration. Some of you have heard it but maybe some of you haven’t. Let’s just suppose that I reach the age of seventy, which is not far from where I am now. And I decide that since I had been such a famous man that at age seventy I’m going to write a little book. And I call it *The Miscellany of Dr. S. Lewis Johnson Jr.* And, of course, there is a tremendous run on this book because everybody wants to know what I think about all different types of topics. And I have three chapters among others in this book. One of them on beauty parlors because I’ve had a great deal of experience with beauty parlors through the female members of my household which are, by the way, increasing daily. [Laughter]

And then I have a chapter on the weather because after all, I’m from Texas and anybody from Texas is an authority on weather. And then, I have one on surf bathing because I grew up in Charleston, South Carolina and have been longing to sit down on the sea shore ever since. And in the course of my chapter on beauty parlors, I say in the midst of many other very wise things, I have a little sentence that says “I hate cold waves.” And then, in the midst of my chapter on the weather, I say in the midst of many other wise things, I love cold waves. And then in my third chapter on surf bathing amid still more intelligent and wise things very perceptive I say, “Cold waves are a matter of indifference to me.” And so anyone looking at my book may say, ah Johnson contradicts himself. He says in one chapter he hates cold waves. In another place, he says he loves cold waves. And in a third place, he says cold waves are indifferent to him. And all you

would have to do, of course, would go to say look, look at the context. Here he’s talking about beauty parlors. Here he’s talking about weather. Here he’s talking about surf bathing.

Well now, we must learn to read the Bible this way. And when James says “Faith without works is dead,” we must not, without looking at the text, assume that because James uses the term faith he means living vital faith such as Paul does. Or works that he means the works of the Lord. Or justify that he locates it at the same place that Paul does. Paul said we’re saved by faith but he means living vital faith that produces good works. James says we’re not saved by faith only but he means dead faith, faith without works. So he must say we’re saved by a faith but that faith must produce good works. So they’re just talking a slightly different emphases about the same thing. So believe and do good works. Don’t let anyone steal the gospel from you by suggesting that we’re saved by believing and doing good works.

Now, secondly, believe and repent. Believe and repent or repent and believe. Now, in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we preach, of course, the free grace of our Lord and his salvation, his saving work. And then offer to men this gospel on the basis believe and repent. And I’m going to ask you if you will to turn with me to Acts chapter 20 in verse 21. Acts chapter 20 in verse 21. Now, in Acts chapter 20 the apostle is meeting the Ephesian elders and in the course of his comments, he says in verse 20, “And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” “Repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now, will you turn over to chapter 26 in verse 20? And here again Paul is defending himself before Agrippa. And he says, “But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

Now, in verse 18 he said that “God gave this commission to me, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.” Now, it is obvious that this expression to repent and believe or believe and repent is a biblical expression. So why should we not offer the gospel to people on the basis of we preach the wonderful saving work of the Lord Jesus and dying for us and why should we not say then to men repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I think that there is sense in which we can say those words. In fact, I think there is a sense in which we ought to say these words. After all, they are scriptural, but now I want to, in referring to this, I want to warn you against what I can see to be the error that is often attached to these words. And under which these words are used to propagate it. If we mean by believe and repent to be believe and weep, if we mean to believe and to be visibly sorry for our sins then in my opinion that is not a proper term of salvation.

In other words, what do we mean by the term repent when we say believe and repent? If we mean something that is visible, something that is outward, then this a false term of salvation because it is a false understanding of the sense of repent. Unfortunately the term repent, as a translation of the Greek word, is really the culprit because repent comes from a Latin term *repenitet* which means to be sorry again. And out of that Latin term has come our English term repent and it was on the basis of this Latin term that it came into our English novel repent. The Greek word is the word *metanoeo* and *metanoeo* means to have an after thought. Meta, the Greek preposition *meta*, is a preposition that means with or after in composition and the Greek word *noeo* means to think. So that *metanaeo* means to have an after thought.

Now, usually when a man has an after thought it’s a different thought. You know like I say tomorrow I want to go downtown then you say no I cannot do that. We have an after thought we changed our mind. And so the Greek word translated repent is the

word that really means simply to change the mind. So it does not mean to be sorry again but the English translation is derived from the Latin word that has this concept of being sorry and connotes the idea of weeping and wailing, whereas, the Greek word means simply to change the mind.

Now, if we mean that when we say repent and believe if we mean change your mind about your former trust you’ve been trusting in the church, trusting in your good works, trusting in your culture, trusting in whatever it is you are trusting in and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that’s true, that’s biblical and that’s the sense in which if we preach the gospel and we say repent and believe that’s the sense in which we should use it. Change your mind about your other trust. Stop trusting in the Methodist church. Stop trusting in the Baptist church. Stop trusting in the Baptist preacher or stop trusting in your good works. Stop trusting in your culture and so on. In that sense, repent is fine and there’s nothing wrong with it.

As a matter of fact, it serves a very good purpose because it reminds us of the negative side of faith in Jesus Christ. And so, if that’s what we mean, then it’s perfectly all right to say believe and repent. But if we mean by that be sorry then it is a false term for salvation. It really is the negative side of faith. Repent, repentance toward God faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. It not only is the negative side but it’s a necessary side too because if we’re going to put our trust in Christ, it is necessarily so that we turn from other trusts which are not trusts in Christ. And by the way, you can see the relationship of the two quite easily if you will just compare a couple of verses. Remember, Jesus came preaching in Matthew chapter 3 in verse 2, “Repent for the kingdom of the heavens is at hand.” And John also preached that message Matthew chapter 3 verse 2 reads, “In those days came John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness of Judea and say repent ye for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Now, notice John’s message was repent. Now, if you turn over to the gospel of John when he refers to John the Baptist’s message he says in the seventh verse, “There

was a man sent from God whose name was John.” This is the first chapter of the gospel of John, “The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might (not repent but) believe. And so John said repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. John the apostle said, John the Baptist came that men might believe.” There is no conflict then between repent and believe. One is the negative. The other is the positive but it is the necessary negative. But it means to change the mind. So when you preach and when you tell people the gospel, be careful. If you say repent and believe, do not create the impression that you mean that they must be so visibly sorry for their sins that they weep and cry. So by the way, in the New Testament, of course, faith occurs many, any more times as a term of salvation than repent and so in any preaching there should be a great stress upon belief even when we’re using the term repent correctly.

Now, third term that is sometimes used is believe and confess Christ. Believe and confess Jesus Christ. And the basis of this is Romans chapter 10 verses 9 and 10. Romans 10 verses 9 and 10. Here we read these words Paul writing he says, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” So here we preached Jesus Christ as the one who came to die for our sins. He went to the cross and there he cried my God my God why hast thou forsaken me and then it is finished and salvation is provided for men. And therefore, if you wish the salvation repent and confess Jesus Christ or believe and confess Jesus Christ. And all that means is just put your faith and trust in the Lord Jesus and come down front in our meeting and acknowledge before this congregation that have believed in Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. But if you are not willing to come down front and stand before the congregation and confess Jesus Christ, you are not saved. And the basis is this, “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” So we must believe and we must confess Jesus Christ and frequently that is set forth as a public confession of Jesus Christ.

Now, I’d like for you to notice, first of all, that the context has nothing here to do whatsoever with evangelistic services in the local church. It doesn’t have a thing to do with a church altar call, which was invented in relatively modern times by some ingenious person who seeking to go beyond Scripture gave us this monstrous practice of coming down front in a building and crying and weeping and wailing at an altar, which is not taught in the word of God at all. Much less standing up in a meeting, in a testimony meeting, and speaking about your faith in Jesus Christ. Bob Theme rightly called most testimony meetings bragamony meetings.

Confess and believe here are not two unrelated things. The confession is something believed and the faith is something confessed. One is outward and the effect, confession. The other is inward and the cause, faith. One is to God, the confession. Verse 13 says, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The confession that is referred to here is the confession that arises out of belief in Jesus Christ and that confession an acknowledgment to God. It’s not an acknowledgement to men at all. And so what the passage has to do with is the outward and the inward or the effect and the cause.

Listen, when he says that if thou shall confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus and shall believe in thine heart that God raised him from the dead, he’s talking about the outward and the inward. It’s the belief in the heart that leads to the confession with the mouth. And what do I do when I confess with my mouth Jesus Christ do I enter a church meeting and stand before a multitude and confessing. Why I know hundreds and hundreds of people who have acknowledged to me they never would be saved if it depended on that. They were too afraid to get up in front of a crowd and speak. Why the confession is the natural acknowledgment of the fact that you have believed in Jesus Christ to anyone but most of all, to God. It’s the acknowledgement before him. Thank you, Lord, for giving Jesus Christ to die for me. At that moment, I confessed Jesus Christ because I have believe in him in my heart.

And if I should meet you on the street having been saved tonight in this meeting and I should meet you in the morning and say look I went over to Believers Chapel last night and I heard a man talk about Jesus Christ and you know, I’ve believed in Christ that would be confession of Jesus Christ. The faith that produces the natural expression of simply an acknowledgement of the fact that you have believed in him that’s all that Paul means by this. And so here when he says in the next verse, “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” You’ll notice, it’s the belief that produces righteousness. “With the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto full salvation.” Salvation from the penalty of sin, the presence of sin, and also the power of sin, and also the presence of sin. So that the products of what happens in my initial confession of the Lord as my savior, the ultimate issue of that is my complete salvation. That’s what he means here. So believe and confess Christ that’s not the term of the New Testament.

Fourth, believe and be baptized. Now, we all know that there are certain so-called Christian organizations that are built upon the view that a man is saved by what Jesus Christ did plus belief in him and baptism by water. Acts chapter 2 verse 38 is the classic passage, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Believe and be baptized. This is perhaps the easiest way to preach a works gospel. In other words, you preached the free grace of God and Jesus Christ but you offer it to men on the basis of belief and baptism by water and in so doing, you have made the gospel of the grace of God a work salvation.

Now, this is no mere academic question but if it is necessary for us to believe in Jesus Christ and be baptized in water before we are saved, then what of the salvation of John Calvin, what of the salvation of John Wesley what of the salvation of George Whitfield. Men who did not preach this kind of doctrine. Now, I’d like to say that I have two objections to this doctrine. One is theological. I think, of course, that we cannot say

that we are saved by grace if we say we must believe in Jesus Christ and be baptized by water.

Now, unfortunately in the New Testament, we do not, so far as I know, have a precise text that says baptism is a work. We know that salvation is not by works of righteousness which we have done but we do not have any passage that says baptism is a work. But we do have passages that say that circumcision, the Old Testament ritual, which all of the Jewish males underwent, we do have passages that say that circumcision is a work. And furthermore, in Colossians chapter 2 we have circumcision compared with baptism. And we have specific reference made in the Epistle to the Galatians that if a man is seeking to be justified by faith plus circumcision, he has fallen from grace in the works.

Now, what is there about circumcision that makes it a work? Well, it’s a physical act. Second, it’s performed by human agency. Third, it’s performed with a material instrumentality, a knife. And fourth, while it is being performed, it is a visible act. There are four characteristics to circumcision. A physical act performed by human agency with material instrumentality. It is visible to others. What about water baptism? Well, it is a physical act. You get wet. Second, it is performed by human agency. This is what we do. I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It’s a physical act performed by human agency with material instrumentality, H₂O and it is visible to others. In other words, all of the essential characteristics of circumcision are found right in baptism. And if circumcision is a work, is not baptism a work? The apostles said in the apostle’s creed but we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we shall be saved even as they, Acts chapter 15 verse 11. But what about this text? “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.”

Now, I have some friends who like to point out that the word for remission of sins that word translated for is the Greek preposition *eis*. Now, *eis* is a preposition that means

“unto” or sometimes, of course, it means simply “to” or “unto.” It can mean “for.” And in a few cases, it means “because.” For example, in Matthew chapter 12, the Lord Jesus refers to the fact that Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah or because of the preaching of Jonah. Now, some of my friends who are so persecuted by Acts chapter 2 verse 38 and they are so sensitive about this verse that they like to say that that *eis* translated for should be really translated because so that this text reads,” Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ (because) of the remission of sins.” That is because you have already received the remission of sins be baptized. I’d just like to say that is not the true interpretation of Acts chapter 2 verse 38 for this simple reason that while *eis* can mean that, it means that in a very, very small minority of the cases. And therefore, one of the principles of Hermeneutics is that we should not appeal to a rare meaning of a word unless the context makes it necessary. And of course, if we say the context makes it necessary, then we’re assuming what we’re trying to prove that’s the pointed issue.

I have a friend, who was a former student at the seminary, and who wrote me a letter because he got into difficulty with this very thing. He went up to Portland. He works in Dr. Jack Mitchell’s church. And he began to talk with a young couple who had been attending the church of Christ and were attending also the Central Bible church. And they were disturbed over the question of the term of salvation. And they were being told by one source that they must be baptized in order to be saved and they were being told by this young man no all you need do is believe in Jesus Christ.

And so he made the very rash statement that this *eis* should be translated because and they were intelligent young people. They just didn’t accept what this preacher said. By the way, that is what I hope everybody in Believers Chapel becomes. The kind of person who tests everything even the things I say or even especially the things I say. I’m actually more convincing than some. Well, so they went to the other man. They said look it ought to be translated because. Well, he reached down in his drawer and pulled

out a sheath of letters. And they were letters from the classics professors of about ten of the leading universities in the United States: Princeton, University of California at Berkeley, University of Southern California, University of Illinois, University of Michigan and there was a long list of them. He sent them to me with a note help bale me out someway.

I got all of these letters from these classics professors and they all began with a simple thing statement *eis*, now some of these classics professors were wrong in what they said. They said some of them said *eis* rarely means because but most of them said *eis* can never mean because, which only showed that they themselves had not studied *eis* as well as they should have, particularly as far as the New Testament was concerned. But the point that each made then was in Acts 2:38 it obviously means simply for or unto. And some of them translated the text, their translations came out just like the Authorized Version. Repent and be baptized for the remission of sin. And so my friend sent me then this sheaf of letters and said now bale me out. What can I do? You see, unfortunately, he had made hermeneutical mistake. He had taken a rare meaning of a word and he had used it to get himself out of a doctrinal difficulty.

Now, the truth of the matter is that you could not tell, as I explained to you not too many weeks ago when we were going through Acts chapter 2 verse 38 in the Sunday morning, you could not tell from Acts chapter 2 verse 38 what the terms of salvation were if this is the only verse you have because you see Peter says you must do two things repent and be baptized. Repent plus be baptized but he then says that two things will happen remission of sins and gift of Holy Spirit. So you could never tell whether the remission of sins is because of the being baptized or from the repent or both. Because two things are commanded; two things are to follow.

And you could never know if you just had that one text. It might be from this. It might be from both. Or it might be from this. If I said to you, get your hat and get in your car and go to town and buy me a chocolate soda. Well, now one of those things is

necessary the others unnecessary. It’s unnecessary that you get your hat but it is necessary that you get in the car and go there in order to do it. So you see, we could never know but fortunately if you turn over a few pages to Acts chapter 10, you will have the answer to the question because here Peter is preaching and it’s the same old Peter. And so he uses terms in the same way. And remember, he’s in Cornelius’ house and he then in the course of his message in verse 43 he says these words Acts chapter 10 verse 43, “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”

Now, notice there is the expression remission of sins but he says, “That through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.” Now don’t turn the page, and if I were to say to you now see the only thing necessary for the remission of sins is to believe I might sway you. But you see, strictly speaking, you could say oh but he may since he has already said elsewhere it’s necessary to be baptized, he may be assuming that here. And that might be true but let’s turn over the page and see what happens. Peter has said now, “That through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins. While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.”

Now, what did he say was going to happen? Repent and be baptized and you shall receive remission of sins and gift of the Holy Spirit. Now, notice verse 44 says, “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.” Now, let me ask you a question. I’ve gone over a few minutes tonight. I’m sorry but you’re going to have to sit here anyway. [Laughter] What is the necessary thing then? If the gift of the Holy Spirit comes in Cornelius’ house before they are baptized, then which is the necessary term. Repent or be baptized. Repent, obviously. Obviously. Notice what he then goes on to say, “They of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.

Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”

In other words, they received the Holy Spirit before they were put in water. Therefore, when he says repent and be baptized and two things will happen remission of sins and gift of the Holy Spirit, then we know that this is the necessary thing. And this is simply a testimony to what transpires. So the gift of the Holy Spirit before baptism proves that this is the key term, repent or believe. Is that clear? Therefore, when we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to people and we preach the wonderful saving work of Jesus Christ if then say to men in order to be saved you must repent and be baptized in order to be saved. We are preaching a gospel of works salvation. Theologically and exegetically we are in error.

Now, we’re going to continue this next Monday night. Let’s close in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word. And we pray that Thou wilt enable us to think clearly about the gospel of Jesus Christ. And not offer it upon terms that dishonor him and to know that wonderful free grace which thou hast shown. We pray.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.