



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“Progressive Sanctification - I: Problem of Perfectionism and Good Works”

[Prayer] We thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. And we thank Thee, Lord, that we have found the word of God a guide and a source of comfort and a source of reality to us in the days in which we live. We thank Thee that the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ has been attested by many infallible proofs, that he has been raised from the dead, according to the Scriptures and the testimonies of those who have seen and others who have known him are found in this book.

While we know, Lord, that ultimate certainty does not come simply from the word of God, but through the word of God as applied by the Holy Spirit, we thank Thee that we have come to that sense of certainty in thy grace. We acknowledge that we are lost, that we were natural men. We did not respond to the Scriptures, but we thank Thee for that which thou hast done through the Holy Spirit in enlightenment, in regeneration, and for the work that Thou art doing in sanctification. We pray that this hour in which the Spirit teaches us may be fruitful and profitable and we accomplish Thy purpose in our lives. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Now, we have been studying the sanctifying ministry of the Spirit. And just by way of review, remember, we pointed out a long time ago that the Holy Spirit has

a work with reference to the unbelieving world. And in that work he bestows upon men natural blessings. It is he who gives us rain even when the Cowboys are playing. It is he who gives us other natural blessings in this world in which we live. It is he who is responsible for moral influences among men. It is he who is responsible for common grace. It is he who is responsible for the good works that men do -- later on we'll refer again to this. And it is he who exercises redemptive influences among the unsaved like sanctifying the children of believing parents before they have come to faith in Jesus Christ. He exercises that ministry of giving them the privilege of association with those who are believers.

Then we have been discussing the work of the Holy Spirit in the believing community, in the church. And we have specifically been dealing with, first of all, regeneration which is his initial work by which we are brought to life. We discussed his baptizing work by which we are placed in the body of Christ. That is not his work of water baptism, but this is spirit baptism by which we are united to Jesus Christ and other believers in the church. His work of indwelling by which he permanently indwells all who believe in Jesus Christ. Every genuine Christian has the Holy Spirit indwelling him permanently. He teaches us, which is really a facet of his sanctifying ministry, but since it so important we have separated it and we discussed that ministry; discussing how he illuminates believers. Revelation is completed. The truth of God has been given to us, but the understanding of it is a continuing process on our part. And as he teaches us continually in illumination, we come to understand more and more of the Scriptures. So his teaching ministry is something that continues as long as we are in the flesh.

He also gives spiritual gifts. We discussed the permanent spiritual gifts that he gives; the temporary spiritual gifts that he gave in the early days of the church. We spent a great deal of time on the doctrine of tongues. You may remember last spring.

Now, when we came to the doctrine of the filling of the spirit, I tried to point out that this ministry is not nearly as significant as it is commonly thought to be, that

essentially it is the ministry of enduement with power. And I'm going to say a little more about it, so if you'll wait a while I'm going to go on by. And now we are discussing his sanctifying ministry, which is essentially the major ministry that he has to us as believers. That is what the Holy Spirit is engaged in today. He is engaged in the work of setting us apart through the service and fellowship with God, his sanctifying ministry.

Then we began to discuss after we discussed the problem of the Holy Spirit, we began to discuss and have been discussing the Holy Spirit's work of sanctifying believers and particularly the theological aspects of that work. We discussed the history of the doctrine of sanctification, the biblical terminology. We discussed the nature of progressive sanctification. We said of course that we would discuss primarily progressive sanctification because that is the aspect of it that we ordinarily think of when we speak of sanctification. We have discussed the characteristics of progressive sanctification. Oh, by the way, we discussed its supernaturals, its two-fold aspect; mortification and quickening. We discussed its pervasiveness, that it touches the whole man. And we were discussing last time the characteristics of progressive sanctification, its author. Its author of course is God. Its means, God the spirit primarily. Its means, the word of God, providence, the ordinances particularly for us. Now, the Lord's Supper although baptism itself had a ministry that is a once-and-for-all ordinance. It's completion -- well it is never completed in the flesh.

We discussed the relationship of progressive sanctification to other stages in the *Ordo Salutis*. Remember the *Ordo Salutis* is [that's not going to stay maybe] the Latin expression for the stages of the work of God in our salvation. It is the order of salvation. It includes everything from our election on through to our glorification. And we discussed the relationship of sanctification to regeneration. I pointed out to you when we were discussing this that regeneration is accomplished at once. One cannot be more or less born again. One is either born or one is not born, just as in the natural life the same

is true in the spiritual life. You cannot say of a Christian, “well, he is in process of being born” or something like that.

Sanctification, on the other hand, is a process. Regeneration is accomplished at once; sanctification is a process. Its relationship to justification; justification is the judicial basis for sanctification and thus sanctification is something that flows out of justification; its relation to faith. And we were discussing that I think at the close of the last hour, and I pointed out that just as faith is the immediate cause of our salvation, so it is also immediate cause of our sanctification. Just as a man is saved through faith, so he is sanctified through faith. And, consequently, every blessing that we have in the Christian life is a blessing that comes to us through faith.

Now, we should not think that we are saved by what Jesus Christ did for us and then when we become Christians that we are to work in order to grow. Now, that is not true. We do however exercise faith. The Holy Spirit is the one who creates the faith within us, nurtures it, motivates us, instigates us to advance us in the Christian life. For remember, Philippians says

“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you both the will and to do of his good pleasure.”

And so our duty is always a responsive thing. It is responsive in salvation, for what Christ has done. In sanctification it is responsive to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. And he does not stop working. Just as surely as you were chosen and brought to salvation, so surely shall you be sanctified. You may resist the work, you may fight it, you may delay it from the human standpoint just as you may do your salvation for many years, but the time is coming when invincible grace will prevail and you will be sanctified.

Now, for some of us, I mean for all of us, the completion of it is of course when Jesus Christ comes again. And as a matter of fact the great work of sanctification may be

done in some of us at that last moment when we meet the Lord face to face, but it is the normal thing for Christians to grow, make progress, though they may have their falls, their difficulties, their times in which they are out of fellowship, but the lives of Christians are lives that grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

If we are not growing, if there is not evidence of advancement in the Christian life, then we do not have any comfort from the word of God that we are genuinely Christians. If we say that we have believed in the Lord and our lives do not manifest any evidence of advancement in the Christian life, we have no reason for hope. The Bible does not give us any reason for hope because the Bible says that "those who have genuinely believed will produce good works." So we are constantly in the Bible, exhorted to examine ourselves. It does not mean however, that you should be constantly looking back for the fountain all of your life and you should never have any assurance of salvation. That is wrong, because we should have assurance of our salvation and then proceed on, but if you have never in your life seen evidence of fruit you have no reason from the Bible to have any comfort at all. Now that may seem very difficult and hard, but nevertheless that I think is what the Bible says.

Now, we want to talk tonight for a little while on progressive sanctification and the problem of perfectionism. And then I want to say a few words about good works and progressive sanctification. And I hope I'll be able to get on beyond that, but we may not be able to do it.

Let's now come to Romans VI - Progressive Sanctification and the Problem of Perfectionism. Sanctification, I think I've said this once before, like a newborn infant, is perfect in parts but imperfect in degree. Now, what I mean by that is this, that sanctification is a ministry of the Holy Spirit that touches the whole man at once. And consequently there is growth, steady growth, and it is a growth that touches all of the man; his mind, his soul, his spirit, all are touched by sanctification. But at the same time, while it is perfect in parts, it is imperfect in degree. We never reach complete

sanctification while we are in the flesh. As you may remember, I put on the board this diagram pointing out that sanctification, as long as we are in the flesh, never practically reaches this top line.

Positionally, this is where we are always, but our experience is up and down frequently, although there should be progress in the general sense (this is not a diagram of AT&T stock in case some of you are here for the first time), this is the diagram of Mr. Prier’s spiritual experience we’ve been saying. It really isn’t, but we’ve been kidding him about that. And according to this every time, at every point of our Christian experience after we’ve come to the cross, we are sanctified. That is our position. We are one hundred percent holy before God. That’s our position. That’s why we are called saints, remember. But our experience varies and even when we are in the midst of our falls, we are still positionally one hundred percent holy before God. The completion of this process does not come until the time the Lord comes, and then wherever we are, we make a very quick trip from imperfect sanctification to perfect sanctification practically, so that our practical experience finally meets our positional standing at that point when the Lord comes. And that is the prospective sanctification towards which we are moving. So sanctification is perfect in parts, but it is imperfect in degree as long as we are in the flesh.

Perhaps one of the best illustrations of this is the illustration of a child. A child born is very imperfect. In fact, we speak of them at a certain point, of reaching maturity. We speak of various stages of a child; it’s an infant, it’s a baby, it’s a child, it’s a youth, it has come to puberty, and then we say the child is an adult. We mean, in effect, it has therefore reached the stage of maturity, an adult. Now, at every stage the child may be perfect before it reaches its maturity.

Now, I was trying to work this around so I could bring in my granddaughter who is living here now. She has been perfect at each stage. She’s now nineteen months old, almost twenty, I guess, but she was an infant, and now she is a baby. She’s made advance, but nevertheless she is imperfect in degree. And I hope I live long enough to

be able to see her as a young lady, to see what she is really going to be like as a mature person. So she is perfect in parts but imperfect in degree. The same thing is true of you as a Christian. You are as a Christian in sanctification, you are perfect in parts. All of your whole being is affected by sanctification, but you are imperfect in degree. You have not yet reached what you shall be in holiness. And I think that all of you will agree with me that that is true.

There are however people who dispute this. We call them perfectionists or believers in sinless perfection. This is the common way in which we referred to. They dispute this claim of imperfection. They believe that it is possible for a man to attain to the place of sinlessness now. So let’s now look at capital A, The Evidence for Perfectionism. And I want you to turn with me to Matthew chapter 5 in verse 48. Matthew chapter 5 in verse 48. The Lord, speaking in the Sermon on the Mount says, giving a principle which is found also in the epistles, we shall refer to that shortly,

“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

Now, this text is often appealed to by those who believe in sinless perfection as suggesting that Jesus is calling upon us to be absolutely perfect. And if it is true that God calls upon us to be absolutely perfect, then we have the power within us to become perfect. Let’s turn over to 1 Peter chapter 1 in verse 16. I think that’s about the verse; 1 Peter chapter 1 in verse 16. And here Peter says,

“Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

And, again, repeated in the epistles: “be ye holy.” Can we then say that the Bible teaches that we should be perfect, absolutely holy? Now, the claim that the measure of human ability is the measure of divine commands is really not true. I should say that

those who believe that it is possible to be perfect do not claim that all believers are sinless necessarily but only that all may reach a state of sinless perfection. And so this is the basis on which they make their claim.

I should like to say this about Matthew chapter 5 in verse 48. In the first place, Matthew chapter 5, verse 48; “be ye perfect as I am perfect” is a rendering of a Greek word that means “mature.” So the word perfect does not mean sinlessly perfect. It means maturity. So “be ye perfect” means grow to maturity. “Be holy” does mean be holy, but there are, so far as the New Testament is concerned, there are stages of holiness, degrees of holiness, for remember holiness means separation. And there are degrees of separation. Just as a child of believing parents is said by Paul to be holy in 1 Corinthians 7, that holiness is a certain degree of holiness. That is not the same degree of holiness that takes place when a person is born again. For at that moment, he does stand before God one hundred percent perfect, and he begins his Christian life in which the degree of holiness should increase as he himself becomes more and more set apart unto God. So these texts I do not think really teach that a person can attain the sinless perfection.

Now I want to turn to some passages in the first epistle of John in order to show the reverse, but before we look at the passages that show the reverse, I also want to look at a couple of other passages in 1 John 3, which may suggest this sinless perfection. 1 John 3 in verse 6. John says,

“Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.”

Notice, “whosoever abideth in him sinneth not.” Notice verse 8,

“He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the

devil. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

Now, now that does seem to say that we can attain to status of perfection, does it not? It says “whosoever is born of God does not commit sin and he cannot sin because he is born of God.” Now, there are some interpreters of this ninth verse who say that this statement “he cannot sin because he is born of God and whosoever is born of God” really refers to the new nature with which we are endowed when we believe in Jesus Christ. We are given a new nature. And that new nature cannot sin. That, of course, is a truth. I myself am doubtful that that is what John is really saying here. I am inclined to take these present tenses as ordinary present tenses. In Greek they are durative in force.

Present tense in Greek refers to an action that continues and so when we say “whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin,” it means does not practice sin, does not go on sinning. His life is not characterized by sin.

Now, he may fall into sin, but he is recovered. He may from time from time sin and that is evident in the life of some of the great saints; Peter for example. He was clean on account of the word the Lord had spoken to him Jesus said, but at the same time, he sinned and denied the Lord. Not only that, but Peter later sinned, according to Galatians. When Paul spoke of how when the Judaizers came to the city of Antioch, Peter withdrew himself and began to fellowship with him, and Paul had to stand up and before the whole company of the saints rebuke Peter, the chief of the apostles, in the sense that he was their leader, and he did it publicly and he said because he was to be blamed. And so a believer is not incapable of sin, but a believer is incapable of practicing sin. That is what John is saying.

In other words, when a person is born again he receives a new nature, and he is a different person. That’s why no professing Christian who continues in the life of disobedience and sin has any comfort from the word of God that he is a Christian. That’s

what Calvin and others meant when they said the Bible teaches the perseverance of the saints. That is they continue in the faith. And the evidence that a man is genuinely born again is that he continues in the faith. If a person does not continue, it’s conceivable that he genuinely believed and fell immediately out of fellowship with the Lord. But that’s not what we are to gain from the word of God as the normal thing. That indicates the faith normally was not genuine faith.

So when we read “whosoever is born of God does not commit sin,” it does not mean he does not commit a single sin, but he does not practice sin. For a “seed cannot remaineth in him and he cannot go on sinning” again present tenses, because he is born of God. So the new life is such and the transformation is such that a Christian cannot continue in sin. He may fall into sin from time to time, but continue in sin, no.

Now, let’s just say, for the sake of argument, that my perfectionist friend is correct. Now, it is striking that perfectionists (Perhaps I should say this.) generally speaking perfectionists, fall into the category religiously of Pentecostals. Forms of Pentecostalism usually they are the ones who believe in sinless perfection. They believe in second work of grace often by which you become sinless and so on. It is an interesting thing that those who believe in perfectionism are also ones who never believe in eternal security. They always believe you can lose your salvation. They are the ones who speak about losing your salvation if you commit a certain kind of sin. Now this is an interesting thing because you see, if it is true, that a believer does not practice sin, if it is really true that a Christian does not practice sin, then how can he possibly fall from grace? And yet they believe most strongly, in falling from grace. How is it possible? Well, of course, it is impossible.

I was speaking with a young lady at my house not long ago, and she was telling me something about her past Christian experience. And somehow or another the doctrine of salvation came up and the doctrine of eternal security. And she said “Oh, yes, that’s a problem.” She said, “I was brought up believing that those who were genuine Christians

continued in fellowship with the Lord. In fact, I was brought up believing that once you had become a Christian, then you did not sin.” Then she said, “Of course we could make mistakes.” Now, this is a happy way of lowering God’s standard. In other words, they faced the facts, people do sin, but let’s call them mistakes. And by calling them mistakes, we can still say that it’s possible to attain a state of sinlessness. We don’t sin, but we do make these little mistakes that don’t really affect things too much. Now I’ve always contended that anyone who believes this usually lowers the standard of divine holiness.

Now, what is the evidence against perfectionism? Let’s just turn back a page to 1 John chapter 1 and listen to what John says. Look at verse 8,

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”

Now, of course, this is not a reference to a person who is not a Christian. A person who is not a Christian would not say, “we have no sin.” This is a reference to believers. And John is saying if we believers “say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” Now, I don’t think that John had this in mind but the text certainly includes it; we deceive ourselves, we do not deceive others. And if one of us should for -- in some moment of insanity could say “I have attained a place of sinlessness,” most of us would want very much the simple privilege of asking our wife or our husband, as the case may be, about it, because we have never yet known any sinless person really except Jesus Christ. He is the only sinless person.

Now, I have known people who have claimed sinlessness. I preached south of Dallas about twenty years ago for a Perkins student who was a Christian, something somewhat unique, but nevertheless he was a genuine Christian. And he asked me to come down and preach to his congregation south of Dallas in a Methodist church in a little city of about two thousand people. And I preached that morning. He told me to go ahead and preach the gospel, and I preached the gospel. And a young lady came up to

me afterwards and wanted to discuss a few things. In the midst of our conversation she made the claim that she was sinless, and she did not need this gospel that was for sinners. Well, it was obvious to me that she was totally blind, and I tried, of course, to quote a few texts to her, but they just did not have any affect on her at all. So I let her go on talking and suddenly the conversation shifted around to something that someone in the community had done that was contrary to her will. It had to do with a building that she owned, and they had wronged her. And she began to speak more and more vehemently about this person that had wronged her.

So then I -- I was young in those days, and I don’t think I would do that again -- but I just said, “Well now, do you think in the light of what you just told me in the attitude you just expressed that you really love that person with all your heart, with all your mind, and with all your soul?” And she looked at me very strangely and kind of angrily and just clammed up and turned around and left because, of course, she saw that really her actions betrayed her confession. She was not sinless. And you’ve often heard me refer to G. Campbell Morgan’s experience where a woman came to him and said to him “Dr. Morgan, I have had twelve years of sinlessness.” And he said, “My, you must be very proud of that”. And she said, “Indeed, I am”. [laughter] And with that, Dr. Morgan said went twelve years of sinlessness. [laughter] So we deceive ourselves. We do not deceive anybody else but further the truth is not in us [laughter].

Now notice the 10th verse; “ If we say that we have not sinned,” in the 8th verse apparently the reference is to the sin principle within us or perhaps even our nature. If we say that we have no sin nature or at least if we say that we have no sin principle within us, we deceive ourselves, the truth is not in us. But in the 10th verse, if we say that we have not sinned, specifically, and again, no person who was a non-Christian who has come into the Christian faith would say that he had not sinned in his old life, so this is a reference to Christians and Christian experience. If we say that we have not sinned as Christians, we make him a liar and his word is not in us. Now language is just about as,

language can hardly be any stronger than that. That is just about as strong as it could possibly be. We make God a liar if we say that we have not sinned. So all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in the sight of God.

And my dear Christian friend, as far as I’m concerned, the more I live the Christian life, the more I sense my sin. I hope it’s not the more I sin, but the more I sense my sin; my thoughts. The things that characterize my life, the motives, the ambitions, the desires; the more I sense my life out of conformity with God. I am not proud of what I see within myself. I hope by the grace of God, I am making progress in his sight. I think also it is characteristic of the saints of the past. I’m not trying to link myself with them, though I would like to be. It is characteristic of them. Most all of them say the closer they came to be to the Lord in personal fellowship, the more they saw of their own sin, because in the light of God’s holiness, our so-called holiness becomes like filthy rags.

It was like Peter, you know, when he was in the boat and the miraculous draft of fishes was taken and he suddenly realized that he was in the boat with the Lord God of Israel. And the sense of what he was came over him and he said “depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” It was like Isaiah in the temple when he saw the vision of perhaps the Trinity, at least the Son, and he heard the Cherubim singing “holy, holy, holy” and then he expressed his own unholiness. Because when we come to understand what God is really like in his character, then we shall see ourselves as we are. And we are sinful. So I do not believe the Bible teaches perfectionism. I have never yet seen anyone that even seemed to me to be close to such a position.

Let’s move on now and discuss finally, progressive sanctification and good works. The new life is originated in regeneration. It is strengthened in sanctification and it naturally manifests itself in good works. So the life that we possess is given us by the Holy Spirit when he regenerates us. The Holy Spirit nurtures that life in sanctification. It expresses itself in good works.

Now capital A - The Nature of Good Works.

Good works in the Bible are not perfect works. I do not think that really anyone ever does a perfect work. Again, I think that almost all of our works, even when they do express some of the love of God and have as motive the glory of God, they still have a little bit of us in them. So good works are not perfect. Now, our Lord’s good works were perfect works, but ours are not. We can however say this, that Christian good works are different in quality from the actions of the unregenerate.

Now, it’s possible for a Christian to do something outwardly that is the same thing as a non-Christian’s action. Let’s just take a simple illustration. Let’s just suppose that we see a person in need. Let’s suppose that a Christian seeing this person in need ministers to them. Now, let’s just suppose that just for the sake of making it precisely the same, let’s suppose that a Christian sees a person in need, a neighbor in a community, and seeing him in need, financial need, writes out a check for fifty dollars and gives it to him. Let’s suppose a non-Christian living next door does precisely the same thing. He takes out his pen, he writes a check and gives him fifty dollars.

Now, outwardly you might think those deeds were precisely the same. Now, of course I do not know the motives of anyone. This is an illustration. But I do know what the Bible teaches. And the Bible teaches that no person’s good works who is not a Christian are acceptable to him. Consequently, I am forced to believe that the good works that the world does are works, while outwardly they may be precisely the same as the good works of a Christian, they arise from a different source. They arise from a different disposition. And they have a different aim in view.

Let’s just take our illustration and say for the sake of illustration that a Christian does this deed which is a good work because while he loves God, and he desires to serve him and he would like to see that person won to Jesus Christ, and he feels that by showing compassion, that of the Holy Spirit showing compassion, he may get an opportunity to point that person to Jesus Christ. And so out of love for God and out of the disposition to obey God because the word says “do good to all men,” especially those

that believe. And so out of this love of God and this disposition to obey God and with a view that God may be glorified in the salvation of that person, he writes out his check for fifty dollars.

Well, if the other person, let’s suppose, writes out the check for fifty dollars because he thinks that perhaps his neighbors will think he’s a real good guy. He does it out of personal adulation. He desires through this gift to express something that manifests his own opinion of himself. He desires the approval of the community. He may even desire other things from the person involved. In other words, good works are works that are different because, not that they are necessarily outwardly different, but they arise from a different source. They have different motivation and consequently they are different in quality from the good works of the world.

Now, we look around and we often see people who outwardly appear to be better men than some Christians we know. And that’s why we can look at some and we say “My, that man has been a benefactor of the community. He has given thousands, perhaps even millions of dollars for the community.” And here is a Christian over here who seems to be struggling along, making a little progress, but is really at times something of an ornery character. Now, how can you say that person’s going to heaven and this one is going to hell? This person says, of course, he’s not a Christian.

Well, you see we are unable to judge the heart. And the Bible says that the man who performs the good works with no intent to glorify God, not springing from love for God, not springing from the motivation of obedience to God, those works are works really designed to flatter himself. And the Christian who may be having problems, but who nevertheless occasionally does do something for the glory of God out of love for God, the desire to obey his word, that person is more acceptable in the sight of God.

Why does the other fellow do any good at all? Well, the Bible says that there is such a thing as the common grace that the Holy Spirit bestowed upon all men. That’s why a public benefactor may do works of benefaction. It is because the Holy Spirit

ministers to the whole of the community in common grace. As we said when we put the diagram on about the spirit's work among the unsaved, it is the spirit that is responsible for the natural good that men do. And so works may be an outward conformity to God's standards but defective because they are divorced from his love, they are divorced from an inner obedience to his word, and they are divorced from the motivation of the glory of God. They are the products of the Holy Spirit, but they are not good works in the biblical sense.

Now I hope that is clear. That is the only way by which the works that men do, non-Christians, are explainable. And since the Bible plainly indicates that the spirit does work in that way among men, we should as Christians not be disturbed when we see someone who is outwardly good but who has never yet believed in Jesus Christ.

Now capital B - The Merit from Good Works. Roman Catholics have claimed that good works spring from infused grace and afterwards give man a just claim to salvation. A person does good works because grace has been infused in him. And after he has done a sufficient amount of good works then God is able to pronounce him justified. That never happens in this life and that is why Roman Catholics do not have any doctrine of assurance. No person who is a genuine Roman Catholic who really believes their doctrine can ever know that they are saved.

Now, if you find a Roman Catholic who knows that they are Christians, who have really believed in Jesus Christ, and there are some. They are saved in spite of their doctrine not by their doctrine. If you find one that has the assurance of salvation, you can be sure they have not imbibed all the teaching of Romanism. Now, it's entirely possible for a person to be in Romanism who doesn't imbibe all the teaching of Romanism. There are Baptists who are in Baptist churches that have not imbibed the first principles of the teaching of Baptist churches. There are Presbyterians in Presbyterian churches who have not imbibed the principles of Calvin. And there are people who attend Believers Chapel that have not imbibed the principles of me, for example. [Laughter] They are not good

Calvinists. They haven’t come to that place yet, but they are here and happy and enjoying it. And when I speak on topics that don’t particularly like they just kind of sit there and look with a quizzical look on their face you know, “Could he really believe that?”

And so it is not necessarily so that because a person is in a group, he believes it. Believe it or not, I had a young lady who was a Christian Science come to my house just two weeks ago, and she wants to be baptized in Believers Chapel. It is most interesting. I have never had anybody... I’ve been preaching for over twenty-five years now, and I’ve never had a Christian Science come and want to be baptized. Well, why? Well, because they don’t believe in water baptism to start with, but she has suddenly felt -- she’s been reading the Bible. That’s another thing that most don’t do. And she has been reading the Bible, and she sees that Christians are supposed to be baptized and so she wants to be baptized. And I said “Well, now wait a minute. What do you think baptism signifies?” And she says, “It signifies that I have come to Christ to be my savior.”

Well, that amazed me that she would say that and so I thought, “I’m want to ask you a few more doctrinal questions.” And I said, “I don’t want you to get upset at me, but I want to ask you a few questions. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God, because I know that Christian Science do not really believe that he is the Son of God?” She said, “Yes, I do.” And I said, “Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins?” I said, “Now wait before you answer that. I mean as your substitute, that he died under the judgment of God for your sins.” She said, “Yes.” I said, “Do you believe that he was raised from the dead?” She said, “Yes.” And I said, “I’m going to have to get Mr. Pryor to come and see you because I am going to have a hard time convincing the elders that you are saved because we’ve never seen a Christian Scientist, who is a believer in the biblical doctrines.

And then I said to her, “How is it that you believe these things when Mary Baker Eddy does not believe them?” She said, “I have been a Christian Scientist ever since I

grew up. My grandfather was a Christian Scientist. We were members of the mother church. My father is a member of the mother church. I am a member of the mother church in Boston, but I don’t believe everything Mary Baker Eddy says.” It was kind of interesting.

So I told Mr. Pryor we were going to have to go by and see her because I want you to be satisfied that she is a genuine Christian, but she certainly made some genuine professions in my presence. It indicates, you know, that a person doesn’t necessarily believe everything that they are supposed to believe.

Now, the Catholics believe that good works spring from infused grace and afterwards give a man a just claim to salvation. Further, Roman Catholics believe that believers may do works of super-arrogation. Do you know that word? Roman Catholics would know super-arrogation. I am going to write it down because it is a very common word in Catholic theology. Let us hope that I can spell it. Pronounce it. Super-arrogation. See there is an accent here, an accent here, an accent there. These are the two big accents. Super-arrogation. Super-arrogation.

Now, super-arrogation means simply works that are more than required, more than required. Roman Catholics believe that believers can do works of super-arrogation, more than required. And these are stored up in a treasury of merit. And these works of super-arrogation may accrue to the benefit of other Christians. So I can do a lot of good works and lay a lot in store so that you Christians may get by a little better. In other words, it’s a kind of work that makes God a debtor to the one who performs them. They are works of merit.

Now, works that Christians do may be rewardable, they may be praiseworthy, but they never make God our debtor. Every good work that we ever do genuinely, by the Holy Spirit, is praiseworthy, it’s rewardable, but ultimately it is the work of God and therefore he is not in debt to us if we should do a good work.

Now, let’s turn to a passage or so; Luke chapter 17 in verses 9 and 10. Page 1099 in my edition; Luke. While you are finding that verse of 9 and 10, let me read verse 7. This is the parable of service.

“But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? [Luke 17:8] And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.”

Or as Philippians says, “it is God that worketh in us both the will and the due of his good pleasure.” And so when you’ve accomplished some work for the Lord which you know which is the work of God, do not think for one moment that you have, by your work, made God a debtor to you. You are an unprofitable servant. You have only done what you were supposed to do.

Now, if he should reward you in his grace, if he should praise you in his grace and that he does, it is not because you have merit. It is because you have been simply an instrumentality in the fulfillment of his will, and he in grace gives us a word of praise. So the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, when you and I stand there, we are not going to be able to say, “now this is what I’ve earned.” We are going to discover at that point that the rewards that are given us are rewards of grace. Everything in the Christian life comes from grace, from beginning to end. We never earn a thing.

Capital C - The Necessity of Good works. I can finish this up in one minute. Works, we have said, are different if they are good works in the biblical sense. They spring from the love of God. They spring from the desire to obey God. They spring from

the aim of the glory of God. Those are good works. So if our works as Christians spring from the love of God out of a desire to obey God and have as their aim the glory of God, then they are good works in the biblical sense. If these things are not true, they are not good works. They are not meritorious, but at the same time they are an essential product of the new life within us.

Now, let’s turn to a couple of passages before we close. Romans chapter 7 in verse 4. I’ll read beginning at verse one while you are finding it. Romans 7:4 verse 1,

“Know ye not, brethren, [for I speak to them that know the law,] how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband (Romans 7:3) So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man. (He’s setting up an illustration of what our Lord has done.) “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ (that is by his saving work on the cross); that ye should be married to another (now we are married to Christ), even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

So just as two people unite in marriage, in this life in the flesh and have as the natural product of that union, physical progeny, so when a believer is united to Jesus Christ in our spiritual union with him, our spiritual marriage the natural result of it is spiritual fruit. Therefore good works are the necessary product of our union with Christ. Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 20. Here Paul states that they are the expressions of gratitude. Verse 19, 1 Corinthians 6,

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, [that is out of gratitude for what has happened to you]”

Now the big passage that we’ve all known that deals with this topic, I’ve saved for the last. It is James chapter 2. This is the explanation of a passage that has troubled a lot of people. The Church of Christ people are not straight on this passage to the present hour. They think that this passage is a passage that refutes the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, because did not one of the apostles write “Faith without works is dead”? Yes. James wrote, the brother of the Lord, “Faith without works is dead.” Notice verse 14,

“What doth it profit [this is chapter 2 of James] -- What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can that kind of faith save him?”

In other words the faith that says it has faith but it does not have works with it, can that kind of faith, a faith that says, can that faith save? I’ll illustrate.

“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? [Nothing] Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”

Now, he says the same thing in verse 20, “But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?” Verse 26, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

Now, what is James trying to say? Is he trying to refute a doctrine of salvation by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? No, he’s not trying to do that. As a matter of fact, he begins this second chapter by saying in the first verse “My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.” He knows that faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is the mark of a Christian. But what he is trying to say is that the man who has genuine faith will have good works. It is the necessary evidence of faith. The works do not save. It is the faith that saves. It is the faith that brings us new life, but the faith that brings us new life manifests itself in good works. There must be good works.

Now, of course, that does not mean I should see them or you should see them in me. That is for God. He may see things in me that you do not see, and I may not see the things in you that he does. But the one who has genuinely believed will produce, will have good works. So good works are different. They proceed from different motivations, from different sources, and they are necessary. They are the marks of growth in grace, and they belong to the doctrine of sanctification.

Let’s close. Our time is up.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the truth of the word. And we commit ourselves to Thee and pray that through the Spirit, there may be good works that are acceptable to Thee, praiseworthy, rewardable. We thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast taught us in the word that we have no merit. We have only done, even in our most shining hours, what we should have done. We are unprofitable servants. Go with us as we leave.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.