



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 16:1-12

“You Love the Practical More Than the Theological?”

Here's Your Subject: The Collection”

TRANSCRIPT

Let's open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the word of God again. We thank Thee for this great epistle that we have been studying for so long. We thank Thee for the account that the apostle has given us of the ministry of apostles in their day. And we thank Thee for the guidance and direction, that he has given to us so many hundreds of years later. We thank Thee for the forthrightness and the preaching of the gospel of the grace of God. And we thank Thee for the other aspects of the local church life that he has touched upon. They have been edifying for us and very needful, and we give Thee thanks.

We thank Thee for the devotion to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that the Holy Spirit wrought in the heart of this great man, the Apostle Paul. And we ask, Lord, that Thou wilt work in our hearts in that way as well. Give us that kind of love for our Lord, that kind of appreciation for all that he has done for us that will make us to be effective, fervent missionaries of the gospel of grace. We pray Thy blessing upon us as we study together this evening.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Well, I was told by the church secretary that I have now been responsible for the longest title in the history of Believer’s Chapel. And I don’t apologize for it because I’m used to giving long titles anyway. In fact, before Martha and I married, when she was working in the tape Ministry, she complained to me about the length of the titles because she had to write them on the little slip on the tape. And she reported -- I don’t remember this encounter, but she reported that I said simply, “Write smaller,” and that maybe so.

Anyway, the topic for tonight is “You Love the Practical More Than the Theological? Here’s your subject: The Collection.” And our text is 1 Corinthians 16:1-12. And I did not want to let anybody who likes to say statements like that escape the consequences of loving the practical more than the theological when we come to “The Collection.” For this will demonstrate how deep your commitment to that which is practical really is.

1 Corinthians 16, verse 1 through verse 12, and I’m going to read it now.

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also (Incidentally, there is no indication of any order that he gave to the Galatians in the New Testament so it’s something that we do not have record of.) On the first *day* of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me. Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia).”

Incidentally, the apostle did change his mind a couple of times, and in the second letter he comments on the fact that the Corinthian were critical of him for changing his

mind. I guess one may consult a message on 2 Corinthians, but I think that probably involved in it was the idea that, if you were really guided by the Holy Spirit, why would you be changing your mind all of the time? Why would you be fickle? And so the apostle makes reference to it in 2 Corinthians chapter 1. Verse 6:

“And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not wish to see you now on the way; but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits. But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. (That evidently, is where he is when he writes 1 Corinthians.) For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries.

And if Timothy comes, see that he may be with you without fear; for he does the work of the Lord, as I also *do*. Therefore let no one despise him. But send him on his journey in peace, that he may come to me; for I am waiting for him with the brethren. Now concerning *our* brother Apollos, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however, he will come when he has a convenient time.”

It’s common for weak believers to belittle theology. The causes are many and as far as I’m concerned, all of them are bad. So I’ll not, mercifully, labor the point tonight because you’ve heard me speak on that topic more than once. But tonight we are coming to a practical subject, “The Collection.”

Concerning which the common practices are not uniformly good. Perhaps we can agree on that. In one of the previous messages, I made references to George Muller. George Muller, as a man, does not have a good reputation with many modern Evangelicals. That’s surprising. If one reads the “The Life of Muller” reflects upon what he was able to do, what he stood for, the work that he did The Bristol Orphanage, so magnificent with hundreds and hundreds, literally I think thousands, of individuals that

were fed by that orphanage without money being solicited for the work. It was a remarkable work of faith. But Muller is not on good terms with modern Evangelicals because that work was built on the principle that modern Evangelicals have generally rejected. Today, Evangelicals carry on their work by solicitation. In many of the churches, it’s the “pledge system.” But outside of the churches, in the parachurch movement, it is solicitation. Solicitation by letter. Solicitation by telephone. All kinds of solicitation. If you have given money to parachurch organizations, you know they’re a solicitation. And they also exchange their mailing lists, in many cases.

So you are the object of a lot of solicitation. Some local organizations and some that we know very well are very anti-George Muller. And the reason is simply that. And what they have sought to do, in some cases, is to find places where Mr. Muller was not true to his system, to his principle. For example, in a meeting in a theological seminary, not too long ago, the president of the seminary attacked Mr. Muller as not being in harmony, carrying on his work, in harmony with his principles. In what way? Well, it was said because at the end of every year Mr. Muller in the British -- in the orphanage in Bristol, sent out published a list of those that have given money in the previous year and thanking them for their gifts, though they had never been solicited by simply saying, “Thank you.” That, it was said, was effectively, a solicitation.

So I wrote in my notes this week, “My, my, must a work in order to be considered a genuine faith endeavor is true in giving donors a word of thanks for their help? Must one be ungratefully ill-bred to qualify as one that must qualify to look only to the Lord for the works funds? In other words, can we say that we are not following a faith principle if not soliciting, never asking for money and someone helps us we say, “Thank you”? Does that violate the principle? I cannot see how that is so.

If George Muller is now a bad example for Christian works to follow, okay. I’ll just accept. That’s what you think. Why not follow the Apostle Paul then? After all, he does call upon us to remember him and follow him and in fact, be imitators of him. So

why don’t simply follow Paul? Uh-oh, sorry. He thanked the Philippians for gifts that they had given to him. So the Apostle Paul did not follow the faith principle because he said to the Philippians, “Thank you.”

Well, we at least have no example but our Lord. As far as I can tell, he never solicited funds. He depended upon the Lord. The only thing that he received was some help from some of the ladies, who helped him, and helped him to meet his needs. So if George Muller won’t do and if Paul won’t do, let’s follow the Lord, so far as our needs are concerned. I don’t doubt that that’s difficult. It’s very difficult. It’s contrary to our sinful human nature, to rely completely upon the Lord. But, nevertheless, it has to be said, I have to say it, if it upsets you, well, I’m sorry, but it needs to be said in our day.

We live in a day of wide solicitation. In fact, in many of our Christian organizations, which preach the gospel, what we really have is a group of professional beggars who have learned the way to extract money from people to carry on their work. That’s very hard language. I stand behind it, nevertheless. And I’m sure that in some ways they can find inconsistencies with me. I certainly would never want to say, “Look at me.” But nevertheless, as far as the word of God is concerned, and it’s my responsibility, I believe, to teach the word of God, that’s what the Scriptures suggest.

Sunday night, right here, the subject came up afterwards in a little conversation, and one of the men in this organization who’s not here tonight, said that he, himself, was very upset over that question. He has money. He has people who are always after him. He said, “How is it possible for us to discern the Lord’s blessing upon a work when we know from the fact of solicitations that if you sent out enough solicitations you always get response. So how can we know it’s really the Lord who has blessing us when we are simply following a worldly principle?” Well, that was his comment. I personally think that it’s a valuable and a true comment.

The collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem was a very important letter for Paul. If you look at the accounts, in the epistles in the Book of Acts, you’d see that he laid great

stress upon the Gentile Christians giving money to the poor saints in Jerusalem. There was a reason for this. First of all, there was a reason incidentally for the poor saints in Jerusalem being poor. And, no doubt, one of the reasons that they were poor was the fact that they sought to follow a kind of communistic system. And it’s not -- it is well known that that kind of voluntary communism, which they sought to follow, is something that does not work for the simple reason that men are sinners. And therefore it does not work, and it did not work. And that was one of the reasons that the saints in Jerusalem were needy.

Some of the people that have written on the point have made it very well. Charles Hodge for example, has said, “Voluntary Communism has always failed because perfect equality in goods requires perfect freedom from selfishness and indolence.” And then he went on to say, “It also requires a high degree of economic understanding, a quality that elected officials never have enough of.” John Calvin was right so he said when he perceived that private capitalism is the economic system that the Bible approves.

Why did Paul -- why was Paul so concerned about the collection, and that it should be given to the poor saints in Jerusalem? Well, put yourself in the first century and put yourself among the Jewish people. And in the midst of that situation, remember what the Christians were claiming had happened on the day of Pentecost and many of the Jewish individuals had turned to this new movement. Now, the question might come to a Jewish person, “Well, does the same kind of relationship that existed among Jewish people exist among them?” The apostle would have been very much concerned for those Christians and to be sure that they themselves recognized their debt to the mother church in Jerusalem. Because after all, it was through what happened on the Day of Pentecost and the work of our Lord in the city of Jerusalem and thereabouts, that the Christian Church had come into existence. And would the Gentile Christians to whom the gospel is now going through the Apostle Paul, would they remember and acknowledge the fact that they had a great debt to the believers in the city of Jerusalem who had suffered? And

then, secondly, a practical token to Jerusalem of the genuineness of the Gentile’s faith would be represented by the gifts that they sent back to Jerusalem to help the poor saints there. Those saints in Jerusalem would definitely say, “Well, those believers out among the Gentile world who are concerned about our physical and economical situation, must have the spirit of the Lord within them, to give themselves to gifts in order to help us.” And then further, the apostle apparently regarded this as a means of binding the Jewish and the Gentile Christians together. After all, they did form one body, and it was important for Paul to make that point in all of his letters, that the Church of Jesus Christ is one church and though it began as a Jewish body, nevertheless, now with the Gentiles who have become part of it, we are still one body of Jews and Gentiles in the body of Christ.

Perhaps one other thing that Paul might have been concerned about was that there was certain brotherliness in the ancient world. In the Greek world, for example, there were associations that were called [indistinct]. That term is a term that really means something like food but then it came to mean “society” or an “association.” And the associations were friendly associations, and they ministered to each other’s needs. And so this brotherliness that existed was something that the Christian church had as a standard for them. If a person fell on evil days or was in sudden need, his friends would get together to raise an interest free loan to help him. There was no Texas Bank of Commerce. They raised it themselves. And so they helped one another. And perhaps an illustration of that in the world was something that the Christians also felt was very useful. So all of these things contributed to make for Paul the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem very important.

Many of you know this in Believer’s Chapel, but the Chapel has always had the principle, I think from the beginning, to help those in the Chapel whom the elders have known are in financial difficulty. They’re not always, of course I’m sure -- I don’t know the history of all of this. There may be cases in which people were in difficulty and the

elders were unable to help them even though they may have wanted to. But they have helped down through the years. And many of you -- I don’t know whether anyone in the audience is there now, you know that from your own experience, that the elders, for the Chapel, have extended financial help for individuals. That is right in the line of what Paul talks about in the collection for the saints in Jerusalem.

At the beginning of how our study of 1 Corinthians, I made reference to fact that the Apostle was answering a letter which the Corinthians had written to him. That seems to be evident from the fact that a number of places in the epistle the apostle begins the statement by saying, “Now concerning.” We have it right here in Chapter 16 in Verse 1. “Now concerning.”

Evidently they had written him and given him specific questions, so he was answering these questions as well as writing this letter to them. “Now concerning,” and here again, “Now concerning the collection for the saints.” So evidently they had written him about this. What they said of course, we don’t know. But the subject had been brought up, maybe it was a thanks for what had been given to them, but, nevertheless, it’s here an indication of the apostle now dealing specifically with it. It has been said -- I have never checked this out, but I’ve seen it written by New Testaments students, that there are nine different words to describe the collection in the New Testament. So the apostle uses a number of words. He uses terms like “fellowship,” “grace,” itself. One of my first experiences with fellowship was many years ago when I was a young teacher at the seminary. I think I was teaching first year Hebrew. And I went to Toronto. I had been invited to speak there at a bible school. And when I finished giving the message in the morning, a older Christian man, a well-known and highly respected Bible teacher, came up to me and shook my hands and said, “Thank you for the message.” Then when he released his hand, I had a five or ten dollar bill in my hand. And he said, “Fellowship in the gospel.” And he was helping me in having a part in the ministries now with the Lord, a lovely believer that I got to know a little better some years after that.

But fellowship -- when Paul writes about the fellowship the Philippians had with him, he was talking about the gifts they had given to him.

So know concerning the collection for the saints. The saints, of course, were the Jerusalem ones, the foundation members of the body of Christ. The Corinthians, so Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2 in verse 19, “are now fellow citizens with those saints.” So what happens in the early church is that those saints who had come to the knowledge of the Lord and formed that first body permanently indwelt by the Holy Spirit have now had additions to them, and they make up the body of Christ. They have been adopted and now participate in the Abrahamic blessings and the blessing of the covenantal system of the Old Testament, the historical covenantal system. The Abrahamic, The Davidic, and the New Covenant and now as Gentiles are being converted, they become fellow citizens with them, so Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2 in verse 19.

“Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first *day* of the week” Sunday to Sunday. This is an amazing transformation. These are Jewish people primary in the earlier days of the Christian church. They observed the seventh day, but now the church is meeting on the first day of the week. That's one of the great arguments for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Only something so spectacular, so significant, so earth-shattering as a resurrection could cause a Jewish body of people to transform their day of worship from the seventh day to the first day. That, in itself, is evidence of the truthfulness of the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ historically. So Sunday by Sunday they are to store up -- the Greek text says “by himself,” that it by the side of himself. It's to be a private. Taking aside a sum of one's money, setting it aside and holding it for the saints in Jerusalem.

Now, in fact in their day-by-day -- week-by-week life. On the first day of the week, let each one of you lay something aside by one's self. It's private. It's done at home. It's not done at church. It's not passing the collection plate. Incidentally it's at

home, he says, by yourself. So far as I know, there’s no New Testament tradition for passing a collection plate in the Sunday morning meeting. Why is it done? Why is it necessary? Answer my questions, privately of course. It’s not necessary. Here’s a church - here’s one church, at least, and there is many others that been in existence thirty-two, - three years. They’ve never passed the collection Sunday morning -- no collection plate. You haven’t found one. It survived. I know we are a strange group of people, but it’s survived, nevertheless, without the collection. Lay aside by yourself. And as the offering plates are passed Sunday evening, in the Lord’s Supper for believers -- ah, then that’s an opportunity, a privilege, to give. So on the first day of the week, let each one of you lay aside something, storing up -- the word is literally “treasuring up” -- treasuring up as he may prosper. We know, of course, the first day of the week was observed because even after our Lord’s resurrection, you remember they started to meet on the first day of the week? John chapter 20. “They were gathered together,” verse 19, “on the first day of the week and our Lord appeared to them.” And again eight days -- seven days later -- eight days the Scriptures say. On Sunday again, when they were gathered together. They began to meet on the first day of the week. So that’s our great day, the first day of the week.

“As he may prosper,” now that means if we have money, we may have obligation. If we have no money, no obligation. In other words, giving is grounded in the principle of, as we may prosper.

In the second epistle in chapter 8 in verse 12, the apostle makes a similar kind of statement. There he says, “For if there is first a willing mind, *it is* accepted according to what one has, *and* not according to what he does not have.” In other words, giving as we prosper, as we have. We should not feel, if we have nothing that we are disobeying the Lord in some way, if we do not have something to give. As we may prosper.

There are some interesting things in the New Testament that have a lot to say about giving, one of the things is the widow. Do you remember her and her two mites? I

was not in Jerusalem when this took place, in spite of the fact that some of you realize I’m a very old man. I was not there in Jerusalem when this happened, but I understand in the temple area there stood thirteen chests, each with a brazen trumpet-shaped receiver into which the worshippers dropped their offerings. Nine of them were marked “For the Lord,” four of them were marked “For the Poor.” This was in the temple court in Jerusalem. So the widow comes with her two mites, and there, remembering of course, that she is the love of the Lord but loves her neighbor, she faced with the decision, what shall she do? Someone has said, “If she casts a mite into his chest, it will be known in heaven that one of the Lord lovers has been in the treasure that day. If she casts it into the box marked for the poor, it will show her care for her fellows. But it will -- will it not seem to place human need above divine worship?” So the solution she adopts is simple and costly, she will balance the claims of heaven and earth. She will put one the mites in one and another of the mites in the other, and with that all of her mites go. The individual that suggested that says, “that’s the arithmetic of heaven.

But when she dropped everything into the container, her last coin, all of her living, she gave herself to the Lord’s hands and absolute dependence of his care. For her living, for her life, what did she have? She was really poor, wasn’t she? All she had was the Lord alone. What a terrible place to be in. To be in a situation where all you have is the Lord. Now, we know of course -- we read the Bible. We know that’s not a terrible place to be. That’s the greatest place in the world to be, is to have the assurance of God’s care for us.

So as he may prosper. You’ll notice incidentally how interested Paul is in money and the handling of it. “And when I come, whomever you approve by *your* letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem.” The apostle is not going to put his hands upon that money. “But if it is fitting that I go also, they will go with me.” Evidently, they were to select some individuals who were to carry their gifts to Jerusalem. The apostle, because

he was going that way, might accompany them, but so far as he was concern, he did not put his hands upon that money. That’s not a bad principle for a preacher in a church.

This may be comforting for some on you. But in thirty-two years of association with Believer’s Chapel, I have never known what individuals in this congregation give. From the beginning and in previous ministry, too, I’ve always made it a principle -- I don’t -- I’m not taking credit for this -- it just came to me as the wisest thing to do -- to never know what people give. So if I look at you and you’ve given a big gift, and I don’t seem to recognize it, that is the reason. And if it’s a little gift, then I treat you the same as someone that has given a big gift. It’s not because I’m so great. I just don’t know. I don’t know. I never have known. I have sought to keep from knowing how much people give. I think that’s very important. I think it’s extremely important in a church. We are living in days in which scandals in the church are rampant over sex, money, and ministry of various kinds. You know, you read the papers. It’s all in the papers. It’s all in our periodicals. It’s there. You know about it as well as I.

The apostle was very careful about money. That was important for him. Now, he goes on to speak about his plans, what one has called plans, personalia, and exhortations in verse 4 through verse 9. “Now I will come to you when I pass through Macedonia (for I am passing through Macedonia).”

He had planned evidently to come north and come south through Macedonia down through Achaia, where Corinth was. And at another -- there is another indication that he may have changed his mind and taken a straight trip across the Agian from Ephesus to Achaia then went up through Macedonia and thus the Corinthians were disturbed a bit. Those who wanted to criticize him, and he had people there who wanted to criticize him, for his fickleness. But he speaks here of his desire as that which is on his mind at this point.

And it may be, he says “And it may be that I will remain, or even spend the winter with you, that you may send me on my journey, wherever I go. For I do not wish to see

you now on the way.” Now, what he means by that is I don’t want to have to stay briefly. The word really means something like in passing. He wants to have more of a contact with them. “... now on the way, but I hope to stay a while with you, if the Lord permits.”

In other words, it’s perfectly Pauline, perfectly apostolic to say, if the Lord wills. We know that from Gethsemane, where our Lord uses a similar expression. “But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries.”

Now, if you want to know what was happening to Paul at this time, just read the Book of Acts, for there in Acts chapter 19 and chapter 20, Luke describes some of the difficulties that Paul was experiencing in Ephesus with the silversmith Demetrius who decided that the kind of gospel that Paul was preaching was hurting their business. So he gathered all of the silversmiths together who were making all those little things to remember Diana of the Ephesians, it was affecting their silver business. They got together and decided that they had to do something about this. And as a result the apostle, as he says here, “had many adversaries there.” God worked that out in chapter 19 of the Book of Acts, but, nevertheless, the apostle had many adversaries. And if you want to read about them, they are described there by Luke.

Now, finally in the latter part of this section that we’ve taken, he writes concerning Timothy and Apollos Further comments concerning two important men, verse 10 through verse 12. And if Timothy comes -- now, that’s a strange statement. It might seem that way because in chapter 4 in verse 17 he has said that Timothy is coming. As a matter of fact, he says for this reason I have sent Timothy to you who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord who will remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach everywhere in every church. If Timothy should come. Well, there’s no contradiction. The apostle hopes, sends Timothy but, nevertheless, it can be written in this way. I won’t get into the details of that, but if he comes.

Notice what he says about Timothy. That's more interesting. See that he may be with you without fear. Why should Timothy expect to have fear there or possibly have fear? Well, Timothy, from what we know, was a very young person. In fact, Paul -- remember when he wrote Timothy, he said, Let no man despise your youth. And so he was a young person. And the tendency of older people is to take advantage of younger people, often not realizing that they're doing it. So Paul tells them, Let Timothy be with you without fear. It's possible also that he was a very diffident and unassertive kind of person like I was. I don't really know what I was. I'd have to ask somebody else, What were you? Well, I thought of myself as being unassertive.

But anyway what is evident is that Timothy might be misjudged by the careless and superficial and might have to suffer and so the apostle exhorts them to see that Timothy is with you without fear, encourage him, strengthen him. Why? Because, he says, he does the work of the Lord just as I also do. What a commendation for Timothy. What a great commendation for our -- for the apostle to say he does the work of the Lord just as I do.

Now, verse 11, therefore, let no one despise him but send him on his journey in peace that he may come to me, for I am waiting for him with the brethren.

The apostle needed young Timothy, evidently, and so he encourages them to treat him well and also to send him on his journey in peace, I need him. I'm waiting for him with the other brethren. And finally, in verse 12, now, concerning our brother Apollos. Notice the beginning, “now concerning.” That's, again, that same little expression. I'm not sure that the apostle had been asked a question about Apollos. Those other questions seem to be plain questions about the church, but this final parody may represent some question that had been asked about Apollos, now concerning Apollos. It may have been simply we've tried to get Apollos to come, and he won't come, and the apostle may be replying to something like that. But we don't know. There's no reason for thinking that. Now concerning our brother Apollos. Now, Apollos has loomed fairly large in 1

Corinthians. Remember back in chapter 1 in verse 12 we read, there were some in Corinth who were saying -- some of them were saying, I am of Paul. I am of Apollos. I am Cephas, or I am of Christ. So there were people in Corinth who had been greatly impressed by Apollos and had attached themselves to him. The characteristics of Christians is to do that. Have two or three preachers around, and there will be some people who say -- they may put it not like that. They won't say, I am of Donald Grey Barnhouse or I am of somebody else, but that's essentially what they mean when they say, Well, I like his preaching. I'm not too responsive to the preaching of someone else.

So Apollos there was a figure among the Corinthians. In chapter 3 in verse 4 through verse 6 you remember Paul wrote, For when one says I am of Paul and another I am of Apollos, are you not carnal? Who then is Paul and who is Apollos but ministers through whom you believed as the Lord gave to each one. I planted. Apollos watered. But it was God that gave the increase. It was not I. It was not Apollos. It was God who worked through his servants. Let us not forget that. We don't -- it's so easy to forget that because we are so -- well, shall I say, sinful.

Chapter 4, verse 6, Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. You can see from this that Paul's relationship with Apollos was very friendly. Even though people were dividing over the two, he and Apollos not only were getting along, but the apostle felt it perfect freedom to give thanks to Apollos and to also answer questions that may have arisen about him. And he says, I strongly urged him to come to you with the brethren, but he was quite unwilling to come at this time; however he will come when he has a convenient time.

Now, I suggest to you that that was typical of the apostle's attitude. It's something that all of us who are preachers should make every effort to make part of our own attitude to others who also teach the word.

Apollos was a great man. Listen to what Luke said about him. Acts chapter 18. “Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man *and* mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.” He was a man who did not understand what had really happened on Pentecost and the transformation in the church that had taken place. And so he spoke through the revelation, given through John the Baptist, and there he was. He stood there.

He goes on to say, “So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he desired to cross to Achaia (that’s where Corinth was), the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ.

They needed a man like Apollos in the synagogues in Corinth, and there he was. He was a man who helped those who had believed through grace. I love that expression, believed through grace.

Now, let me show you how a vast, I think, majority of the Christian faith today would have understood why and how Apollos had believed. They would say that Apollos helped those greatly who had believed through the exercise of their free will. It says here he believed -- he helped those who believed through grace. Now, if you know anything about -- we talked about this back when we were in maybe the fourth chapter. That was in the presiding dispensation, of course, but it's a long time back, isn't it? And I talked about semi Pelagianism. Pelagious the ancient heretic who believed that men could ultimately save themselves. The Christian church has been troubled with Pelagianism, but in the fifth century after Pelagious had been largely defeated, in the fifth century there was a reaction against the strict teaching of Augustan. And Augustan had

spoken very strongly against Pelagianism. And so in his strong teaching, there were some who reacted. And what resulted was what church historians call semi Pelagianism. The issue was when -- we might put it this way.

The issue was the beginning of faith. How does faith begin? How do we understand how faith begins? Do we understand it to begin with human beings? Do I understand it that faith begins with an act of human freedom? Or do we understand that faith begins with an act of God?

That's the point. There are those who still today believe that faith begins with an act of unaided human freedom although grace strengthens as a person in his act of unaided freedom turns to the Lord. Grace may strengthen. Augustan held that the will is prepared by God by prevenient grace. Now, if you're Latin student, you will remember that prevenial means to come beforehand. Prevenient means that which comes beforehand, antecedent grace. The grace of God is that which is responsible for our turning to the Lord, not our act of unaided human freedom because the act of unaided human freedom would trace our salvation to ourselves. Do we not see that? We make the first turn. There is within us the power to turn to the Lord. Grace may help us, but it's our act.

Now, the negative of that is horrible. God cannot act in the salvation of men until we act. How would you like a God like that? What kind of a God is it that cannot act until we act? A God whose omnipotence is defeated by the potency of the human will. This is the story of the grace of God that it was Luther in the reformation writing his great book. Every Christian ought to read the bondage of the will. If you have to work through it, slave through it, perspire through it, you ought to read it, because that was the point of his book, the whole point. It's right at the heart of the Protestant reformation that we are saved by grace -- by God's initial work in the hearts of his people. Those whom he has elected. Why people don't like the doctrine of election, I don't know. I love it. I love it. I am so grateful and thankful. And the older you get, you young people in this

audience, the more you will appreciate it. Apollos is a person who helped those who believed through grace, believed through grace. You don't understand the biblical salvation until you understand that fact. Once it grips your heart, once it transforms your heart, you will be a different person. Believe through grace. There's a whole lot that could be said about this, and I won't try to go into it now because I've said essentially this over and over with some of you. This pivotal position of Pelagianism, the priority of the human will and salvation as over against the priority of God is the whole point of preaching the gospel of the grace of God. And I'm thankful to God for the shaft of light from the Holy Spirit that came to my mind and caused me to understand what had happened to me. I didn't really know what had happened to me for a good while. And then when I came to understand this, I then understand what -- I understood what happened to me back when I was in the insurance business listening to the preaching of Donald Grey Barnhouse. So Apollos, the apostle had the greatest of love for that great man of God who helped those who had believed through grace, not through free will. The world believes in free will. You find it on our -- the pages of our newspapers constantly, Jim Wright of the Dallas Morning News, I remember a few years back he had to offer for himself a defense of free will on the editorial page. It was a Saturday, I believe. I've got it in my file somewhere -- as if it's the truth, the doctrine of free will, because everybody seems to believe it except Christians. And even in the Christian church, it's a minority understand what salvation through grace really is. Thank God for the grace of God.

I give credit for Charles Haddon Spurgeon, too. I started reading his sermons back in the 1940s. That's 50 years ago almost. I imagine I've read as many as -- I know I've read more than you people. You haven't been long enough in this life to read as many as I have, but that was the great theme of Mr. Spurgeon's preaching, and that's what made him the greatest preacher of the gospel in the 19th and early twentieth -- the 19th century really.

So let me sum up. I've got five minutes here. The service of giving and its joy is what the apostle speaks about. I want to tell you an illustration. I gave this some time back, but it's such a great little story that I think it's worth repeating, and it certainly applies to us. It has to do with two people who were touring Korea. These two businessmen were touring Korea. And as they were traveling along, they happened to see a field out in the side, and they saw an old man pulling a plow, a rude plow, and an old man held the handles. And the young man was pulling the plow, and the old man behind was following along directing. Well, the lawyer and the missionary -- well, the lawyer and the businessman were in the toll of a missionary who was the interpreter. And the lawyer was amused. He took a snapshot of the scene. So that's a curious picture. Supposedly very poor he said to the missionary. The missionary said, yes, that's the family of Chi Buoy (phonetic). When the church was being built, they were eager to give something to it so they sold their only ox, gave money to the church. This spring they're pulling the plow themselves. Then the businessman said, That must have been a real sacrifice. The missionary said, They didn't call it a sacrifice. They thought it was fortunate that they had the ox to sell.

The lawyer and the businessman had not much to say but when they reached home, the lawyer took the picture to the minister of his church, sat down, told him about it. He said I want to double my pledge. There it is. There's the word "pledge." I want to double my pledge to the church, he said. Give me some plow work, please. It's the kind of a message that really comes home to us.

General Gordon was one of the greatest of the British generals, brilliant service in China. He declined all of the money, all of the titles that had been -- that had been offered him. He accepted only one thing. He accepted -- Christian man. He accepted only one thing. He accepted a metal on which there was inscribed the record of his 33 military engagements. After his death the metal couldn't be found. Eventually, it was learned that he had sent it to Manchester during a severe famine in that city in England,

and he had directed that it should be melted down and used to buy bread for the poor. And under the date of the sending, these words were found written in his diary. The last earthly thing I had in this world that I valued I've given to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, the women who gave her mites and had nothing left has company in the Lord's ministry. There are people like that. A few days ago -- that clock's moving slowly. A few days ago Martha and I received a pizza box through the mail. It's a little small. It wasn't a full like this. And I looked at it and wondered what it was. It was light, and so I opened it up. And what do you know? It was a pizza box, supposedly, but what it was was a gift from the seminary -- one of the seminaries, one of the three or four at which I've taught. And in it there was a glossy menu in which were such things as food for 25 or food for 50 is so many dollars and so forth, and then an encouragement for me to give the amount that was represented by the pizza box. New idea to give, working on -- I don't know what. It was ludicrous to me that a theological seminary should send this out to all of their men on their list, all of people on their list and suggest that instead of buying a pizza for themselves or for a group of people or for a whole body of people, like, for all of you, that I send the money into the theological seminary. It was embarrassing.

Errors and excesses of professed evangelicals have led to great harm in biblical works. Jim Bakker, Swaggart, various others, I won't mention them all, but Time Magazine, August the 3rd of 1987 described this and those things as a serial of sex, cash, and power. David Hubbard of Fuller Theological Seminary remarked, quote, skeptics have fuel for their fires. They may see this as reflecting on the excesses of the whole evangelical movement. He was absolutely right. We do. We do. We are embarrassed. It hurts the cause of Jesus Christ. One or two individuals who will trust the Lord, the Lord alone, and find the Lord sufficient will be more of an advertisement for the grace of God than hundreds of people, thousands of people in the Lord's work who beg and plead like the people in the world. May God deliver us from that kind of thing. Let's bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for the Apostle Paul. We're thankful for the men of that day who gave themselves wholeheartedly to the gospel and trust Thee -- trusted Thee for the supply of their needs.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.