



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 18:1-17; 2 Corinthians 1:1-2

“Paul and the Church at Corinth”

TRANSCRIPT

We are beginning today, a series of expositions in 2 Corinthians. And the Scripture reading today is Acts chapter 18, verse 1 through verse 17, and then we'll read the first two verses of 2 Corinthians chapter 1. So turn with me to Acts chapter 18. We'll read verse 1 through verse 17. The apostle is on his second missionary journey. I'm sure you who learned missionary journeys of Paul in your Sunday school may remember. And he has just come from Athens. And Luke now, in verse 1 of chapter 18 writes,

“After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.” (That word probably means something like leather workers.)

“And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” That clause, pressed in the spirit because of a textual problem may be rendered perhaps more accurately

wholly absorbed in preaching. So at that point, he became wholly absorbed in preaching, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Messiah.

“And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. And he drove them from the judgment seat. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.”

Now, we turn over and read just the first two verse of 2 Corinthians chapter 1. 2 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 1 and 2. I'd like for you to notice carefully this salutation because we will spend a few moments on it near the end of the message, which today will be something of an introduction to the series of expositions on 2 Corinthians.

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:”

We know there was a church at Cenchreae which was the port of Corinth but beyond that, we’re not sure of other churches in that part of the land of Greece. Of course, in the northern part of the land, there were a number of churches: Thessalonica, Philippi, Beroea, and so on. So evidently at least, the church at Cenchreae, as well as the church at Corinth, is included in that opening statement. And then verse 2,

“Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

I won’t say anything about this because we’ve said this a number of times, but you’ll notice that grace and peace for the apostle come, not simply from God the Father but come from the Lord Jesus Christ. Which is a very clear indication of the fact that the apostle identified the Son of God as the source of divine grace, coequal with the Father in that respect. May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. And let’s bow together now in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege that is ours today to study the Scriptures, to come to understand better the revelation concerning our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to worship Thee more harmoniously with Thy mind and will as set forth in Thy word. We rejoice in the privilege that is ours. What a marvelous thing it is for us to be able to gather and to address our petitions and aspirations directly to Thee through our mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. We’re surely blessed.

We worship Thy name. We exalt Thee as the redeemer, our refuge, our strength, our Lord and our God.

We pray Thy blessing upon the ministry of the word of God today, not simply in Believer’s Chapel, but wherever the word of God goes forth in its purity. Wherever men proclaim the soul efficiency of the Triune God in human salvation. We praise Thee for the revelation of that marvelous truth and for the way in which it has gripped our hearts and the way in which it has caused us to burst forth in praise for the grace shown to us who are sinners and rebels.

We pray, Lord, that the ministry of the Word of God through the Chapel may have the hand of the blessing of the Triune God upon it. Bless the ministry here and the Sunday school and the other forms of outreach, over the radio, through the printed page, through the Bible classes. Lord, we ask Thy blessing upon Thy word. We pray Thy blessing upon our elders and our deacons, the members, the friends, the visitors who are here today. May we each grow today in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and may it be reflected in the life that we live this week.

We praise Thee now for the privilege of singing, of meditating, of hearing the word. We pray that Thou blessing may be upon those who are unable to be with us, whose names are in the calendar of concern, for some who are ill and sick and some who are bereaved. Lord, we pray for them. Encourage them. Comfort them. May the experiences of our lives cause us to lean more and more upon Thee.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today, which is the first of our series of studies in 2 Corinthians is Paul and the church at Corinth. One might ask reasonably, the question, “Why study 2 Corinthians?” Well, a simple answer could go something like this: In the first place, 2 Corinthians is the most emotional of the apostle’s letters and, in many ways, gives us a remarkable picture of the apostle’s personality. In fact, when you read the epistle, you can catch some of that particular fact because it’s very abrupt and rugged in its style. For example, if you read this in the Greek text, you’d probably be surprised to

find that it’s one of the more difficult of the Pauline letters to read due to the fact that the apostle was obviously quite upset over a number of things that had happened. It affected his ministry, and it reflects itself in the language in which he wrote to the Corinthians this time. It’s furthermore, and as a direct result perhaps of that, his most personal letter, very autobiographical. Just for one touch of that, one can read chapter 11 and notice the description of the many experiences that characterized his life. If you’re interested in understanding Paul the man, 2 Corinthians would be one of the finest sources of that. And, also, in addition to these facts, it is in many places, one of his really distinctively doctrinal epistles.

For example, one of the finest of the chapters on the relationship between the Mosaic Law and the liberty of the Christian in the present day is found in 2 Corinthians. It’s the one epistle of Paul that gives us the finest insight into the intermediate state, the state of believers between the time of their death and the time of their bodily resurrection. It’s an epistle which gives us some specific information, perhaps more than anywhere else, of the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, before which all of us who are believers are required to stand some day.

It’s the epistle of the particular redemption of the Lord Jesus Christ set out so beautifully in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, where the apostle also deals quite extensively with the doctrine of reconciliation and even justification. That chapter is one of the greatest of the doctrinal chapters in the Pauline writings. It’s the epistle which speaks, most specifically, concerning the doctrine of Christian separation and gives us a great deal of understanding of that particular issue. It’s the greatest of the Pauline writings on the subject of Christian giving. It probably is Oral Roberts’ most neglected letter, and these chapters are illustrations of that.

And then, of course, probably everyone who thinks about 2 Corinthians and has read it very much, will realize that here is Paul’s description of what Christian ministry is all about. It’s a defense of his own ministry, a defense of his apostleship, a defense of all

that he felt that God had spoke to him about and had called upon him to preach to the Gentiles.

Corinth must have been a very interesting city. It has been called by someone, the “Vanity Fair of the Ancient World,” the “Paris of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century.” To travel from Athens to Corinth, as the apostle did in this second missionary journey, was like going from Oxford to London or like going from Charleston to Dallas.

So one traveled from the place where the intellect was supreme to the place where the flesh and carnality showed. If Athens was a center of clouded light, well, Corinth was full of sensuality. Commercially, it was the hub of the commerce of the region. Men called Corinth the “bridge of Greece” for the simple reason that it was located on the isthmus -- that’s a hard word to pronounce, right? That, I did it fairly well that time. I will try to avoid it in the future and speak simple of the bridge of Greece because that little strip of land which connected northern Greece from the Peloponnesus was the place where Corinth was located: one gulf on one side, another gulf on the other side. And so consequently, commerce, in order to pass from the north to the south or south to the north, had to pass through Corinth. And because the southern tip of Greece was so dangerous for maritime traveling, in fact, that place called Malea. It was said concerning Malea as a proverb, “If you’re going to sail around Malea, you’d need to make your will before you leave.” So many people, in order to avoid that, crossed Greece where the city of Corinth was. It was therefore one of the places where commercial life flourished.

Morally, Corinth was a deprived and debauched place. In fact, the very term, “Corinthiatci,” which meant specifically, originally, to live as a Corinthian, came to mean to lust. So to live as a Corinthian, meant to live that kind of carnal lust for life. In fact, on the Greek stages of the theaters, whenever a Corinthian was seen, he was usually shown to be a drunk because that was the general impression that people have of Corinthians.

Spiritually, it was headquarters for the worship of Aphrodite. A hundred and fifty or so years before the time of Christ, the temple of Aphrodite there is said to have had one thousand prostitutes who were attached to the temple, through which individuals who worshipped Aphrodite could worship by engaging in sexual intercourse. At night, the harlots went down to the city, and there they plied their trade.

Now, in Paul’s day, the city had been destroyed but, nevertheless, so far as we can tell, it was very much the same. The apostle refers to the Corinthians in the first epistle in chapter 6, describing something of their previous life, and he describes it in this way. He says, “Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, no adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor coveters, no drunkards, nor revelers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such, were some of you.”

So this is a description of what many of the Corinthians were before the gospel came to them, and they were cleansed. He went on to say, “But you have been washed, but you have been sanctified, but you have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God.”

The city then was rebuilt by Caesar in 46 B.C. but the temple was still there and, so far as we know then, Corinth was a very wicked city. It was from Corinth that Paul wrote Romans and from Gaius’ house, looking out over the city, he had all of the inspiration that he could possibly have needed to write those chapters in Romans 1 and 2, in which, the sin of men is so realistically set forth.

When Paul reached Corinth, if someone had said, “There is the most important man who has ever visited our city,” surely, the people who heard a person say something like that would have said, “He’s mad,” but it was true. When the apostle came to Corinth, that city saw its greatest, most famous visitor, and there’s never been one like it since who came to the city of Corinth.

Now today, in the time that we have because we don’t have a whole lot of time to do what I would like to do, I want to turn to Acts chapter 18 so that we can review Paul’s ministry when he came there. And then I want to spend a little time on Paul and the Corinthians and try to set up, as briefly as I can, the correspondence that Paul had with the Corinthians because it’s very interesting. Actually 2 Corinthians, for example, is really 4 Corinthians, so far as we know, from the New Testament. Paul may have written other letters but we know of four letters that he wrote to the Corinthians. Now, two are found in the New Testament but other two existed because Paul makes reference to them in these two letters. So we are calling this 2 Corinthians because this is the second of the epistles that has been preserved for us, inspired by God the Holy Spirit. The other two, the first and the third, were evidently not inspired by the Holy Spirit, not preserved for that reason, not necessary for us, in order to live to the glory of God. So I want to spend a few moments on that so that we can reconstruct in our minds, just exactly his contact with the Corinthians and the letters that he wrote to them because, after all, I want you to read 2 Corinthians like some of you read Amos. But, I’ll warn you right now, we want you to read 2 Corinthians but won’t set a specific time.

But I’ll read the original text and you read the English text. If you want to read the original text, that’s fine, too, but at any rate, we want to read the epistle together because I think that we will get a whole lot more out of it if we do. And then finally, this morning, I’d like to say just a few words about some of the leading things that one is introduced to by the first two verses of 2 Corinthians chapter 1.

Now, turning for a moment to Acts chapter 18 in verse 1 through verse 17, the apostle came to Corinth on his second missionary journey. He had traveled through the north of Greece, Philippi, Thessalonica, Beroae, Athens and leaving friends in various places, he had arrived in Corinth alone and very anxious. We know that not from Acts. We know that from 1 Thessalonians, as he speaks in those epistles, particularly the first letter, of some of the feelings that he had concerning the ministry that he had just

completed. There are three stages in his ministry in Corinth. Verse 1 through verse 4 describes the first stage. Verse 5 and 6, the second stage. And verse 7 through 11, the third stage.

When Paul arrived there, he came into contact with Aquila and Priscilla. They were Christians, not only Christians, but outstanding Christians. Almost everywhere they went, there was soon a church in their home. So they were not only Christians, but they entertained the saints. They were illustrations of hospitable saints. The apostle came into contact with them. They were practicing the same trade that he was. They were leather workers, and so we read that he came to them, he abode with them, and he worked together with them. But on the Sabbath days, he went into the synagogue. You can see, incidentally, how Paul got a foothold in the cities in which he preached. He wasn’t a clergyman. He wasn’t called to a church, there to be the pastor. There isn’t any such thing as that in the New Testament. One can read the New Testament through and not find that at all. He was a man gifted of God, gifted in his case with the gift of apostleship. He came into the city. It was, incidentally, improper for a scribe or a rabbi to take pay for one’s teaching. And the apostle, as a general rule, avoided any of that and never took pay for his teaching. He did accept some gifts that were given him by the Philippians and some others.

In fact, the rabbis taught that if one did not teach his child a trade, it was as if he were a thief. And so the idea of appealing for funds in order to support ministry which you alone say is from God, which is so characteristic of evangelicalism today -- the extremes found across the Red River to the north -- is thoroughly incompatible with the teaching of the New Testament, and I challenge you to find any of it in the word of God.

On the Sabbath days, the apostle went into the synagogue and there he reasoned, we read, in the synagogue every Sabbath. And he sought to persuade the Jews and the Greeks. There is an interesting variant reading in the western text of the New Testament. The western text is probably an inferior text, but it contains some rather striking variant

readings, some of which may be genuine. But in verse 4, the western text reads this way, “And he was reasoning in the synagogue every Sabbath inserting the name of the Lord Jesus.” Think of that. “Inserting the name of the Lord Jesus and he sought to persuade the Jews and the Greeks.” Paul was trying to persuade the Jews and the Greeks.

Now, think of that clause for a moment. “Inserting the name of the Lord Jesus.” Whether that was something that Luke wrote or not, it probably is a true reflection of Paul’s method of exposition because it reflects what we know of Pauline preaching and teaching. For example, the apostle, so far as we can tell, when he preached, he gave what we would call, the history of salvation. He looked back in the Old Testament at the flow of divine history and particularly with reference to the promises of the Messiah who was to come, and then he linked with those prophecies of the Old Testament, the historical fulfillment in the life and events of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

So we can imagine the apostle rambling through the Old Testament and at specific messianic passages, inserting the name of the Lord Jesus, therefore, showing how those passages were fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ. So while I doubt that that’s a reference that is inspired of the Holy Spirit, it probably is true to the method of his preaching.

Now, when Paul described his preaching to the Corinthians in his first letter, he said when he was in Corinth, he determined not to know anything among them, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified. So he, in effect, says much the same thing. I was concerned to preach to you, one central message. The Lord Jesus Christ and the Lord Jesus Christ as crucified. That participle in the Greek text may be rendered that way because it doesn’t have the article. That is, he preached Christ as a crucified Messiah. And that would thoroughly accord with opening the Scriptures, reading them, expounding the prophecies of the Old Testament, and then showing how they were fulfilled in a crucified Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. So he did that Sabbath after Sabbath.

Then we read in verse 5 and verse 6 that Silas and Timothy, who had been left north, came south. And Paul, at that point, began to become wholly absorbed in preaching. Now, I imagine that what that means is that Paul was freed from the leather working to do simply preaching. Evidently -- and this is speculative -- evidently, Silas and Timothy brought some financial gifts to the apostle which freed him for a time. And so he gave himself wholly to the Word of God. As we suggested, the phrase in the Greek text probably should be rendered, wholly absorbed in preaching. So Paul became, quote, “full-time,” unquote. That’s a very poor description of any Christian because after all, all of us are full-time workers for Christ. You, who are in business or in your profession or you who labor with your hands, you are full-time for Christ, if you’re a Christian. So there isn’t any such thing as a full-time worker. The apostle was a full-time worker from the beginning in that general sense. But here, evidently, having some extra money, and perhaps extra support, he was able to give himself wholly to the preaching of the Lord of God.

Now, the apostle was a man who not only held the truth, but the truth held him, which is even better. And so he gave himself specifically to that, and he testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. Now, the Jews didn’t mind you taking passages from the Old Testament and speaking generally about them. That is, you could turn to passages that were messianic. As a matter of fact, the Targums insert the name Messiah in several of the passages of the Old Testament in the Aramaic paraphrases. In Isaiah chapter 42, the term “Messiah” is inserted. In Isaiah chapter 52 in verse 13, the term “messiac” is inserted, messhiac in the Aramaic -- inserted in those places. They were doing that. That was common to look at a passage, see that it had to do with the Messiah and even in the paraphrases, insert the term. So that was all right. As long as Paul stuck to the theology - - stayed with the theology of the thing, that was all right, but when he then made the identification of messica or the messhiac with Jesus of Nazareth, that is when things blew up.

And so he taught that Jesus was the Messiah and when they opposed themselves and blasphemed, he shook his raiment and said to them, “Your blood be upon your own heads. I’m clean. From henceforth, I will go to the Gentiles. And he departed thence and he entered into a certain man’s house named Justus, one who worshipped God whose house” -- notice where the house was. It was right next to the synagogue. Now, you can understand that the apostle might have been concerned over that. And, in fact, when he wrote the Corinthians he said, “I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.” That’s one of the reasons why. He was right next to the synagogue, and they would have liked nothing better than to put Paul to death if they possibly could do it as has history later on indicates. So right by the synagogue, amid much trembling, no wonder about it, the apostle continued his ministry. He was wholly absorbed in preaching. And look at what happened. Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue. He was what we would have called, an administrative head. He was like, in the Presbyterian church, the clerk of the session. He wasn’t a preacher. But he was one responsible for the life of the synagogue. And he was converted. Paul refers to him in his Corinthian correspondence. He believed in the Lord with all his house and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and in testimony to their faith, they were baptized. But the official, an official board member converted. Think of it. Why, official board members are not supposed to be converted, are they? They’re just religious.

Now, one of the great privileges I’ve had is baptizing elders. That is, elders who were elders but were not converted, and then became converted. That’s a great privilege. Testimony to the power of God. So Crispus was saved and was baptized. And, further, the apostle, trembling, no doubt worrying about his physical safety, so the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by vision and said, “Don’t be afraid, Paul, but speak and don’t hold your peace.” I can imagine Paul saying, “I understand clearly what you’re saying, but it’s easy to say fair enough, but I should have a good reason for it.” And the Lord gave him that. He said, “For I am with thee.”

So the one who swept the midnight from Thomas’ soul, can sweep despair from Paul’s soul and from others who find, in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, reason to tremble in fear. And God went on to say to Paul. He said, “No man shall set on thee to hurt thee because I have much people in this city.” Now, that doesn’t mean there already are a lot of people converted. That isn’t what the Lord was talking about. He’s saying, “I still have a good many more that have not yet been converted, and that’s why you need to keep on preaching.” In other words, this is a clear reference to the fact that God had elected individuals who were living in the city of Corinth who had not yet come to faith in Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus, in John chapter 10 speaks similarly when he said, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold. Them also, I must bring. And they shall hear my voice and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.”

So the Lord doesn’t send his saints out to preach to the wind. Now, that applies to you who are in the congregation who are businessman or a housewife or a worker in an office. You don’t preach to the wind when you testify to the Lord Jesus Christ. You have the assurance that God has his instrumentalities, his instruments, his agents by which he is reaching men and women for the Lord Jesus Christ. What more wonderful thing could you do than be an instrument of the Lord like the apostle Paul in the preaching of Christ? So preach him, wherever you are. Testify to him and see God work to glorify His name.

Now, Paul stayed in Corinth, we read, for eighteen months. Then he went on to Jerusalem, went up to Antioch, stayed there for a while, and from Antioch again, his third missionary journey. He eventually reached Ephesus and stayed there for three years. Ephesus, across the Aegean Sea, to the east, Corinth to the west.

The occasion of the first letter to the Corinthians may be put in this way. At Ephesus, when Paul was there, hearing about things in Corinth, he wrote 1 Corinthians. Now, not the 1 Corinthians of the New Testament but the first Corinthian letter that we know that Paul wrote. Paul refers to it in 1 Corinthians 5. He speaks about a letter that

he’d already written them. That letter was a letter that was primarily directed, so far as we can tell, against the sexual fornication that characterized the area and characterized some in the church. He writes about it in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. So 1 Corinthians, we don’t have. 1 Corinthians that we do have is second Corinthians. Isn’t that nice? That’s something you have to remember. Now, the apostle heard further about things in Corinth and so hearing about the party spirit from Chloe and then hearing from others about other problems, like illicit sex and marriage and meat sacrificed to idols and certain doctrinal questions, wrote another letter. This letter is second Corinthians, but it’s 1 Corinthians in our Bible. So Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to answer a number of questions that had arisen and to deal with the party spirit that had developed in Corinth. Some people saying, “I’m of Paul.” Others saying, “I like Peter’s preaching.” Another, “I love Apollos. He can preach so beautifully. Why, his language is just like a southerner preaching. And so intellectual. So eloquent.” And then others who said, “All these people follow the party line. I am of Christ.” And of course, probably should be understood to be that way, too. But at any rate, Paul dealt with that in 1 Corinthians; that is, in our Scripture’s 1 Corinthians. But it really was second Corinthians.

Now, Paul had planned to visit Corinth. He said in 1 Corinthians chapter 16. He had planned to visit Corinth by way of Macedonia and he planned to winter in Corinth, so he said. But he modified his plan. And so some of the enemies in Corinth said, “You see, Paul’s a fickle fellow. He changes his mind all the time. How can you say that he’s following God’s guidance when one time he says this and another time he says that?”

So people were upset. They began to doubt his apostleship. So far as we can tell, some individuals came from Palestine, not Gnostic, not Judaizers, but Palestinian Jews, evidently, who wanted to suggest that the apostles in Jerusalem were the only true apostles, although the Corinthian church had been founded by the apostle’s preaching.

At any rate, he modified his plan to visit Corinth and decided that he would go to Corinth, go to Macedonia, come back by Corinth, visit Corinth twice. But troubling news

led him to make an urgent visit to Corinth. That was his second visit to Corinth. And the question that arose was the question of his apostolic authority.

After that visit, he was very much disturbed over the situation in Corinth, and we know that he wrote them a stinging letter; that is, a letter in which he was very critical of the things that were happening there. That letter is described, or referred to in 2 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 3 and 4. It was carried by Titus. But after Paul sent it off, he began to be very sorry that he had written it. Perhaps, it was something a little bit out of the will of God. Apostles can make mistakes, too. At any rate, it hasn’t been preserved for us. We probably should not speculate about it, but he began to be sorry he had sent it. And so he was so anxious to see what Titus would say, he took the stinging letter and so he went to Troas because that was the way that Titus was to go to Macedonia, and then he would come to Troas. And so Paul went to Troas, and, evidently, was in the fall, and he waited for Titus there. I can imagine Paul hanging around the harbor, looking for all of the boats that came from Philippi and Macedonia, and checking them all to see if they had in them, a fellow by the name of Titus. But he waited and waited, and Titus didn’t come, and finally he was told, and this was common knowledge, it’s too cold for any boats to be plying the Aegean now. If Titus comes, he’ll come by land. And so Paul made his way from Troas up toward Macedonia, and there he came into contact with Titus, and Titus brought him good news. Good news of the reception of his letter in Corinth and of the things that they had done, and, in fact, one person who had been so diligent to undermine Paul – undermine Paul’s authority, had been dealt with so severely by the Corinthians, that the apostle in 2 Corinthians, which is now fourth Corinthians, says that, perhaps, they should deal more easily with that individual. So he writes 2 Corinthians from Macedonia, praising the Lord for the things that have happened, vindicating his ministry and his apostolic authority, and dealing with some other questions as well.

So there you are. Four letters Paul wrote, two inspired, the second and the fourth, known as our first and second. We’ll let it drop at that, but we’ll call second Corinthians, 1 Corinthians, as the Scriptures say. And we’ll call the fourth Corinthian letter 2 Corinthians, and you have my permission now to forget those other things, except it makes it much clearer to understand some of the things that Paul says here.

Let’s turn to the salutation for just a moment. A couple of things I’d like to stress before we close our meeting today. All of the big issues are raised right here in this opening salutation, but, of course, rather briefly, and somewhat aside – in an aside. “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.”

Now, the very fact that Paul calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ is, to my mind, exceedingly significant. The epistle has the fullest, most passionate account of what apostle means. No one would ever have chosen to be an apostle if he knew what an apostle was, just as no one would chose to be a Christian if he really knew what a Christian faced. But God makes Christians, and God makes apostles. And in Paul’s case, he suffered greatly, but he counted it all for joy, to do what God had called him to do. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ. The rest of the epistle will detail in full what it means to be an apostle and we’ll stress that fact and what it means on a number of places, especially in the latter part of the epistle. So he was an apostle of Jesus Christ.

That’s the source of his apostleship, his relationship to the Lord. He is an apostle, not from human origin, he’s not one of Oral’s five apostles, Oral being one, his son Richard being the second, and three others. Oral pronounces and appoints apostles and carries on a lot of other things, too. But the apostle of the New Testament is not that kind of an apostle. This is an apostle of Jesus Christ. He’s not a Kenneth Copeland. He’s not a Kenneth Hagin, he’s not a Jimmy Swaggart. He’s not an Oral Roberts or a Richard Roberts. The apostle is an apostle of Jesus Christ, appointed by him by of the sovereign authority of the second person of the trinity.

Later on in this epistle, he’ll talk about false apostles. People claimed to be apostle in --apostles in Paul’s day. Listen to what he says, “Such are false apostles. Deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel, for Satan himself has transformed into an agent -- angel of light. Therefore, it’s no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose ends shall be according to their works.” Many people think that an emissary of Satan standing in the pulpit is a kind of person who has a long tail which he hides beneath the pulpit itself. And that if you could actually see him outside the pulpit, you’d actually see a long tail. But that’s all false. A man who is an apostle of Jesus Christ is entirely different from that kind of individual. That kind of individual looks as if he were a righteous man. He opens the Bible, and he comments upon the Bible. He reads the text in the morning service, but that’s a far cry from being an apostle of Jesus Christ. False apostles. They parade as ministers of righteousness, not wickedness. And so the apostle calls himself an apostle of Jesus Christ and by the will of God, not by the will of man. The apostle considered himself to be divinely chosen and divinely appointed by the Lord Jesus Christ in Greece. And in this fact lies his authority.

It’s no wonder that the apostle preached the grace of God. You know, when men think of the great Protestant Reformation that took place in the sixteenth century, you’ll find many men, outstanding scholars -- When I went through college, one of the men whose writings I studied was Charles Beard, very famous American historian. Every encyclopedia of American history will have a long article about Charles Austin Beard, well-known in his day as one of the leading historians. Professor Beard says that the Protestant Reformation can be described in this way, “It was the substitution of one set of theological doctrines for another set of theological doctrines. And that explains the Reformation.” Well, of course, that’s true. It was the substitution of one set of theological doctrines for another, but oh, the difference between them. One of them was a dead set of theological doctrines that never could bring life to the Christian church. The other was

a set of theological doctrines that was spiritual dynamite and did bring life and relationship to God through the preaching of them.

Luther the monk represents one; Luther the reformer represents the other. These two men, Luther the monk and Luther the reformer, are two entirely different men. They’re not the same men. When Luther talked, he didn’t say, “We are men who are seeking to know the truth concerning the way of salvation.” Luther, when he wrote to Erasmus, he said, “We propound assertions.” Now, Erasmus was a lovely man, a very gifted man, a very marvelous handler of literary Latin. He wrote in the finest of style. Even Luther, when he read his book on free will, he had to say, “My, such beautiful Latin, such beautiful style. The only thing is, it’s not Scripture.” So Luther in his blunt way – he wrote pretty good Latin but couldn’t compare with Erasmus’ Latin. Erasmus was very disturbed by Luther. He said, “You’re making assertions.” And Luther said, “Yes, I make assertions.” He said, “To say you have no pleasure in assertions is one way of saying, Erasmus, that you’re not a Christian. Take away assertions, and you take away Christianity.” So it’s what we say. We give forth assertions. That is, truths about the Lord God. And if we don’t give forth truths about our Lord God, we’re not talking about Christianity at all. We’re not speculating. We’re giving forth truths concerning the way of salvation. Assertions, I do believe in assertions. Luther was absolutely right.

When he says here that -- when the apostle says here that he is an apostle by the will of God, he expresses exactly what the Bible teaches concerning the way of salvation, too. The way of salvation is not by the will of man, the way of salvation is through the will of God, who, out of his sovereign determinant will, transforms human will. When we say that we are saved, not by free will, but by the sovereign grace of God, we’re not saying man doesn’t have a will. We don’t need an Erasmus, and we don’t need anyone else to tell preachers of the grace of God that we have a will, that we are men. We are men. We have wills. We have a mind. We have hands. We have feet. We don’t need anybody to tell us that. We’re talking, however, about sinful men. We’re talking about

sin and grace, not about human nature. We all have wills, and we’re responsible to decide. The question is, “From whence comes the decision of the will?” And it was the contingent of the Romanists, that it came from man’s human free will. And they possessed that authority. “That,” Luther said, “destroyed the grace of God.” And Luther was right. For he was giving simply what Paul said, and what Augustine said about sin and grace.

Listen to what he says. This is Luther. He says, “For when they could not deny that we must be saved by the grace of God and could not elude the truth, then empowered sought out another way of escape, pretending that although we cannot save ourselves, we can, nevertheless, prepare for being saved by God’ grace. What glory remains to God, I ask, if we’re able to procure that we should be saved by his grace? Does this seem a small ability, that he who has no grace shall nevertheless, have power enough to obtain grace when he wishes? What is the difference between that and saying with the Pelagian -- That is, those who believe just in works, you don’t need any grace at all -- saying with the Pelagian that we’re saved without grace? Since you place the grace of God within the power of man’s will. You seem to me, to be worse than Pelagius since you put in the power of man, the necessary grace of God, the necessity of which he, the Pelagians simply denied. I say, it seems less envious wholly to deny grace than to represent it as secured by our effort and zeal and to put it thus in our power.” That’s why, when the Protestant Reformers and all of them taught the same thing, Luther, Calvin, Beza, et cetera. They all taught that we’re saved by the sovereign grace of God, that God is the efficient source of human salvation and listen. If that ever grips your heart, will you sit by your desk, in your chair, by your bedside, one of the things that you cannot help doing is to turn to the Lord God in heaven and say, “O God, I praise Thee for the light that shone into my darkened soul, my sinful soul, and cause me to see how to save through grace, sinners.” If you have that, you’ll be a follower of Paul and of Augustine

and of Luther and of Calvin and of Spurgeon, and of that great company of men who’ve understood the pure grace of God.

Now, let me say negatively, in love. This truth in evangelicalism is largely lost today, unfortunately, largely lost. We say we are saved by grace. We deny it by saying we’re saved by the decision of our free wills. May God keep us from that view of divine salvation. So Paul says -- I imagine we’ll have a few things more to say about that as we go through 2 Corinthians, so we’ll drop it now -- the apostle says that he’s an apostle by the will of God and he writes to the church of God, not of the bishop, not of the Presbyterian, not of the preacher, but the church of God, and he wishes to them the grace of the theology of God’s great reformation. May God help us to understand it, to love it, and to preach it with whomever we come into contact. If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we remind you the Scriptures assert that we are all sinners and fall short of the glory of God. But through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shed his blood for sinners, we offer as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus, forgiveness of sins through the saving cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. If God has pierced your mind and heart to cause you to see that you’re a sinner, this salvation is for you. Come to Christ. Believe in Him. Trust in Him in your heart. Thank Him. Just say, “Lord, I thank Thee for the gift of divine grace and salvation, the forgiveness of sins through the Lord Jesus. I’m a sinner. I need it. I come to Thee now, trusting in Christ.” May God help you to do that. Shall we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for the sovereign grace of God. We acknowledge, Lord, that when Jonah said, “Salvation was of the Lord,” he was saying the same thing that the saints of later days were saying. We praise Thy name. Father, Son and Holy Spirit, wholly sufficient for our redemption. If there are some here who have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, give them no rest or peace until they rest in Him.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

