



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Acts 15:1–12

“The First Apostles’ Creed”

TRANSCRIPT

The Scripture reading this morning is again from the book of Acts, and we are turning to chapter 15, and reading for our Scripture reading verse 1 through verse 12. You remember, the Apostle with Barnabas has just returned from the first missionary journey and then, having met with the church in Antioch, to let them know the things that God had done to them among the Gentiles. Evidently, shortly after that, difficulties came to pass in the church and Luke describes what happened in chapter 15. The context is the church at Antioch.

“And certain men, which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed. (And, by

the way, there appeared to have been in among the Pharisees and among that group, there were some who were, evidently, true believers and there were others who were not. Paul, writing to the Galatians, speaking about the Judaizers and their views, makes it very plain that they were not regarded by him as being genuine Christians, or genuine believers in our Lord Jesus Christ. But these are Pharisees which believed—but, nevertheless, they said): saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. (Now, Peter, of course, is speaking of the incident in Cornelius’ house, when for the first time to a group Gentiles, according to Luke, the Gospel had been preached.)

And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

(I’d like for you to notice that term that is used for being under the Mosaic Law—it is a yoke. And remember, Paul’s statement in Galatians 5, verse 1, where speaking to the Galatian Christians, he said, “Stand fast in the liberty, where with Christ hath made you free and be not entangled again in the yoke of bondage.” So, both Peter and Paul speak of being under the Law of Moses as being under the yoke of bondage. Now, in verse 11, we read): But we believe that through the grace of the LORD Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.”

It’s such a privilege to be able to read and study the Word of God. We often forget. We sometimes—and generally, I guess—conclude by saying, “May God bless the reading of His Word.” And the fact that we say that over and over again, leads us, generally—if you are as I am to sort of tune out those words, so far as any significance is concerned. But, it is so wonderful to be able to read and study the Word of God. Think of the countless millions, who do not have the opportunity that you have this very morning. Even listening to a poor preacher is such a great benefit that God has given to you; as over against the many who either do not know of the Word of God, or who do not have the opportunity to hear it.

I do hope that I, as well as you, are thankful for the opportunity that we really have. Let’s bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] We are indeed grateful, Lord, so often forgetful of it, but nevertheless, we are grateful that we are able to gather on the Lord’s Day, and gather around our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the Word that reveals to us the great spiritual truths by which we come to know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent. We are thankful, Lord, and we ask forgiveness for the many times that we forget how blessed we are. We thank Thee for the forgiveness of sins, which Thou hast brought, through the Lord Jesus, for the justification, for the righteousness that comes to us as a gift, when by Thy grace Thou hast enabled us to see ourselves as sinners and to see Him as the one who has offered the atoning sacrifice and to see the merits of His work as the free gift of a loving, merciful God. How great is Thy loving kindness. It is from everlasting to everlasting.

And we give Thee thanks for those days in the ages past, in which Thou didst set Thy love upon us. We look forward into the future with anticipation and with thanksgiving, for the experiences of the love and mercy of our great Triune God. We worship Thee today, Lord. We worship Thee; the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And Father, we also thank Thee for the privileges of life and one of them the privilege of prayer. We bring to Thee the petitions of our hearts, some that

Merle has just mentioned, particularly those whose names are listed in our Calendar of Concern. We pray for them, we ask Thy blessing upon each of them. Supply the things that are needful for them and minister to them out of the riches of Thy person. We thank Thee for the privilege of serving Thee as a church, as individuals.

We pray Thy blessing upon our elders and deacons, and upon those who carry on the work of the Lord here in so many ways. Bless them, bless the work of their hands. And then we pray for our sister Christian churches, where the gospel is proclaimed, here in Dallas and to the four corners of the earth. We pray, Lord, Thy blessing upon them. May today be a great day for the church of Jesus Christ we pray. We pray for our country, for our president, for others associated with him in government, in these critical days, Lord, give guidance and direction to the United States of America. May, Lord, we as citizens also be grateful for what Thou hast done for us. We commit this meeting to Thee, the singing of the hymn that follows, the ministry of the Word—may our Lord Jesus Christ be glorified in what we do. We pray, in Jesus Name. Amen.

[Message] The title for the message this morning, “The First Apostles’ Creed,” as you might suspect from the reading of the Scripture, is derived from the 11th verse, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

Probably a bit better rendered, but nevertheless, the same sentiments expressed by other versions, which have, “But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ even as they.”

The council of Jerusalem, is the name and title that is often given to this time when Paul and Barnabas came from Antioch to Jerusalem, to discuss the question of the relationship to circumcision and the salvation of Gentiles. Like many other popular biblical expressions, it’s probably a bit misleading to call this, “The council of Jerusalem.” There are a number of things, of course, that might suggest this. For example, it was not a convention of delegates, but a meeting of Antioch with Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were there for consultation, not authoritative decree.

And, furthermore, the authority that is expressed by the letter that is issued is not the authority of a church, but rather the authority of the Apostles and elders.

Other things that often have been given titles, which do not really represent—the titles do not represent—the events too well are things like, “The great commission,” whereas, really, “The great commission,” is when the Father sent forth His Son, rather than when the Son sent forth the disciples for the evangelization of the earth. Things like, “The Lord’s Prayer,” which is usually a reference, a term, that refers to that part of the Sermon on the Mount in which our Lord gives the model prayer. Whereas, “The Lord’s Prayer,” if we were to look simply at what is the important prayer of the New Testament, by our Lord, it’s obvious that it should be that great high priestly prayer in John, chapter 17. And then even, “The Apostles’ Creed” is another term that is very misleading, because strictly speaking no apostle ever signed “The Apostles’ Creed.” “The Apostles’ Creed” is, at best, a 2nd century document. And this statement in verse 11 has more reason to be called “The Apostles’ Creed,” than that “Apostles’ Creed,” but do you think that we shall ever be able to change the thinking of the Christian Church on these points? No, we will not. Nor would I even try to.

I just would like to point out that when Peter said, “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they,” he was giving the apostle’s views concerning salvation by grace. In fact, the Apostles’ Creed does not really give us this fundamental teaching that is found here in this statement by the Apostle Peter. And, if I had to choose between them, having the Bible and having this statement, of course I would choose this statement. It’s more significant.

The consultation that took place in Jerusalem, involved the principle of grace in human salvation and, therefore, there was strife, because there is always strife when we talk about the way of salvation. There is a difference of opinion about the way of salvation, and it’s customary for the world to use statements like, “It doesn’t really make a difference what you believe, so long as you believe it with fervency and with zeal because God will accept us if we come to Him, no matter how we may come to Him.” That’s very, very wrong, biblically, but nevertheless that’s the way the world

thinks. It thinks that everybody is going to heaven, though they are traveling by different roads. And, if they are religious people, it doesn’t make a bit of difference which religion you may have, so long as you have religion.

Now, the Scriptures are utterably opposed to this but many people—most people—do not read the Scriptures. And, when they do read them, they read little bits here and there, and this very important truth appears to miss them completely.

Now, when they finally hear what the Scriptures say, they usually are very, very upset. Their pride is trampled upon; their sense of self-righteousness is denied by the Word of God. In fact, the Apostle Paul said that one of the reasons that you know that I am preaching truth is that I am being persecuted. In Galatians chapter 5, in verse 11, in the context of the question of the relationship between circumcision and salvation, the Apostle said, “And I brethren if I yet preach circumcision, why do I still suffer persecution? Then is the offense of the cross ceased?” And what Paul simply means is this, If I were preaching to you that you should believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and then be circumcised, in order to be saved, you would have some reason for praising your own nature because you had the determination and the will and you actually carried out this religious act of circumcision; and thus, the work of salvation becomes partly the work of God and partly the work of man.

And so, God has something in which He may glory and we have something for which we may glorify God; but, we also have something of ourselves in which we may glory, too—our willingness to be circumcised. So, Paul says, “Look, if I were preaching that a man may believe in Christ and then he must be circumcised to be saved, nobody would be persecuting men, because that would be just what human nature likes—something that they do in which they can put their trust.”

Now, he said, “Then is the offense of the cross ceased.” The offense of the cross of Jesus Christ is very real and when we say to men that you cannot be saved apart from the saving work of Jesus Christ that is offensive to the natural man. It is offensive to morality, because it tells them that their works cannot justify them. We can go to Hell by character, but we can never get to heaven by character. It is an offense to philosophy because philosophy is an appeal to human reason an attempt

to understand reality on the principles of human reason. But, in Christian faith we have an appeal to faith. It’s an offense to culture because the truths of the Word of God are revealed to the simple; and not to the wise and the noble, as Paul points out in 1 Corinthians chapter 1. It’s an offense to our sense of caste, because God chooses the poor and the humble as a general thing—not always, because it’s possible for a rich man and an influential man to have a sense of his need and to come to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, as Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus did, and others. Paul is a shining example of that.

It is an offense to our wills because it calls for unconditional surrender. And, in fact, the Bible says we’re not saved by the actions of our will, though we must exercise our will in our salvation. In fact, the Word of God says, “By His own will,” God’s own will, “He has begotten us, with the word of truth.”

And, it’s an offense to our pride because it reveals the exceeding sinfulness of our heart and the fact that we are headed for a Christ-less eternity, due to the judgment of God upon our sin. And, finally, it’s an offense to the man, himself, because it says to him, you must be born again. One birth is not enough.

We had a Texas governor, not too many years ago, who was asked had he been born again. He was a member of a Christian Church, right here in the city of Dallas, and he said, in characteristic—the characteristic response of men—who though religious do not understand spiritual truth, “I’ve already been born. I don’t see why I should need to be born again.” Will he only revealed by that that he had not been born again, and therefore so far as our Lord’s words were concerned, he was not qualified to enter into the Kingdom of God. For Jesus said, “You must be born again. And except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.”

Do you mean to say, Dr. Johnson, that you have to agree with this in order to be saved? Now, wait a minute, the issue is not with whether you agree with me. It was Jesus who said that! It was the Lord Jesus who said, “I am the way, the truth and the light. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.”

If anyone was bigoted, using that term the way men define it, it was the Lord Jesus Christ. So, really, the issue is: Do we believe what He said, or are we going to trust our own human ideas concerning salvation before the Lord God?

Well, you might have thought as you were reading through the book of Acts that the question of Gentile salvation had been settled in Cornelius’ house. After all, Peter had been preaching. He had said to this man, “Give all the prophets witness that whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins,” and while Peter was still speaking, Luke says, the Holy Spirit fell upon them. They began to speak with tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. Peter was shocked and surprised, but nevertheless responsive. And he said, “After all, they have received the Holy Spirit as we, who can forbid water that they should be baptized?” And so, the Gentiles were saved through the preaching of the Gospel and apart from water baptism.

You might have thought that would have settled the question. That concerned the fact of Gentile salvation; but what we have here is something that concerns not simply that, but the method as well. Are Gentiles required to believe in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus and then required to be circumcised in order to be saved? So, we are faced here with that particular question.

Now, it arose in the church at Antioch, where things were really happening. Many Gentiles had been converted through the preaching of Paul and others, and the results of this had been spread afar—spread far abroad—and so, some men came down from Judaea and they began to teach the brethren. If you are not circumcised after the manner of Moses you cannot be saved.

Now, this raised the question that Paul discusses in the letter to the Galatians; and I’m going to turn over there and read verse 2 through verse 4 of Galatians chapter 5. In fact, I’ll read verse 1 through verse 4, because this is precisely the issue that arose in Antioch.

Paul writes to the Galatians who were troubled by Judaizers, who were teaching the same thing:



“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. [So, if you are going to try to be saved through circumcision, you’re putting yourself under the legal method of salvation; and you are not responsible simply for circumcision, you’re responsible for the whole of the Law of Moses. Now, Peter in Acts 15 says that was a yoke “which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.” So, you can see that no one is going to be saved by Law. Now, Paul says in the 4th verse): Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law. (Incidentally, that probably should be rendered, ‘are trying to be justified by the law.’) You have fallen from grace.

Not from salvation, but from grace, the grace principle of salvation is what he is talking about in Galatians 5:4.

Now, we turn back to Acts chapter 15, and we read in Luke’s words, “And certain men came down from Judaea,” with this doctrine. Now, I don’t know what these men looked like. I have no idea. Well, let me take that back. I have an idea what they looked like. I don’t know what they were wearing. I don’t know really whether they were tall and slender or whether they were short and fat; or whether they were beautifully proportioned as I am [Laughter] but I know this about them. I think—and when we get to heaven and it’s not like this, you are free to come up and tell me because I was wrong once before, in 1937—one time—[Laughter] but anyway, I just have the idea that these individuals were gloomy looking. They were long faced killjoys, and they went around hanging gospel crepe everywhere they possibly could. Because a legalist is always like that. He’s a kind of an individual who is not really happy until you believe what he believes. And, further, that you have become something of his disciple. If you read the 6th chapter of the Epistle to the Galatians, that’s precisely what Paul says about these Judaizers. That’s what they were trying to do. They were trying to make converts—legalists always want to make converts—for their particular view.

And since they don’t understand the grace of God and don’t understand the marvel of the free grace of God, they are gloomy, long faced killjoys, as a rule. And that is my impression of how they must have looked.

What’s really sad about it is that some well-meaning people and some people who have a better understanding of grace can sometimes be so confused that they dissemble with them. And, even Peter in Antioch and Barnabas, dissembled with these gloomy killjoys. Sometimes, if they are very influential people, there are some believers who just cannot really stand up for what they really believe.

So they said, except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. They were saying, it’s perfectly all right to believe in the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, it’s perfectly all right to believe in the atoning work of Christ, it’s perfectly all right to believe in His death, burial and resurrection, and His bodily resurrection. And, it’s perfectly proper to believe in His Second Coming to the earth.

But in order to be saved, you must be circumcised. This is really the problem of the Epistle to the Galatians. What has happened is that a spiritual rite, or ritual, which was designed to represent certain spiritual truth but not be the truth itself, has become the instrument of righteousness. For example, circumcision was originally given to Abraham as a sign that Abraham was recipient of the Abrahamic promises. In Genesis, chapter 17, after Abraham had been justified, God gave the sign of circumcision. And so, all of Israel’s males were required to be circumcised to show that they belonged to the covenant people—those who had the Abrahamic and later the Davidic and New Covenant promises. So, circumcision did not communicate to them righteousness, it was the sign of the faith of righteousness that they were to possess.

Circumcision was simply designed to indicate the inefficacy of the flesh and the necessity of a faith righteousness in order to be saved. But, as so often is the case with people who want something in which to boast—that’s our nature, we want something in which to boast—the instrument has become the means by which righteousness comes. That’s always the danger of

ritualism. That’s the danger that faces the Christian Church today, with baptism, which is designed to be a sign of the faith righteousness which we have. But now, in such a wide area of professing Christendom, has become the means by which an individual enters into the proper relationship with the Lord God.

Now, Paul and Barnabas didn’t believe that. And, when you have in a local church some men like Paul and Barnabas, who are willing to stand up for the truth with a lot of people who are carried away by false doctrine, what do you have? Well, you have static.

Now, the first word that is translated here, in the King James Version, no small dissension is the Greek letter, it’s the Greek word *stasis* from which we get the English word, static. So, when Paul and Barnabas had no small static and disputation with them. There was an uproar in the church at Antioch, because the apostles felt this was false teaching. And they didn’t hesitate to speak up about it. No sentimental namby-pamby, milky spineless love characterized Paul and Barnabas. But they spoke out. There was an explosion in that church that was related specifically to the doctrines of the Word of God.

There are lots of people who think that the church should never have an explosion. Listen, there are many churches that would be purified by good explosion, if there were some people who were concerned about truth! And were willing to stand for the truth! We are so affected by the world’s idea that love will cover everything, but there is a time when we have to stand for truth.

There have been times in the history of the church when we have had to do it. If we had not had a Athanasius, Christianity—humanly speaking—might have drifted off into becoming one of the ancient sects or we would have thought it to be so. If there had not been a Luther or a Calvin at a particular point—if there had not been others in the history of the Christian church, who stood amidst a lot of opposition for the truth of God—humanly speaking—the church would not be where it is today.

I can imagine the argument. It went something like this. These men, when they were challenged by Paul and Barnabas, they said, “Look, Abraham was circumcised. And Abraham was a

believer. Why should not a person who is a believer be circumcised, if he’s an heir of the Abrahamic promises and Abraham was circumcised, why should he not be circumcised? And has that not been our custom down to this time? And, furthermore, even our Lord was circumcised. So, why should we not have circumcision?” Then I can imagine Paul standing up—and I don’t think Paul minced any words. You know, I don’t think that he got up and said, “Now, I appreciate the way in which you have expounded your views. They’re very, very appealing. But, I’d just like to introduce a little stricture by suggesting that there may be another interpretation of this particular point.” I don’t think Paul did that, at all. I think he got up and he said, “Look! Have you fellows read the book of Genesis? Have you seen what the Scriptures said?”

Now, I know some of you are saying, “He couldn’t have said that.”

Do you know, in the New Testament, who said, “Have you read...?” It was our Lord. He said, “Have you read this?”

So, Paul said, “Look! I want to give you a lesson in numerology—or, numeric—when you count, it’s: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen... And, I’d like to remind you that in the 15th chapter Abraham was justified. It says,” now, I know Paul knew this text well because he cites it several times.

“And Abraham believed in the Lord and was accounted to Him for righteousness.”

Now, he said, in the 16th chapter, and then the 17th chapter, in the 17th chapter it says, “God gave Abraham the rite of circumcision.” Now, remember, our lesson in numeric. Fifteen precedes seventeen—it’s as simple as that. He was justified before he was circumcised.

Now, upon what does justification depend, then? It depends upon faith. And then he explained that circumcision was a sign and a seal of the righteousness that they were to have by faith. Paul explains, by the way—I’m not putting words in Paul’s mouth, you know—this is exactly what it says in Romans chapter 4.

Oh, he didn’t talk about numerics there, but I have insight into that, you understand and just understood what Paul must have said to them. Paul—don’t take me too seriously—some of you have

come in here today for the first time, I am kidding. [Laughter] But I think he was just as firm, just as firm, and explained to them that Abraham was justified before he was sanctified.

Now then, they decided though it was such static and confusion of the church at Antioch that they would go up and see if this might be confirmed by discussing it with Jerusalem. And so, Paul and Barnabas and a few others made their way to the city of Jerusalem; and, along the way, they stopped in little gatherings of Gentile believers and Jewish believers, and they told them of the things that had been happening among the Gentiles. And those Christians along the way, they rejoiced in what Paul told them and Barnabas told them about the things that were happening among the Gentiles. It’s obvious that the great majority of these early believers stood with Paul and Barnabas on that point. But, in Jerusalem it was different.

They arrived in Jerusalem. There was no joy in Jerusalem. Sour, somber, sepulchral, sanctimoniousness characterized so many of them. And it appears—though we have no definite statement of this—that there was a great deal of sympathy with the Judaizers in Jerusalem. When they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church and of the apostles and elders—evidently, a rather informal first meeting—and they declared all the things that God had done with them. And there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, “That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.” They understood that if you are going to be circumcised, you’ve got to keep the whole law. And so, the whole church came together to consider of this matter. And, do you think that they said, “Now, we got into a lot of trouble up in Antioch, and a lot of hard discussion, and maybe we can avoid that in Jerusalem and just discuss this question in nineteen hundred and eighty-five kind of love.”

But we read in verse 7, “And when there had been much disputing...” See, these people believed truth was important. When there had been much disputing, finally, Peter arises, takes the stand after a whole lot of argument; and, in a sense, sets out the view that prevailed in Jerusalem. And, had it not prevailed, there is no telling what—humanly speaking—might have come of the great doctrine of the grace of God.

Now, Peter stood and the first thing he did was to give the illustration of what happened in Cornelius’ house. He says, “Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.” He doesn’t say, “and believe and were circumcised.”

“And God, which knoweth the hearts...” The Lord is able to understand what transpires in the individual heart. He “bore them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; And (He) put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”

Now, that’s the refutation of all ritualistic salvation. He’s referring to what happened in Cornelius’ house and how, as I said before, the Holy Spirit fell upon those in Cornelius’ house before they were baptized.

Now, you may think that there is no connection whatsoever between circumcision and baptism. I’d like to suggest that there is a very close connection. Let’s just think about circumcision for a moment, very briefly, circumcision is a physical activity. Secondly, circumcision is a physical act performed by human agency. Thirdly, circumcision is a physical act performed by human agency with material instrumentality. And, fourth, circumcision is a physical act performed by human agency with a material instrumentality visible to others.

What is baptism? Well, baptism is a physical act. It is a physical act performed by human agency, with a material instrumentality. Water! And it’s visible to others.

Now, in the New Testament, in the Epistle to the Galatians, there is no question but that Paul says “circumcision is a work,” in fact, that’s the whole point of Galatians. They were told, “You must be justified by believing in Christ,” and undergoing circumcision. Paul said, “No. You are justified by faith, not by the works of the law.”

So, if circumcision is a work, baptism is a work, too. It’s the same kind of work.

Now, we of course know from our own human experience, if we have been truly saved, that we were saved when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. We have salvation. And even if we had not been baptized, we would know that we possessed eternal salvation because God, through the Holy

Spirit, brings the conviction of the forgiveness of sins when a man believes in the Lord Jesus, who offered the atoning sacrifice by shedding His blood for sinners on Calvary’s cross.

But, we know that the Lord Jesus said that we should be circumcised in testimony to our faith. And so, in obedience to our Lord’s wishes, we are baptized in water. But we know that our baptism is a testimony that we have come to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, just as in Israel, circumcision became a means of salvation, rather than the recognition of Abrahamic faith; so in wide sectors of professing Christianity today, it is taught and believed that one cannot be saved apart from baptism in water. For example, in one large church, original sin is removed by the waters of baptism. Daily sin is removed by the non-bloody sacrifice of the mass. Venial sins is—are—removed by the oil of extreme unction. Other sins are removed by the fires of purgatory.

Well, what is left for the cross of Christ? Water, bread, oil and fire remove sins—what does the blood do? If so much is done by works, little is done by grace.

Now, lest Protestants think, well, they are wrong but we are right. Let me remind you that in Protestantism, there are those who teach that we must repent, confess, believe and be baptized in order to be saved. The same error that existed in the early church in Antioch, and then in Jerusalem, and also among the churches in Galatia, has existed in the history of the Christian church.

Now, Peter goes on, and he interrogates these Judaizers by saying, verse 10: “Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples...” What does he mean by “tempting” the Lord God? Well, it was to tempt them in the sense of to impose a law on the Gentiles that they should be circumcised in order to be saved. In other words, to question the judgment of God. God knows the hearts. He knew that in Cornelius’ house those individuals had been cleansed from their sins, for He had done that. And then, to insist that they must be circumcised in order to be saved—when God has indicated His approval of them by giving them the Holy Spirit—that is to tempt God. It’s to test Him! It’s to say, in effect, can we not get away with

something different in the plan of salvation? Can not we add a little here and a little there? Or trim a little bit here or trim a little bit there?

After all, we can get more men to heaven by our way than you can get by your way. Peter says, that’s to tempt God. That’s to test Him.

So, “Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” Peter sees that if you say you must be circumcised in order to be saved, you must come under the whole of the Law.

But, he says, “We believe...” This is “We”—we, apostles, we apostles and elders—“We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus, we shall be saved, even as they.”

In other words, Paul, Barnabas and I and others agree, salvation is through grace. If we are saved through what we do, we’re not saved by grace. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus, we are saved even as they.

Now, just for a few moments, let’s analyze that statement. Grace is the principle of human salvation. Free grace—it’s absolutely necessary if we are to be saved. There is nothing in which we can put our trust—and if you were to say, “I put my trust in my faith,” ah, that faith is the gift of God! It’s the faith that God gave you that enables you to hold out your hands for faith as the hand of the heart, and receive the forgiveness of sins. Receive justification of life. That is the gift of God. It’s by grace that we are saved, through faith. And that, not of ourselves—it’s the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

Now, if you have any difficulty in believing that you are lost and that you are deprived and that you are headed for a Christ-less eternity, just do one thing. Study yourself. Take a good look, deep down in your heart and see if you can stand before the Lord God, in the light of His commandment, “Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.” How many of you in the audience would like to stand up and say, “I have fulfilled that law to this point.”



Well, I’ve got a crowd of sinners here! How many would like to stand up and say, “I have fulfilled it for half of my life, but I failed back in 1937.” [Laughter]

If you study your heart, you’ll see that you stand before the Lord God condemned. You are on your way to perishing. You are on your way to a Christ-less eternity. You are lost! Lost if your trust is not in the provision that God has made for sinners in the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for sinners, and took the judgment of sinners, and who through His ambassadors offers the forgiveness of sins to men who recognize that they are lost, and headed for a Christ-less eternity, and desire to be delivered; possessing the assurance of everlasting life.

We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are saved, even as they.

I know most people think, well, if you just do the best you can you’ll get to heaven. They’re kind of like professors in theological seminaries; seventy is a passing grade. And, after all, if you get seventy, you’ll get to heaven. The only trouble is, heaven is not like passing a course in a theological seminary or university. Because, you see, if you got seventy and if seventy is the way to get to heaven, heaven is thirty percent dirty. And God will not have heaven to be thirty percent dirty.

One must present Him with a perfect righteousness in order to be saved. That’s why, through the Lord Jesus, the Apostle Paul can say, “We are justified freely. Declared righteous freely, by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

You can have that 100, but it comes as a gift of grace. Faith is the means.

Verse 9: “Purifying their hearts by faith...” It’s the instrumentality by which we receive. And, saved is the result! That’s to possess the forgiveness of sins, it’s to possess justification of life, it’s to be a member of the family of God, it’s to be a son of God, a child of God, adopted into His family with all of the other blessings that belong to individuals who are Christians.

Many of you have heard me speak of Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse. He was the man who led me to the Lord. Dr. Barnhouse—when he was Mr. Barnhouse—just a young man in his teens, was asked to speak to a Christian Endeavor Society meeting in Northern California. And he said, he went to this home where he was staying, was a young couple. They had a little boy about four years of age

and in the afternoon before the meeting, he said, “I went into the room which looked out over the front and I was reading. And, this house was in a new area and they hadn’t finished things in the subdivision.” In fact, he said, “The front street was not yet paved, and out in the front street—it had been raining a good bit—there was a place there that was a little lower than the rest of the street, and it was full of water. Now, they had a little boy, four years of age. If there is one thing that boys cannot resist, it’s a puddle of water. They just cannot do it. Girls can stand around a puddle of water and look at it, and stand off. But boys—and if you’ve got any girls who do this, they have a little of the boy in them, because boys, the first thing they want to do is to do something about that water. It’s just standing there. It needs to be ruffled a bit. And so, they’ll throw things in it. Finally, one boy who is more boy than the other boys, will take a great big rock and he will throw it down. And everybody will get dirty. [Laughter] And then they begin to play in it. That’s what we’ve been waiting for—an opportunity to play in it. And they will sit in it and fall in it. Well, he said, he was sitting by the window and he heard the mother take the little four-year-old out on the porch. And she said to him, “Now, son, play on the porch.”

Now, he said, there were steps down to the walkway and then there was a short walkway of twenty feet or so, and then there was a gate and then the sidewalk. And there was the puddle. And so, the little boy came out and he played on the porch for about five minutes. Then he took a couple of steps down, then stepped back up. Took a few more steps down, stepped back up. Stepped all the way down to the end of the steps, came back up. Went down, this time, got on the walkway a little bit, came back up. Finally got down near the gate. And he said, “I was just watching him and finally that boy got out of the gate, he was hanging on the gate, swinging on the gate and then he came back,” and Dr. Barnhouse said, “He came back and played such a long time by the steps that I didn’t look anymore until I heard this big splash out front, and a boy crying and mother rushing out of the house, mad as wet hen.” [Laughter]

And she came and she grabbed him, and she was dragging him back toward the house, and he was saying, “Momma, don’t whip me. Momma, don’t whip me. Momma, don’t whip me.” And

she turned to him and said, “Oh, hush, I forgive you.” No more crying. He was crying, of course, only because he was going to be whipped.

So, if the judgment is not to come, he is perfectly happy. [Laughter] But Mother was not happy yet. And so, it wasn’t but just a few minutes, Dr. Barnhouse said, “I heard the unmistakable sounds of a little boy being bathed. And, finally, the little boy was bathed and dressed and he was brought into the room where he was and Momma said, “Now, sit down here and talk with Mr. Barnhouse.”

Well, that’s an illustration of what God does for us when He saves us. He not only forgives our sins, but He also gives us cleansing of heart and righteousness. That’s what’s meant when Paul—when Peter says, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

Now, our time is up. I want to mention just this. We’re all familiar with the so-called Apostles’ Creed. At best, a 2nd century product—here is a creed with clearer right to the title “Apostles’ Creed” than that.

“We believe,”—what do we believe?—“We believe in salvation through circumcision.”

No! “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

“We believe in baptismal regeneration.” No! “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved...”

“We believe in rites and rubrics and all of the other things that go to make up a good works salvation.”

“We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved...”

“We believe in doing one’s best.” No! “We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved...”

Turning over a new leaf? Religion? All of those things. No. “We believe that we shall be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

We believe that the morally good need him. Do the morally good need him? Yes. We believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus we are saved, even as they. In fact, moralists must come to the same fountain, drawn from Emmanuel’s veins, as those who are other kinds of sinners do.

I don’t know whether you have ever noticed this, or not, but this is a strange way to put this because, after all, remember, Peter is one of those who were religious. And, after all, religious people tend to think, yes, terrible sinners can be saved. So, you might have expected Peter to say, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ they shall be saved, as we are.”

But, he says, “We believe through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we shall be saved, even as they.” It’s almost as if Peter said, “Look! Don’t raise the question about whether they can be saved; the question is whether you who raise the question about whether they can be saved, can be saved.” It’s the person who thinks of himself as a morally upright person that has the greatest difficulty in perceiving the salvation of God.

So, here today, if you are here as a church member, and you’ve been baptized and you’ve sat at the Lord’s Table, and you think you’re a pretty good citizen in the community, and you’ve got your income tax form already prepared to mail tomorrow—or perhaps you’ve already sent it in and gotten your refund—and you think that everything is wonderful. Let me remind you that we believe that through the grace of Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Salvation is through grace.

And it comes by virtue of the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the merits of His work are imputed to those who, by His grace, have come to recognize their lost condition and rely upon Him and what He’s done. May God help you to come. Come now! Don’t leave this auditorium without that trust in Him that means eternal life.

Shall we stand for the Benediction?

[Prayer] Our Heavenly Father, we are thankful for such a great statement by the Apostle Peter. We attribute it to Thee, Lord, Thou didst so many hundreds of years ago, guide the great Apostle, to lay stress upon the fact that no man can by works of law, reach Thee. We thank Thee for

the marvelous lovingkindness and grace which gives us what we cannot earn, as we by Thy grace recognize our need. If there should be someone here, Lord, who is not yet come to Christ, may at this very moment they be thanking Thee for what Christ has done and how He meets their need. In His Name. Amen.