



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hebrews 13:7-9

“Jesus Christ, Unchanged and Unchangeable”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege that is ours. We thank Thee for the opportunity to turn to the word of God. We thank Thee for the confidence that the Holy Spirit gives us in the truthfulness of the word of God. We thank Thee, too, Lord, that this is Thy word to us by which we may judge and examine all of the affairs of our lives. We thank Thee for the great utterance of the Psalmist, who took it from the Holy Spirit, who said, “In Thy light, we shall see light,” and we know that all things, ultimately, are to be just in accord with that. The reality of all of the things of human experience, the true reality, is found in Thy light. We pray that Thou wilt give us understanding of the word of God, and understanding of life, itself, and particularly of our part in the divine program. We thank Thee for the time together this evening and pray that the Holy Spirit may be in our meeting, to give us instruction and encouragement from Thy word.

And we pray, in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Clarence Edmund McCartney was the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, for many years. He was a very godly, evangelical man, who was also better known as a great preacher. He has written a number of books, some of which come back in print from time to time. They are mainly sermons; but in one of them a sermon on the greatest texts of the Bible, he begins it with words like these. “It was seven twenty-two on the morning of April the

fifteenth, eighteen sixty-five, the gaunt form stretched on the bed in the room in the house on Tenth Street, ceased to breathe. The Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, turned to the window and pulled down the blind, to shut out the bright sunlight. Then, turning again and looking down at the silent form, he said, “Now he belongs to the ages.”

McCartney was a great student of the Civil War and well known for the time that he had spent studying the Civil War. And he went on to say this, “This is the shortest biography of Lincoln, and one of the best. Yet, after all, there is only one who belongs to the ages and it is He to whom the ages belong Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever.”

So with that as an introduction, let’s read verses 7, 8, and 9 of chapter 13 of the Epistle to the Hebrews. The author is drawing near the end of his great, what he calls, exhortation. And he writes.

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow. [That word is the word that means literally, imitate. “Whose faith imitate.” In fact, the Greek word is the term from which we get the word imitate.] Considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods, which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.”

Well, McCartney was right, of course. Jesus Christ is the one who belongs to the ages; and further, the ages belong to him, for they are all in his hands. As our author says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” We live, it is often said, “in an exploding world.” In fact, there is nothing unchangeable. The creation, well, the author has reference to it back in chapter 1 in verse 10, of his epistle, and he’s pointed out that the creation, itself, is a changing creation, “Like as a cloak, you will fold them up, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will not fail.”

The empires that have come, have risen to prominence and sovereignty, and have passed away; all have been changing empires. Where is the kingdom of Assyria? Or where is the kingdom of Babylon? Or where is Parthia? Or for that matter, where is Rome? In the sense of the great Roman Empire. Men change. Men change because they begin as infants, they grow and become youths, then young men, then mature men at age thirty-five, middle age, then they grow older, and finally they become decrepit. You have a living illustration in front of you. Look at me. I'm fading away. But, it is true of all of us, we are constantly in process of change. We finally lose health, we have many experiences that make their impress upon us physically. We are changing people.

The churches change. Where is the church at Ephesus? The church that Jesus said had 'lost its first love.' It no longer exists as it did. The churches, Ephesus, others, the saints themselves changed. Demas left, went back, having abandoned the world of the Apostle Paul, went back home to Thessalonica. Oh, changing, changing world.

In the light of it, when we read, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever," He is the only unchangeable human being and he is a human being. We see so many changes in our just recent days. Where is the U.S.S.R.? It is gone. Ten years ago, who would have thought it? But today, there is no U.S.S.R. There is Russia. There is the Ukraine. And there are fifteen or twenty other republics. But as far as the U.S.S.R. is concerned, it's no longer there. Rhodesia? I grew up. Rhodesia, a country in Africa. It's not Zambia. In fact, most of us don't even know what the country's name was before the present names. The Belgian Congo is now Zaire. So it's really true. We live in a changing, changing world and we should not be surprised at change. Some texts, it has been said, "haunt" the preacher and, yet, they frighten him as well. They are too great to preach on. Who could ever do justice to, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever." But when you preach the word of God and when you have as a calling from God to proclaim and expound the Scriptures, how would it appear if an expositor of the Scripture jumped by a great text like this? So, it's a text that bothers us because we are unable to do it justice. But, at the same time, it's so great that it would be terrible not to center our attention upon it. When you strike this one, its sublime

chord, someone has said, “It echoes all the music of divine creation, revelation, redemption and the coming kingdom of ages.”

It’s often overlooked, however, that it stands in a context. It’s Hebrews, chapter 13, in verse 8, but there is Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 7 that precedes it. And there is Hebrews chapter 13, verse 9, that follows it. And they have a very close connection with what is stated in verse 8.

So verse 7, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken to you the word of God.” This is a rather interesting expression because it occurs three times here. We have in verse 7, “Those who rule over you,” and then over in verse 17, “Obey those who rule over you.” And then in verse 24, “Great are those who rule over you.”

Bible expositors, almost without exception, say that these three occurrences of this word that means “to rule over” is a reference to the elders of this body of believers, to whom the author was writing. There’s an interesting expression in verse 7, however, which differs from the others. If you’ll notice, verse 17 says, “Obey those who rule,” present tense, “who rule over you.” And then, in verse 24, “Greet are those who rule over you.” They are obviously, still living. You couldn’t call upon someone to greet them.

So we have two of these occurrences are references to living beings, who are in process of ruling over the believers, to whom the author is writing. But in verse 7, “Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you.” As a matter of fact, it probably is more correct to render this, “Remember those who had the rule over you, who spoke the word of God to you.” That’s in the present tense, but the fact that he says, “who have spoken to you the word of God,” makes it fairly evident, the commentators agree, that he’s talking about elders who have died and have gone on. And he’s calling upon them to remember them.

So they are to “remember those,” and even the word remember suggests that. “Remember those who have had the rule, in your midst, the elders, who have now gone on into the presence of the Lord.” And not only remember them, they’ve spoken the word of God to you, and you are to follow their faith, “considering the outcome of their conduct.”

Now, this is a remarkable text, I think, because it calls upon us as living people, yes, I’m still living, it calls upon us as living people to honor those who have served us in the Church of Jesus Christ. And it is our responsibility to do that; to remember that godly men have had the oversight over us, have served the Lord well, have spoken the word of God to us. We are to remember them. And, furthermore, we are to imitate their faith, to follow in the faith that they have manifested in their Christian service.

I happen to have been the recipient of the ministry of a number of wonderful, godly men. Not only the person who led me to the Lord, but many others, who from time to time, older men, have spoken to me the word of God and whose faith I would love to be able to say I have truly followed. But, it’s so important to remember those who by precept and by practice have exemplified the life of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Back in chapter 11 in verse 4, the author has written, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain through which he obtained witness that he was righteous; God testifying of his gifts, and through it, he being dead yet speaketh.” What a magnificent testimony it is. He’s dead. He’s gone. He still speaks by virtue of his faith. So remember your changing leaders.

But, now, in verse 8, obviously in that context, remember your unchangeable Lord. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” There’s a close connection with verse 7. In the swirling waters of change, which sweep over human leaders, there is the eternal rock of the Lord Jesus Christ. He remains to guide us. “His years,” he said back in chapter 1 in verse 12, again, “His years shall not fail. Like a cloak, you will fold them up, they will be changed but You, Lord.” Now, we pointed out in expounding that verse, that this was a reference to Jesus Christ. “But You Lord, Your years will not fail. They will be changed, You are the same, and Your years will not change.” So this text, which is derived from the Psalms is a text that teaches his omnipotence, his eternity, and his immutability, the eternal Son of God.

So there is a passage, back in Acts chapter 13, verse 36 and verse 7, that I probably should mention. The Apostle Paul is speaking, you may remember, to the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia.

And in verse 36, near the end of his message to them, he says, “For David, after he had served his own generation, by the will of God, fell asleep and was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption. But He whom God raised up saw no corruption.” No bones in the tomb in Jerusalem of our Lord because he is the risen Savior. He is still, of course, the head of the Church. He never needs a replacement as the courier, finally, ultimately, elects a new pope when one dies. There is no successor for our Lord. If he could be called our Father, God, there is no successor. Of course, we call him the Son, because he is a different personality, but every time the Roman church elects a pope, it reminds me of the fact that our leader, our great Lord Jesus Christ, is not going to be followed by anyone else, to serve him in the office of head of the Church.

You’ll notice, also, in connection with faith, that he says that there is no originality in the service that we give to him. “Whose faith imitate.” In other words, we’re not to give original expression of faith, but imitate the faith of others who have truly believed in him. The picture of our Lord Jesus Christ as an unchanging, immutable, eternal person, can only be caught very feebly by the pictures that we have on our walls. I’ve mentioned to you many times in the course of a message on this point.

There are houses in Great Britain that you have walked into and that I have walked into. I remember one particularly in Scotland called Mellerstain; it’s a marvelous place. It’s a wonderful place to visit. I’ve been there at least four or five times because it’s something you can go through that great home and the next time you go through it you see things you never saw before. The first time I ever went through it, it was pointed out to me by the guide in this magnificent living room that was as big as this room here, for that matter. There was a portrait on the wall which was a famous portrait. And he said, “That particular portrait is one that has the characteristics of portraits in a great degree. No matter where you are in this room, that lady’s eyes will be looking at you.” And so, I remember, the first thing I did when he stopped talking, was to walk over to the side, as far as I could, over here, and look up and her and see if the eyes were still pointed toward me. And they were. No wonder she was looking at me when I was young and handsome. [Laughter]

But, nevertheless, our Lord is just that kind of person. He is a person who is always the same. And that remarkable title is very interesting, because it's not simply a title that he thought up on the spur of the moment. Among people in the past, in the word of God, this term was used of the Lord God. “The Same.” And, later on, it came to be used among the medieval mystics. It was used as a title for the eternal God. They called Him “The Same.” That was a title. “I worship The Same.” Or I'm having a time of prayer with “The Same.” They spoke of knowing “The Same.” They spoke of taking refuge in “The Same.” And so amid all of the restless drift and change and flocks of phenomena in our human life, there is one person who stands out as “The Same.” The Triune God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now, he says that we are to remember his name. “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever.” Let me just talk for a few moments about the name, Jesus Christ, because there is so much caught up in it. I could never hope to expound the name Jesus fully in a few minutes. But you know that that name is a term that is derived from two words: one that is a reference to Yahweh or Jehovah and it's built upon the verb “to save.” So it means something like “The Lord Saves.” Jesus, the Salvation of Jehovah. The remarkable thing about this name is that it was the name of our Lord, when he was an infant in the cradle. “Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.” It was the name of his childhood. It was the boy, Jesus, that Luke makes reference to, when he made his trip up to the city of Jerusalem as a twelve-year-old boy. It was the name that was used of him so frequently, in the ministry, in the ministry that our Lord Jesus was carrying on. In chapter 14 of the Gospel of Matthew, when he walks upon the water, the text says, “Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea.” And then in verse 31, “And immediately,” when Peter saw the wind was boisterous, “Jesus stretched out His hand and caught him.” So even then, the true humanity of our Lord Jesus is recognized in that experience. So it was an experience in which he manifested his divine power, walking on the water.

It was the name of the cross. I know that it might be more pleasing to us to say that the thief on the cross cried out, “Lord, save me?” But, strictly speaking, probably, the Greek text says,

“Jesus,” the dying thief, “Jesus, save me?” Now, some people seem to think that if he said, “Jesus, save me?” instead of “Lord, save me?” that that somehow is a diminishing of the authority and power and greatness of the Son of God. No, it’s not! As a matter of fact, it’s not a diminishing of his regard for our Lord either. Because, of course, anyone who can save us is a person who has to be a divine being. And so when he called him, “Jesus,” and said to Him, “Save me?” Why, of course, that in itself, is an affirmation of his high regard for our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Now, our Lord responded, of course, and said, not only would he save him, but that day he would be with him in paradise. He had said, “Save me” or “deliver me” or “remember me when you come in your kingdom.” The very fact that he thought that Jesus was able to do what he was calling upon him to do, and that he would have a kingdom was certainly the highest of regard for our Lord Jesus Christ.

But he used the term “Jesus.” It was the name that was used in the resurrection. In John chapter 20 in verse 14 and verse 19, when the apostles are together, it’s Jesus who comes into their midst, and appears to them. And, you remember too, of course, in Acts chapter 1 in verse 11, when the prophecy of the Second Coming of our Lord is made “It’s this same Jesus, that you have seen go into heaven, will come again.” So when we read, “Jesus Christ,” we are to think, of course, of the true humanity of our Lord, but not deny in any way the power of our God. In fact, the term “Jesus” would probably be a term that the saints find very precious down here and in heaven as well.

And Mr. Spurgeon suggests that in heaven, that’s true and that this stanza reflects their regard for him. “Jesus the Lord, their hearts employ, Jesus My love, they sing. Jesus the life of both our joys, sounds sweet from every string.” “Jesus Christ,” as he says, “the same yesterday, today and forever.” What about “Christ”? Well, the term *Χριστός* [*Christos*], from which we get Christ is the term that means Messiah, and that in, at the same time, is a reflection of its fundamental meaning of “The Anointed One.” For the Messiah is an anointed one. That’s why *Mashach* -- the term *mashach* means “the anointed one.” And so he’s Jesus, the anointed one.



Kings were anointed. Priests were anointed. Prophets were anointed, all three. And our Lord, of course, holds all three of those offices. And, particularly, the office of King. So He is the Anointed One and that suggests his office of kingship, which again the author of this epistle has alluded to in chapter 1 in verse 9, where he says these words, citing from Psalm 45. “Let all the angels of God.” Well, go on to the place. “But to the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. [And then, in verse 9] You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness above Your companions.’” So he is the Anointed King!

Well, if God has appointed him as a savior of sinners, and anointed him to be a savior of sinners, why is it that individuals object to having Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior? If God has anointed him to be the Anointed King and Savior of sinners, it seems to me that the right response of human beings is to bow down before him and acknowledge him as their Lord.

That’s what believers, that’s what most of you in this audience, I’m sure, have done. That’s the proper response to him. Only his teaching is the authoritative teaching. And he has taught us, and has given us, the word of God through his prophets, through his apostles and through others. And so we look at the sixty-six books of the word of God as the “word of God.” They are our guide, they are our inspired rule of life, as long as we are here in the flesh.

I do not think that it is wrong necessarily to have a creed; if the creed is true to the word of God. But in the final analysis, the word of God is what we are particularly interested in. Creeds may be helpful. They may be able to center attention on certain things over which there has been some discussion in the church and for which there is need for some clarification but, ultimately, we are interested in what the word of God says.

And the best of the creeds are those that begin at the beginning and acknowledge that it’s the word of God that is the final authority. The Westminster Confession of Faith is a great creed, a great statement of the Christian faith, touching on a number of points that are very important. But

in the final analysis, we test the Westminster Confession of Faith by the word of God. So creeds are great.

John Calvin was a great interpreter, but John Calvin was not without error. One can find errors in Calvin’s writing, scattered here and there in them. No serious errors to speak of, but, nevertheless, being a human being, there are errors in his writings. I remember one in particular, where in the Garden of Gethsemane, he makes the statement that he uttered, “Nevertheless not My will,” before he said, “Save me from this hour,” he said, “That slipped out, but he quickly took it back by saying, ‘Nevertheless, not My will but Thine be done,’ as if to suggest that he really erred in offering that particular prayer. Calvin seems to give the impression that our Lord changed his mind, after he had said, “Save me from this hour,” then he took that back and said, no, “Not my will, but Thine be done.” But there are other places in which Calvin may also be at fault. But we, as followers of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are interested in the creeds; but we are fundamentally interested in the word of God. And they all are to be tested by the word of God.

It’s a great mistake for an individual to take a creed and say, “This is my statement of faith,” and at the same time, not be subject to criticism from the word of God. So we affirm the greatness of the creeds, but at the same time, we affirm the greater benefit of the word of God, itself, as the critic of the creeds that have been offered.

Now, that was his name. But notice again what he says, “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever.” So remember his name, but now remember his attributes. He is the same. Now, that does not mean, of course, that he is immobile. When we say that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, we don’t affirm of him that he’s a statue. We don’t affirm that there is not living vitality in him. We do not affirm that he is not constantly at work.

There is a great difference between immobility and the unchanging character of the Lord Jesus Christ, which theologians call his immutability. His immutability has to do with those things that make up his personality. He does not change. But he’s constantly active. He was constantly in his over thirty years of ministry upon the earth. So “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and

forever” pertains to his person, his attributes, the qualities that make up his life, and also, the ministry that he engaged in. He is immutable but not immobile.

The reason that we affirm that our Lord is immutable is that if he were mutable then we would have a problem with our divine Savior. Because a person who changes either from better to worse or from worse to better or if we grant that moral stability is recognized and accepted then he would move from immaturity to maturity. But God cannot move in any one of these directions. He does not move from that which is worse to better. He does not move from that which is better to that which is worse. He does not move from immaturity to maturity. And the Lord Jesus Christ is a divine person. Surely he possessed a human nature, and in his human nature, he grew. In his human nature not in his divine personality.

When I was in Ft. Worth preaching on Sunday mornings, I’ve been going over there a good bit this fall, preaching over there, preaching to lawyers; isn’t that interesting? This is a church. It’s called The Believers Fellowship. If you are over there on Sunday morning, go by and meet them. They are a fine group of people. Mainly, younger people, but they have some mature people, too, but they are lawyers. And they are very interested in the things you say. And when I finished Sunday morning, one came up and checked me up in a very friendly way over our Lord Jesus Christ, about the possibility of change within him, and what way could we speak of change in him.

And so I had a chance to tell him some of the things that I’m just telling you right now because it was fresh in my mind; to point out that there is no change in his divine personality. The change exists in his human nature. And I cited to him, which he knew the minute I cited these texts, in Luke chapter 2, about our Lord growing in wisdom and stature before God and men. In his human nature, that’s what he does.

So our Lord then is the same, that is, immutable, as a divine person; but in his human nature, he was changeable, growing in maturity as one should as a true human being. So we don’t get up in the morning and say, “Lord, good morning, how are you?” Because, of course, our God is the same all the time. So a person who says that is kind of a little bit off-base.

Now, in what sense is he the same? Well, he is the same in his love to his people. Jeremiah chapter 31 in verse 3, speaks of the everlasting love with which God loves his people. That’s very comforting to know that when I have failed him, when I have made mistakes, when I have sinned against him, when I have been unkind to my family, my wife, my friends, the everlasting love still pertains to me. “I have loved you with an everlasting love.” His saints are the recipients of that love. He is the same in his purpose toward us. His purpose is to bring us, ultimately, to himself, and that purpose shall be accomplished. That’s very comforting, too.

He is the same in his teaching. The same things that are found in the word of God that were applicable when the apostles spoke are the things that are applicable today. We don’t have a gospel for each century. We cannot say, “Well, there was a gospel for the first century, there was a gospel for the fourth century when Augustine was around. There was a gospel for the time of the Reformation. There was a gospel for last century and now.”

The last house I lived in, I think I made reference to this in the past. There was a young couple, lived across the street from us, and we were anxious to try to give them a testimony. And we did have a chance to give them a testimony. And one day, the wife came over and spoke to me and said that she would like a book to help her husband, because he was responsible for the devotional thought at Sunday school this week in their church, which was the North Way Christian Church. And she specified, of course, and she knew us well enough to know that I probably would refer her to somebody like Calvin or Augustine. She said, “But we want something contemporary.” And so I gave her a couple of books about the immutable Son of God, and affirmed to her, as I gave them to her, “Now, these are very contemporary because He’s the same yesterday, today and forever, and your class needs this.” I don’t know whether she liked it or not. But, nevertheless, she took the books and finally, gave them back to me.

He is the same in his resources. You remember, when he left, he said, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” And so, he is with us, in all the experiences of life. A personal being who is with us in our illnesses and in our sicknesses, in our bereavements, all of those

experiences, and in our disappointments in the things that make up our human life, we can always count upon the fact that he is with us.

Do we need another Luther? Well, it would be nice to have another Luther. It would be nice to have another Calvin. Nice to have another preacher of the word of God, a man like Spurgeon. But we really don't need them in the sense that we cannot get along without them, because we have him. “Lo, I am with you always, to end of the age.”

He's the same, the same in his power to save. Luke, when he writes his great book, *History of the Christian Church*, points out that in the first volume he wrote about the things that Jesus began to do and teach, letting us know as he does, as he describes the events of the acts of the apostles that the Lord Jesus is continuing to do the same things that he did before this time, through the Spirit. So those two books, those two Lukan books, The Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles tell us what Jesus did and what he continues to do. And he is the same in his power to save. He is the same in his willingness to receive men. “Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out.” “Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” These invitations are still applicable to us. And, of course, he's the same in his strength to preserve us. Jesus Christ, he's the one who has given us eternal life, and no one is able to pluck us out of his or the Father's hands.

Now, the final verse is very closely related to this, too, because he says in verse 9, “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines.” Because our Lord is unchangeable, there is no need for innovation in the doctrines of the word of God. We have many attempts at innovation in the history of the Christian church. We go all the way back to the beginning and the heresies of Gnosticism and other heresies characterize the early age and made it necessary for the Christian church to more carefully define the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and, of course, the person of God. And down through the years, there always springs up something new.

In more recent times, we've had Bultmann demythologization. We've had philosophical existentialism penetrate the church. We have crisis theology. We have process theology, today.

And, in fact, there is nothing new in theology but that which is false. In the case of the word of God, it stands still as the standard by which we are to believe and live.

Now, you probably have read in the newspapers that a number of scholars, forty or fifty of them, I believe have been engaged for several years in the study of the words of Jesus. And the point of all that they're doing is to tell us which of his sayings are authentic and which are not. And they are now publishing a book. I think it's to come out this month. It may have already come out. I don't think it's come out yet officially. In which, we are now going to be told which are the authentic words of Jesus and which are not. I must confess, I just smile. And, no doubt, if we go into the twenty-first century that will be the innovation of the twentieth century, one of the innovations, and it will come under this same judgment. There is nothing new in theology but that which is false.

Just think for a moment, think of the Gospels for example, for they have been studying the Gospels. Who do you think could ever have, among the people that you know in history or in the present, could ever have created the picture that the Gospels give us of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? No committee such as the committee of the apostles could have ever come up with the story of the word of God, which has been attacked from the first century to the twentieth century, and will be attacked in the twenty-first if there is such coming. And, yet, the word of God, while it's had ups and downs as you might expect, when the attacks are fierce, it still stands today in the hands of millions of people, who believe by virtue of the testimony, the internal testimony, of the Holy Spirit to their hearts that it is the word of God. And we will discover, as we read this book and I will read it and study it because I'm interested in that. We will see where they have failed because of unbelief to understand the nature of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We have within evangelicalism, new things that spring up from time to time. The charismatic movement springs up from time to time. I remember in the early part of this century, in 1906, when the charismatic movement, modern charismatic movement, had its beginning in Los Angeles. You might say, well, we knew it would have started in California. Well, it did start, so far as the popularity of charismatic teaching is concerned. And, from time to time, it's hotly discussed in

evangelicalism. And then it's abandoned because it has not a sound foundation. And, recently signs and wonders, John Wimber and the vineyard movement, I was trying to think of that today and I was, I knew it had to do with grapes. [Laughter] That's one of the disadvantages of growing old, your memory is not as sharp as it used to be, of course. The Grape Movement? That doesn't give it the respect that you might expect. The grape, the old vineyard movement, yes, the vineyard movement, there are literally hundreds of vineyard churches now. And our own Sam Storms is at the moment, I don't think he will be in that movement permanently, he thinks he will at the moment, but I don't think he will. He's in that movement. As you know, he's moved to Kansas City and there teaches in the signs and wonders church in Kansas City. But it, too, is a movement and in my opinion, it's the kind of movement that ultimately will fail.

We have, also, in evangelicalism a number of men who are getting on the Canterbury Trail and leaving evangelicalism and going into Anglicanism or Episcopalianism, because they want more liturgy. In evangelical churches, the common evangelical church, not Believers Chapel, you understand, but the common evangelical movement, there is nothing really to create awe and reverence and worship in it. All we have is the word of God and the sense of the presence of our Lord in the meetings, if we earnestly are seeking his will and his way. But some want more than that. They are greatly impressed by the liturgy. They are impressed by the garments. They are impressed by other things. Impressed by the statues. They're impressed by the things that make for awe. And so leaving evangelicalism and going into a movement such as that, acknowledging at the same time that ministry of the word of God is not as significant and is not as close to the word of God, they, nevertheless, are making the choice.

And then, there are those on the Roman road, too, who are going back to Roman Catholicism, for much the same thing, even strong evangelical or at least who made strong professions of evangelicalism, have moved back into the Roman Catholic Church, again, for the same things and sometimes, also, because of the sense of tradition that exists in that great traditional church.

But, if we have the word of God, if we really are listening carefully to what the word of God says, we may be satisfied with that. And so, consequently, we are not interested or should not be interested, in my opinion, in the things that have to do with ceremonialism versus the gospel as found in the word of God, or asceticism versus grace. We're not interested in the Canterbury Trail.

The author says, “Don't be carried about with various and strange doctrines.” And then, speaking more specifically of some that were troubling to them, “For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods, which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.”

Now, evidently, there were a number of people who were setting out certain legalistic requirements for spirituality; certain things that could be eaten and certain things that could not be eaten. And, in fact, at maybe at times when a person could not eat, like fasting, which were supposed to have some kind of spiritual force in our lives, establishment by inner grace is what he recommends; God doing something for us, within us, through the word of God, not outward man-made taboos.

And then, finally, in that verse, he says, “Which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.” The profit comes from him. The hermits, the monks, the nuns were occupied with things. And Martin Luther is one of the great examples of that. Luther said, “If monkery could ever have gotten a person to heaven, he would have gotten to heaven by virtue of his monkery.” He actually punished himself, in order to live up to the things that were supposed to be means for spiritual growth and development until he discovered “The just shall live by faith.” And that gracious gospel is what really, ultimately, came to his heart by the Holy Spirit. He says, “It's good for the heart to be established by grace,” the knowledge of what God does for us, rather than to be occupied in the things that we are eating.

I've always thought that the experience of Thomas Chalmers and what it teaches is very much like what we, ourselves, need to bear in mind with reference to the things of the word of God. Thomas Chalmers, the great Scottish theologian, a very great influence in the nineteenth century in



Scotland among evangelicals, he spoke about the expulsive power of a new affection. And how he came to that was an experience that he had in the Scottish Highlands.

He said he was riding in the box seat of a coach, traveling through the Highlands of Scotland, and the route took them along a narrow ledge of a mountainside. On one side a steep mountain slope up and then on the other side, a deep precipice. And he said as they came to precipice and got out on the ledge, one of the four horses that were carrying the carriage took fright, and there was acute danger that the coach and all its occupants would be flung to instant death.” And he said, “Immediately, the driver began to whip the shying horse with all his might, causing such pain that it forget its fright and began to pull at its traces.” And after they got by the danger, Dr. Chalmers said he asked the driver why he had flogged the animal so unmercifully. And the man replied, “I had to make him forget his fear, by giving him something else to think about.”

Well, the same principle holds in the Christian life, of course. The expulsive power of a new affection because the devotion that the Holy Spirit brings to us, for Jesus Christ, is the greatest power in all, so far as the abandonment of the things that are dishonoring to our Lord and to the truth of his word. The more you love him, the more you abandon the things that you know are displeasing to him. The affection that the Holy Spirit puts in the heart for the Lord Jesus is the greatest sanctifying influence in a believer’s life. And that’s why we have to keep reading the word of God constantly, and growing in the knowledge of him and in the love for him.

Let me close by just a couple of comments. The immutable Messiah has the keys of life. The sciences, the philosophies of today are the jests of tomorrow. The things we think today are the things we discover, generally, are not right the next day.

I was so interested in what was recorded in *The New York Times* last Sunday. I decided to give up reading *The New York Times* every day. I guess, I hope, it was the expulsive power of a new affection, I didn’t have time to read this paper every day. But, it’s a useful paper for some things but I was interested very much in the fact that scientists report the unusual transmission of HIV. We’ve been told, very constantly, by the news media and by the doctors there’s no danger. There’s no

danger. HIV. And now, they’ve been telling us all along that the only way you may get it is by transmission; that is, sexual intercourse or contaminated needles.

But now we discover, there are instances of it being communicated in which there is no sexual intercourse, nor contaminated needles. And so we are constantly learning. And we learn, of course, that the best prevention is not to engage in the kind of activities that might lead to it. In other words, the most careful kind of living is the only hope that we have. And the doctors and the scientists are now having to pull in their horns. They’re still trying to tell us there is nothing to worry about, they don’t want us to panic. We haven’t panicked all along. We don’t panic. We try to follow the word of God, and we know that the kind of intercourse that leads to HIV and AIDS is the kind that’s prohibited by God’s word.

So but it illustrates the fact that the world is a changing, well, I’d say mistaken world. It’s moving in its ways without the guidance of the word of God. It’s flopping around. It’s without the proper guide. And our society has become, it’s really a society in shambles today. And every day you read the newspapers or everyday you listen to your radio or you look at your TV screen, you see evidence of the fact that the truthfulness of the word of God. Our society is a godless society.

The sciences, the philosophies of today are the jests of tomorrow. But which of our Lord’s words are obsolete? Is it true that our Lord’s words have become obsolete? Here we have fifty or sixty well-known New Testament scholars studying the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even the fact that they study them and spend, literally, years in their study is evidence of the power of those words. So we proclaim an eternal, triumphant Jesus Christ, for your yesterday, your sins; for your today, your fears, your concerns, the trials of life; and forever, the greatness of the Son of God.

I look back again at that marvelous statement we looked at last week in which we have the five negatives. Mr. Spurgeon’s sermon title rings in my ears and mind, “Never, Never, Never, Never, Never.” What a title. It’s almost as good as the one that one of my former students at Trinity Seminary asked me to give. He gave me a message with this title. He gave me the title before the Presbytery in Detroit, Michigan, last spring. He said, “I want you to speak on,” let’s see how he put

it, “Total Depravity in the Age of Self-Esteem.” So I had a chance to do that. But I like Spurgeon’s better, “Never. Never. Never. Never. Never.” “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” He’s the same yesterday, today and forever. And he will never, never, never, never, never leave us because he’s promised to be with us forever.

Let’s bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are certainly thankful for these marvelous words that Thou didst give this author. We thank Thee that they ring true. They ring true in the deepest inner resources of our hearts. We feel by the testimony of the Holy Spirit, so we are told, that these are words that come from Thee, Father. Our Lord has said, “he will never, never, never, never, never leave us.” He is the same yesterday, today and forever. What a hope! What a blessing! And, Lord, if there should be someone listening to these words who does not have the assurance of eternal life, O God, cause them at this very moment to turn to him, to give themselves to him and to his cross, for the forgiveness of sins and for life eternal.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.