



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Titus 3:1-8

“The Christian, The State and Justification by Grace”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Now, our Scripture reading is found in the 3rd chapter of Paul's letter to Titus. This is the sixth of our series of messages in this short epistle, and the final one will be given next Sunday morning. Today we are going to read verses 1 through 8 of Titus chapter 3.

“Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (I should comment upon the fact that that comma that is found in that text after regeneration should not be there, and this really should be translated as if those two words belong together and the term Holy Ghost goes with both, so we would say,) by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should

be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This (That is just what I have said.) This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.”

May the Lord's blessing rest upon his Word. Let's bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures, and again we thank Thee for the revelation that they have given us of Thy purposes among men. We are thankful that we know that the end is just as sure as the beginning, that Thou art the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end, and therefore Thou art well able to accomplish everything that is in Thy heart to accomplish. We thank Thee that Thou art sovereign and Thou doest work according to Thy pleasure, and we are confident Lord that the work that Thou doest do according to Thy pleasure is just and right and holy and good. And we pray that Thou wilt minister to use through the Scriptures in such a way that we may come to understand Thee better, and to because we understand Thee better, rely more implicitly upon Thee. We thank Thee that Thou hast brought us to knowledge of him to know as life eternal and that with him Thou hast freely given us all things, and especially Thou hast given to us the ministry of the third person of the Trinity to guide and direct us.

And so Lord, we pray for each one of us that the needs and the desires of our hearts may be met in Thy Word. And Lord for those who are troubled we pray that Thou wilt minister to them, that Thou wilt give them peace. For those who are agitated and anxious, we pray Lord that Thou wilt cause them to consider who Thou art and what Thou hast done and to cast themselves into the everlasting arms. And we pray Lord for some who have important decisions to make and do not know exactly what steps to take, give something of Thine own omniscience, in order that they may know Thy will. We

pray for the elders of this church and ask that Thy wilt particularly give them wisdom and guidance, in the days in which they must make important decisions.

We pray for our deacons and ask Lord that Thy wilt strengthen them in their ministry and in their work. We pray that as a congregation we may be able to know what Thou wouldst have us to do both collectively and individually. We would pray particularly Lord for the young people who are here, and as they look towards the future which is so bright spiritually but so dark otherwise. We pray that Thou wilt give them the comfort of Thy presence and the strengthening of Thy presence and the wisdom of Thy counsel, and as the desires that are implanted by Thee come to realization will thou given them the power to perform them. Enable them, oh God to submit their will to Thy will, and so fulfill Thy will in their life upon this earth. We look forward to the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are looking for the appearing of our great God and Saviour whom we love and whose we are. And so we commit this hour to Thee. We commit the hours of this week to Thee, and may the freshness and the brightness of the resurrection of Jesus Christ characterize the hour and characterize us throughout the week. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Our subject for today is “The Christian, the State and Justification by Grace.” Two fundamental issues of great importance are raised in the passage that we are going to study this morning. One is the Christian's relation to the state and the right to revolution. We are living in very strange and difficult days for men who are passed middle age, because the values and the order of the old days are definitely changing. It would seem from the reading of our newspapers that nothing is more sacrosanct these days than the man who strikes a policeman, and no one is more guilty than the policemen who strikes a defensive blow or for the matter, who enforces the law or uses his ingenuity to apprehend the law maker, and this is very strange for us who are older because we were brought up to believe that it was the responsibility of citizens to obey

the powers that be. I am convinced that what we are seeing is in evidence of that which is contrary to the teaching of the word of God. It would seem to me that Paul's words put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers to obey magistrates is very plain and clear, and this is not the plainest of Paul's passages, for in Romans chapter 13, he says, “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers for there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God, and they that resisteth shall receive to themselves condemnation.”

Now, the early Christians, as you study their history, not only in the Bible but after the time our New Testament, they obeyed Rome until Rome required them to burn incense to Creaser, an act of idolatry, and then they like the apostle said, we ought to obey God rather than men, but until the state requires us to be idolatrous it is our responsibility as Christians to obey the state according to the teaching of Scripture. In other words as far as I can tell, a Christian has absolute no right to revolution. The idea that Jesus was a revolutionary is throughout contrary to the Bible. I know that many evangelicals say that Jesus was a revolutionary, but if they have read their Bibles at all they mean by that that he was a spiritual revolutionary. But that creates a very wrong impression. I will not call it dishonest because I know exactly why they are saying that but it surely creates a wrong impression. And no one was more obedient to the higher authorities than Jesus of Nazareth. He did not lead any revolution at all. As a matter of fact, he is responsible for the apostle's teaching. It was he who said that we are to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the thing that are God's.

Now, often people say, “Well remember the American revolution.” And thus they would like to justify revolution. Well, let me say first of all that the American Revolution was not necessarily an act of God, but I think also that if we study the early facts about the American Revolution, we will discover that it was quite different from a revolution such as a French revolution. The French revolution was a true revolution bent on the

destruction of law and order. In fact it was the womb of communism, and if Reinhold Niebuhr said anything that was right, and he said a number of things that were right, although his theology was not conservative. In my opinion he said something that was absolutely right, when he said that, “Every error infecting a modern liberal culture and most of the eras which reached a tragic culmination in modern Totalitarianism were hatched in the French enlightenment and French revolution.” The American Revolution was not that kind of revolution. It was a revolution in which the colonists thought they were trying to preserve the law and order that was already enforced, that is the law and order of the colonies, and the evidence of that is illustrated by the vigor with which the leadership of the new nation persecuted or shall I say reacted would be a better word. Reacted against Shay’s rebellion, which was a true rebellion, and all we need to is go back and study our American revolutionary history to see that, so as far as I can tell the Bible does not give us any right to say the Christian or anyone else has the right to revolution.

Now, that issue is raised and Paul handles it very briefly in the first couple of verses of this third chapter of Titus. The other issue that he raises is of much more significant in my opinion. And it is the principle of grace in human salvation, and the statement that the apostle makes in the seventh verse, I regard myself as one of the greatest statements in all of the Bible, and it is a statement in which the apostle says, “That being justified by his grace.” I think that is of the utmost importance, and I do not think that any Christian who has come to understand something about his salvation can truly understand it and truly defend it until he understands what it means to be justified by grace.

Some years ago a Roman Catholic professor in one of our universities wrote me a letter when I was just beginning my teaching at Dallas Theological Seminary. And he asked me if he could correspond with me concerning some of the fundamentals of the Christian faith, and so I welcomed the opportunity, and he said, “If you are willing to do

it, I would like to ask you a question, and would like for you to reply.” And his question, which opened our correspondence, was, “What do you think about justification by faith?”

And I wrote him back a letter in which I explained that I believed that justification was by faith and that our justification by faith was to issue in good works, but it was our justification by faith that brought us life. And I quoted a few important texts and asked for his comments, and so he wrote me back and he made a few comments in which he said, “I largely agree with everything that you have said in your paper, or your letter.”

And I thought well I am getting somewhere until he threw in the hooker, and it was this. “What is your definition of faith?” And he went on to say, “Now, my definition of faith is love in action.” And I realized that what had happened is this, that he agreeing with my belief in justification by faith, but when he meant when he defined faith he defined it in such a way that according to my view point at least he was saying justification by works, for love in action in works. And so then I scoured the Scriptures in order to lay down the teaching the justification was something that God freely gives to us, and that the importance of a text like justification by grace began to come home to me.

For while it is possible for us to explain away justification by faith, it is very difficult for us to explain away justification by grace. That is that our relationship to the Lord is a relationship that comes as a free gift from God to us, and so I have always appreciated this statement that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. We have said that Titus is the epistle of good works. and six times that term is used. In verse 16 of chapter 1 Paul says, “And unto every good work, reprobate.” In chapter 2 verse 7 he says, “In all things join thyself a pattern of good works.” Then in verse 14 he says, “That we are to be people zealous of good works.” In verse 1 of our Scripture reading he has said that, “We are to be ready to every good work.” In verse 8, “They which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.” And finally in verse 14 of chapter 3, “And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses.”

Six times the apostle stresses the fact that those who have believed in God are to maintain good works, and I outlined this epistle in the light of that term saying that in chapter 1 we have good works in the congregational life, in which the apostle sets forth the requirements of the elder and also warns the elders against the false teachers and tells them that they must learn to silence such false teachers. Discipline should be exercised in the church of Jesus Christ. We will talk more about that next week. Then in the 2nd chapter he preaches and teaches on the subject of good works on the family and the individual life, he tells us how the old men are to live. That's the passage that's directed to me. And then he tells us how the old women are to live, and that passage does not have a great deal of application to anybody in our congregation, I am sure. [Laughter] Then he tells us about how the young women are to live, and that does have some application. And then he tells us how the young men are to live, and moves on even to tell us how servants should live, and they all in effect should adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

Then in the 3rd chapter he speaks of good works, in the public life. Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers. So today we want to look at this, and the first thing I want you to notice in verses 1 and 2 is Paul's reminder to obedience and kindness. Saints, who have believed in Jesus Christ, are those who are waiting for his appearing, so we were taught in chapter 3. We look for that blessed hope and the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. And so we get up in the morning, and we open, we lift up our shades and we open our windows and we say, “Perhaps today, Lord.” Or when we go to bed at night, we close our shades and our windows and we say, “Perhaps tonight, Lord.” So we live in the light of the possible return of our Lord Jesus Christ today at this very moment. But in the mean time, we are to fill our days with obedience and kindness. These are the things that are to characterize a Christian and first of all he points out this reminder to obedience. Put them in mind to be subject to the principalities and powers to obey magistrates. That means simply that

so far as the constituted authority is concerned, it is for a Christian a constituted authority of God.

That means my dear Christian friend, so far as I can tell that when we think of our state government, our county government, our city government, when we think of our federal government, we are to think of these men as ministers of God. These are the words of God. They are the ministers of God, and consequently if we resist we do not only resist the authorities, we resist God. When we obey we obey God. That is what Paul tells us in Romans chapter 13, “They are God’s ministers.”

Now, what shall we do when, as Rome required the Christians to take a pinch of incense and say that Caesar was God? What shall we do if they require us to commit the sin of idolatry? Well then we do what the apostles did under those circumstances. We ought to obey God rather than men, Peter said. But until the state who serapes the place of God and requires us to be idolaters, we are to be obedient to the state. We do not have nay right to revolution. Perhaps Paul wrote these words because of the creations, because Palipas, the Greek historian said of them that they were constantly involved in insurrections and murders and internecine wars. But since the apostles mentioned this more than once and since the teaching is derived from our Lord himself, who said as I have commented earlier. “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesars.” It is evident that this is the general teaching of the word of God.

Now, he moves on to speak of kindness in verse 2. He says that, “Men are to speak evil of no man. They are to be no brawlers. They are to be gentle and they are to show all meekness unto all men.” That’s something of a climax. Paul could have put it a lot milder it seems to me. He could have said, “Showing some mildness towards some people.” Or he could have said, “Show all mildness to some people or some mildness to all people.” But instead he says, “Show all mildness to all people.” And even plays on the word, suggesting that this is a complete assignment, show all meekness or gentleness or mildness unto all men.”

Now, that is a remarkable command and one might say, “Paul why should we do it?” And so Paul tells us why. He says in the 3rd verse. “There are some reasons why we should act as we act, and one of the reasons is what we were, and the other reason is what we are now. And so he contrasts the past and the present. He contrasts our state in sin and our state in grace, and he says the thing that has happened to you should give you a soft spot in your heart for people who now are like what you were, and since God was so kind to you, you ought to exercise kindness towards the world. It’s very simply. It simply causes us to recognize what we are and to render to other people the kind of action that God has rendered to us. And I must say one of the great teachings of the word of God is simply this. That Christians and believers, no matter who they are whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament are never to forget what they were? In the Old Testament, Israel was told, “And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bond man in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God redeemed thee. Therefore I command thee this thing today.”

And that text became the desk text of John Newton who wrote that hymn that we say a moment ago. “Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.” And no one was more of a wretch than John Newton. He absolutely sank to become one of the lowest dregs of human society of in his day. A slave runner, he mingled in the lowest of society and became himself a perfect wretch and was marvelously converted and became a great preacher of the grace of God. And you know what text he put above his desk was that simple text, “Remember that thou wast a bond man in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God redeemed thee.” And Paul, when he writes to the Ephesians, says to them, “Remember Gentiles, you who were far off have been brought nigh.” And if you are a Christian believer it is the word that the Holy Spirit puts to you, “Always remember what you were.” And so Paul says in verse 3, “For we ourselves also were sometime foolish.” These seven virtues of verses 1 and 2 are paralleled by the seven vices, which

were formally characteristic of our lives, evils of the mind, evils of the pursuits of our lives, evils of the heart. For example we also were sometime foolish.

Now, do not think that Paul is speaking only of creations who have come to believe in Christ. He is speaking about you and me. We were sometime foolish. We thought formally that we could approach God on the basis of our good works. We thought that simply because we were Baptists that when we reached heaven and knocked on the door of heaven, and Peter should say, he won't be there so far as I know, but nevertheless to use the euphemistic kind of speech of certain classes of people when the door is open and the apostle says, "Who's there?" And we say, "I am a Baptist." And he is not going to bow his head and say, "Oh come right in." And if he hesitates you say, "Oh I am Baptist. I am a member of the First Baptist Church." He is not going to be greatly impressed, and if you were to say, "I am a Presbyterian, and I have all of the dignity and grace of a Presbyterian." They are not going to be greatly impressed by that. Or if you should say, "I am an Episcopalian, and I have all of the class and intellect of an Episcopalian." They are not going to be impressed by that above.

We were foolish, for we thought that we could reach heaven on the basis of what we do. We thought that if we joined the church, that if we prayed, that if we attended the meetings, if we witnessed, if we were good, if we were philanthropists, if we were baptized, if we sat at the Lord's table, if we reformed, or if we were educated or if we were cultured, we thought surely God would accept us, and some even think because we're in America that surely God will accept us. [Laughter] We were foolish. That's what we were, foolish to think that God accepts these things, errors of the mind, evils of the mind, foolish, disobedient, deceived. That's what we were deceived. But not only that, we were evil in our pursuits, we were serving diverse lusts and pleasures and further evils of the heart, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. The truth of the matter is, my dear friend that we are so evil and so dirty that we spoil everything that we touch, and that is God's picture of us.

Now, Paul says, “That’s why we ought to be kind, to men because that’s what we were.” But he said something else is a reason for our actions, what has been done for us, and again Paul roots duty in doctrine. He always does that. He says really ultimately we ought to be this because we are this. We ought to do this because this is what has been done for us. And will you notice in these verses now in which he describes what has been done for us, he talks about God’s work for us, not our work for God. In fact, it is so much the work of God that he does not even mention our faith until he has finished the saying, and in verse 8 says, “They which have believed might be careful to mention good works.” In other words he talks about our salvation as if it were something that were done by God.

Now, I know it’s not really Scriptural to have only six points, but I could not find a seventh, and so I want you to notice six things that have done for us. First of all in the fourth verse, Paul says, “But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared.” He has just exhorted us to be kind and he reminds us that God has kindly appeared for our salvation. It is a divine intervention. God came when he was uncalled for and unsought.

Now, there is a teaching going around in evangelical circles, which I like to attack every chance I can get because too many people are following it. It is the teaching that everybody is just waiting for someone to give them the gospel. That is not the teaching of the New Testament. Paul says in more than one place, “There is none that doeth good, not no one. And there is none that seeketh after God no not one.” There is no excuse so far as I can tell for the modern notion bought by some of our evangelical friends that men are longing for God and laboring to find him. The sheep so far as I can tell never do seek the shepherd. They, the text says, “Were as sheep going astray, but now have returned or been returned unto the shepherd and bishop of our souls.” That text does not say, “We were as sheep out looking for the shepherd, and we finally tracked him down.”

[Laughter]

No, that's a great lie. Men are not seeking after God. They are running away from God. They have always been running away from God, ever since Adam ran away from God in the Garden of Eden and hid himself in his garments of fig leaves behind the bushes of that wonderful place. And so God came when he was uncalled for, when he was unsought, and the babe lay in the manger in Bethlehem no new comer to our human existence for he was the great angel of Jehovah, but he came in order that he might do what we did not wish, accomplish for us a redemption. So that's the first thing, a divine intervention, the kindness and love of God our Savior. That word the love of God is the word from which we get our English word, philanthropy. And so the love and the philanthropy of God appear. That's the appearance of the grace of God that Paul referred to in chapter 2 verse 11, a divine intervention.

Now, the next thing is a divine salvation. Not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us. Now, notice this salvation does not arise out of human good works. That's the meaning of *bi*. It's a Greek preposition that suggests origin, not from works of righteousness, which we have done did he save us, our salvation does not arise out of our good works.

Now, I know that people look at individuals who are not Christians and say, “My if any body is going to heaven that man is.” Or if you say, “He's not going to heaven since he's not a Christian.” They say, “You mean to tell me that a man that has done so much good as that is not going to heaven.” Well if he is not a believer in Jesus Christ, he's not going to heaven. That's final. Well, how can you explain these good works? Well, now those good works may genuinely be good according to the human standards of good, and so far as we can tell they outwardly conform to the good works of God. But you see good works are not only judged by what they are outwardly, they are judged by what they are inwardly. Do they arise out of the heart that loves our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ or God who is his Father? Well, no if he's not a believer. Well, if they do not arise out of the love of God, do they arise out of the desire to obey God? No they do not

arise out of the desire to obey God? Well, are they designed to glorify God? No, they are designed to glorify the man who gave them. He wants to put his name on the building that he is building.

Some years ago I spoke to one of the officials at SMU, and it was during the time of sustentation drive, perhaps things are different now, but he said a very interesting thing to me. He says, “You know we have the hardest time getting money for the general fund, but we have no problem at all in getting funds for buildings, which we will name after the donor.” That was very interesting. Things may be different now, but I think that is true to human nature. “Yes, I will give you fifty thousand, providing you call it the S. Lewis Johnson Building.” Well, really I am not giving that for the glory of God or even the glory of men or the glory of a man. That’s not a good work. That’s not a good work before God.

Now, Paul says, “It is not by works of righteousness which we have done. Human good is only human good. It does not measure up to God’s standard of perfection. It comes short.” Now, it may not be as bad as some other types of human works, but it still does not meet God’s standard. Paul says, “But according to his mercy the standard of God’s salvation is his mercy.”

Now, I am an old man, and the reason that I am old is because I can look back and remember John D. Rockefeller, and I can remember Rockefeller being famous all over the country as a rich old man who used to go around giving people dimes. And I used to read the newspaper that said, “Rockefeller was there, and he was passing out dimes to the children.” And I would always think, “Now, I wish I was there to get one of those new dimes.” He gave new dimes right off the mint.

Now, he was just an old crook. He had made all of his money through standard oil by crooking people out of money. He had discovered some oil, and then as a result of this sharp business practices, it’s all documented. Read his history. He had made a fortune, and so he made it something like this. When cars were invented and people

began to set up filling stations on the corners, why he would come and say, “I’ll give you ten thousand dollars for your filling station.” The man said, “No, I am making money. “ He said, “If you don’t sell to me, I am going to put one up on the other side of the street.” And sure enough he would put a filling station up on the other side of the street, and if you were selling gas for thirty five cents, he would see it for thirty three, and if you sold it for thirty three, he’d sell it for thirty one, and if you sold it for thirty one, he’d sell it for twenty nine, until finally you came to him and you said, “Mr. Rockefeller,” or his representative. “I think I will sell for ten thousand.” He said, “I’ll give you five.” And then he would buy you out and then in a few weeks the price would be up to thirty-eight cents, whatever it was, and he would make his money all back. And so he was a crook. Well, he used to go out giving out dimes.

Now, evangelicals have used this as an illustration, and it illustrates the point, he gave out of his wealth. He gave a dime. A dime to you, a dime to you, a dime to you, but he did not give according to his wealth. If he had given according to his wealth, he would have given one hundred dollar bills everywhere.

Now, God saves not out of his mercy but according to his mercy, and it’s no wonder Paul says, that we are saved by a God who is rich in mercy. Ephesians chapter 2 verse 4. So this salvation then is a salvation. It does not arise from human good works. It is a salvation that is measured by divine mercy. Third, he says in the 5th verse, “According or by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” Science today no more than the law yesterday can help men.

Now, we often sadly in the 20th century thought that science with all of its discoveries would enable us to reach our answers to the questions that had plagued us about our lives and we have discovered in the 20th century that in the presence of the problems of life, science is dumb. It does not tell us anything more than the ancient religious leaders were able to tell us in the day of our Lord. It is no more able to solve the problems of life, that the Pharisees were who believed that the way to reach God was by

keeping the Mosaic law and living a life characterized by good works, and so God had to do something. And that is what he has done. And he has saved us by the washing of the regenerating, and the renewing work of the Holy Ghost.

Now, this is not baptismal regeneration. Paul is not saying that we were baptized and thus saved. There is no water in this text at all. You can read from verse 1 through verse 8, and you will not get the slightest bit of moisture upon you. This is the washing of the Holy Spirit. It is the washing of the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit's renewal. In other words it is the work of God. There is no water here. The Holy Ghost goes with both nouns, regeneration and renewal. The washing is metaphorical, and it does not refer to the work after our salvation. It refers to the work at salvation. Both of these terms regeneration and renewal, new birth, and new life. The reason that it refers to both is it says that he saved us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and in verse 7 that being justified by his grace.

Now, thousands of fundamentalists attend the stork school of theology. Now, what I mean by that is illustrated by a little story that appeared years ago in the Reader's Digest, which Dr. Barnhouse used to like to use. A little girl came home from school one day, and she said to her mother, “Mother, how was I born?” And mother said, “Why the stork brought you.” And she said, “And you, mother?” “Well, I was found in a cabbage patch.” “And grandmother?” “Well, she was found under a rose bush.” And so the next day she went back to school and she wrote in her theme. “There has not been a natural birth in our family for three generations.” [Laughter]

Now, she did not understand a great deal, but her mother and her answers gave a theory that no more explained human birth than some our evangelicals do when they refer to the new birth as a work that is produced by our faith. It is not a work that is produced by our faith. Why the very fact that we are born physically is the evidence of the fact that we are the product of the work of our parents. And we do not have anything more to do with our spiritual new birth, than we do with our physical birth. It is

the work of God. It is he when we were dead, Paul says, who communicates to us life. We are not responsible for our new birth any more than we were responsible for our natural birth. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who in efficacious grace comes to us, creates new life in us so that we respond in that new life and believe in the word that is proclaimed to us. It is the work of God. And so that's why he says, “We were saved by the washing of the new birth and the new life, which was produced by the Holy Spirit.”

What is regeneration? I hope you understand what it is, and that you are no longer enrolled in the stork school of theology, but you have come to understand that new birth, regeneration is the divine act of cleansing the elect and communicating to them spiritual life by the work of the Holy Spirit through the word of God.

Henry Clay once said that he did not understand what these people, who were talking about, who talked about the new life, but he had seen Kentucky family feuds of long standing heal by religious revivals, and that what ever could heal a Kentucky family feud was more than human, and I believe that. It is the work of God, which creates new life, and so if you are in the audience this morning and you have been born again, you are the product of the work of the Holy Spirit, and you live because of him.

Now, that means that we are fantastically dependant upon the work of a sovereign God. Now last night, at about 11:00 it was too early to bed. I never like to go to bed before 11:00. I usually do not make it until about 1:00. It always seems to me a waste of time to hit the pillow before about 1:00. And so I home by myself. The reason I am so tough this morning, is because my wife is out of town. [Laughter] And so I thought well, I have got a couple of hours, and what would you do with a couple of hours, so I reached up and I got down a volume of Jonathan Edwards, A Narrative of Surprising Conversions. And I opened up the book because it has a sermon in it on the sovereignty of God. And so last night at 11:00, I read this tremendous sermon on the sovereignty of God pointing out how we are dependant upon a sovereign God for everything that has happened to us. He works according to his own good pleasure.

Now, he works righteously. He works holily, he does not do anything to compromise his holiness or his goodness, but he acts sovereignly, and it was thoroughly in accord with what I had been studying in the word of God that our salvation, our regeneration is the product of God. It does not arise out of the will of the flesh, Paul says, It does not rise out of the will of man. We are born of God, and so when he reached the end of his sermon, Jonathan Edwards said, “What should we do in the light of the sovereignty of God? Well, we should get down on our knees and thank him.” And that’s what I did. I just got down on my knees and said, “Oh God I thank Thee that Thou hast in sovereign love and mercy exercised Thy grace to me, and I belong to Thee.” And my dear friends, not only does he exercise his sovereign mercy to us, he is not like human judges, who have men before him, and he says, “Now, I see that you are before me. You have committed such and such?” “Yes, I am guilty.” “You have done this?” “Yes.” “You are guilty.” And now the judge speaks. He says, “Well to tell you the truth, I think I am going to be nice on you today, and I am going to pardon you.” No, God is not like that because you see he is a Holy God, and we must never think of his mercy as a short changing of his justice, and so he demands that the penalty for sin be met, and it is met by the saving work of Jesus Christ. And so the mercy that God exercise to us is a righteous and a just mercy. He does not bypass any of his holiness, so when I get to heaven, and I knock ion the door, and someone says, “Why are you here?” I am not going to say, “Because I was in Believer's Chapel.” I am going to say, “I have the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ and I justly belong here. Move aside. Where’s the Lord? Where’s the Lord?” [Laughter]

Now, my dear friends that is precisely what we have the right to do because we have the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ. We do not have any second rate salvation. It’s all there. Fourth, he says, we must hurry, which he shed on us abundantly. What? The Holy Spirit, and this divine gift is shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Everything comes through Jesus Christ.

Fifth, that being justified by his grace. There are only two ways in which a man may be justified. One he may be justified if he's innocent, or two he may be justified by paying the penalty. You may remember the case of Captain Dreyfus, the French military officer who was accused in the last century of selling military secrets to the German army and was court marshaled. He was Jew and his hearing was utterly unfair, and he was accounted guilty and banished to Devil's Island, but he had friends and he himself was determined to free himself, or absolve himself, and so in the face of new evidence finally the military was forced to have another trial. And again he was found guilty.

Now, however it had become such a national scandal that the president of France pardoned him, but Captain Dreyfus would not except the pardon, because he knew he was not guilty, and so he and his friends worked for a third trial. And finally a third trial was held, and it was shown that it was not he who was responsible for the sell of the secrets, it was someone else, in the military or the foreign office. I have forgotten which, and so he went out not only pardoned, but he went out acquitted. Declared innocent by the law. He was free.

Now, that is one way of being justified. We cannot be justified that way because we are sinners, and so the only way in which we can be justified is to pay the penalty, but if we pay the penalty of eternal death, we are lost forever. And so we need someone to pay the penalty for us, and God has taken it upon himself, through our Lord Jesus Christ who is also a member of that blessed Trinity to accomplish the payment in himself, and so God pays the penalty that God in his righteousness requires and grants us freely by grace justification. Remember righteous, that righteousness, which God requires us to have or his righteousness requires him to require him to require we have through Jesus Christ justified by grace.

And then sixthly, that we should be made heirs according the hope of eternal life.

Now, everybody is interested in an inheritance. Aren't we? Yes, we are. We all would like to think that we are going to have an inheritance some day, and so we look

around in our family, and we say Uncle So and So is wealthy. I wonder if he is going to leave me anything. Don't we? We do. We look for an inheritance because we can get something for nothing, but to get an inheritance someone must die, and that is what our Lord has done. And that is what our Lord has done. And our inheritance is an inheritance that is the result of his death for us.

Peter you know says, “We are given an inheritance that is incorruptible, that is undefiled and that does not fade away reserved in heaven for Lewis Johnson.” Wouldn't it be terrible if it said for Lewis Johnson? Now wouldn't it? Yeah, you see you are not willing to admit it because you don't want to be in the position of wishing that I didn't have it. But you know I wouldn't like it if it read for Lewis Johnson. You know why? Because there are lots of other Lewis Johnson's. Last Monday night at the Cotton Bowl game I just has settled in my seat, and the announcer said, “Will Bob so and so and Lewis Johnson please go to gate two.”

Now, I was there with my son in law and he said a moment later, “Well, aren't you going?” And I said, “No, it's not me I am sure.” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Well I don't know any Bob So and So, and apparently they are together.” And further I knew there were other Lewis Johnson's in the city of Dallas.

Last night just out of curiosities I said, “What am I going to tell these people in the morning about this?” And so I got my telephone book out and I looked it up. And there are six Lewis Johnson's in that book and four Lewis Johnson's who misspell their name -- Louis [Laughter] So there are ten Lewis Johnson's in the city of Dallas at least, besides me. Now, I don't know that there are any other S. Lewis Johnson Jrs, but I know there is a Lewis Johnson Jr also.

Now, I am rather glad than that that text does not say, “Reserved for Lewis Johnson or even Lewis Johnson Jr or even Lewis Johnson Jr. or even S. Lewis Johnson Jr.” By the way your name is in the Bible your first name your second name, and your third name. Dr. Barnhouse used to like to say. You don't believe that do you? Well, there's

one text that says “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Poor, lost, sinner, there’s your name. [Laughter] All three of them, first, middle and last, and that’s what we have an inheritance that is for you according to the hope of eternal life. Well, then times up.

Paul in the next verse the last reaffirms these matters. If what we are and what has happened to us is expressed to us in the verse that precede here is expressed what we ought to wish to do. This is a faithful saying. What I have been speaking about. It can be relied upon. “And these things I will that Thou affirm constantly that they which have believed.” You see we do not do good works in order to be saved. We do good works because we have been saved. So he says, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. Take careful thought to take the lead in good works. So the living we arouse to work. You who are dead in your trespasses and sins, in the audience, you first need to be born again. And if you have not been born again, you are lost and you cannot do any good works that are pleasing to God. You need new life, and God is able to give you that life, if you recognize that you are a sinner, and that Jesus Christ has died for sin. And in your heart you come and say, “Thank you, Lord for dying for me.” That’s evidence that life has been communicated and faith is your response, and you have new life.

Now, if you are sitting in the audience and say, “I don’t like this doctrine that Dr. Johnson’s talking about. I don’t really want to be born again.” Then of course you have no excuse. But let the ungodly never say that we who believe in free grace think lightly of holy living. They, which have believed in God, are to be careful to maintain good works, and my dear Christian friends, may I say one word to you as I close? Apparently this is often neglected by Christians because Paul says, “I say that this is a faithful saying, and these things I will that Thou affirm constantly.” Apparently we often neglect them.

Now, I left this morning after preaching at 8:30, and I walked into the kitchen and a lady who works at the church here said, “You know I am so delighted to have a young couple as tenants in my building from your church.” And I said, “Tell me what you mean.” And she went on to explain that she never allowed her building, her piece of property to be rented to young people. She always had older people. They were safer tenants for her, but she said, “I looked at this young couple, and something just impressed me.” She works with young people herself at SMU quite frequently. And she said, “Something told me these young people are all right, and it has been the most wonderful association with them.” I think that’s the fulfillment of this text, good works. They are adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the grace of our God, which has brought us salvation. We are thankful for the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit that communicated new life to us. We are thankful and grateful for the cleansing of the renewing work of the Holy Spirit. And we pray Lord that as a result of that which has happened to us, we may be careful to maintain good works. Go with us throughout this week, and glorify thyself in and through Thine own. We pray in Jesus name. Amen.