



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 4:6-7

“Augustine’s Teaching on the Human Will”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father we give Thee thanks for those who in centuries past have, by Thy grace been brought into a relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and have passed on to us things that are fruitful and profitable for us in nineteen eighty-seven. We thank Thee for some of the great men of the past. Great because Thou didst make them great as they have confessed, and great because they are so useful in the proclamation of the truth which Thou hast given to the apostles and has guarded down through the centuries, transmitting it through faithful men that we may be the beneficiaries of that truth. We thank Thee and praise Thee for Augustine and for the things that Thou didst teach him. May those things Lord that Thou didst teach him be things that we learn as well in our day. We ask Thy blessing upon each one present, may our time together be profitable for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] As most of you know, I’m simply filling in for Kurt and his exposition of the Epistle to the Philippians, and I hope that you will keep following along with him. And the reason that I am speaking to you on the subject tonight, “Augustine and the Human Will” is because during our question and answer session last week, there was a question concerning the will which indeed Kurt answered properly and correctly, but it

led me to believe that perhaps it would be helpful again for us to consider what the Scriptures have to say concerning the human will. And sense the struggles that Augustine had have directly to do with that question, I thought that it might be well for us and that we might profit historically if we looked at the struggles that Augustine had with these questions and how they have been committed to us through others such as Calvin and Luther and some even more recent men in order that we might come to understand some of the things that have meant so much to these great men of faith.

So our subject for tonight is, “Augustine and the Human Will.” And one of the passages that I think would be most fitting for us to read is 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 6 and 7. And the reason this is so fitting is that Augustine traced his understanding of the doctrine of grace to this particular passage and particularly the 7th verse. But I’ll read the 6th verse, the apostle is writing and he said,

“Now these things, brethren, I have transferred (and he means transferred in a figurative sense) to me and Apollos for your sakes, that in us you may learn not to go beyond that which has been written, (Now that’s a very interesting statement, and in one sense, that really is the heart of Augustine’s theology, that is the desire not to go beyond that which is written. If one reads Augustine one notices that constantly Scripture texts are cited. And in fact that’s characteristic of him, one Scripture text after another being expounded, so I think that that is fitting though Augustine so far as I know did not make much of that clause.) lest one of you should be puffed up in behalf of one against the other. (Now the 7th verse is the important verse.) For who makes you to differ? And what do you have which you have not received? And if indeed you have received it, why are you boasting as though not receiving it?”

Let me read that again, because it’s important that you grasp what he is saying.
“For who makes you to differ? And what do you have which you have not received?”

Notice that, what do you have that you have not received? “And if indeed you have received it, why are you boasting as though not receiving it?” So it’s very plain that what Augustine is saying is that everything we have we’ve received from God and therefore there’s no cause to boast in anything. Because it’s something we have received, not something we have earned by merits. Now what he had in mind particularly was a reply to the Pelagians, Pelagius and his followers who believed that righteousness was conferred upon individuals on account of merits. And so this text when it came home to him caused him to realize that everything that he had, not simply his salvation, but the faith by which he believed and the grace that brought him to faith were things that were given to him by God. He had received them, he had not earned them. So, that’s the background of what we want to talk about.

And I’d like to begin now with an introduction. It would require a series of discourses to do justice to the importance of Augustine for Biblical doctrine. One well known author has said with reference to him, “That he has strikingly been called incomparably the greatest man whom between Paul the apostle and Luther the Reformer the Christian church has possessed.” Probably, the majority of people who have studied the history of Christian doctrine and studied it from a Christian standpoint would agree with that statement. That from the time of the apostle, to the time of Luther, the greatest of the men who have expounded the doctrine of the grace of God was Augustine.

Among his voluminous writings and they are voluminous, for example in my library I have eight large volumes and that’s not all of his works. Those are large volumes, and the print is small, in fact I have one of them here so you can see just how large it is. Eight of those and that’s not all, that’s only a part of the things that he wrote. He wrote constantly and never seemed to stop. He was always writing letters as well and preaching as well, and so his writings are truly voluminous. Among them at least five are masterpieces. *The Confessions*, anyone can profit from reading *The Confessions*. It is Augustine’s accusations of himself and his confession of his need of God and how he

came to an understanding of the truth. It’s an analysis of his religious experience and any of you who read that I know would profit from it. He also wrote concerning Christian doctrine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, the principles of his Biblical exposition. He wrote a little book called *The Enchiridion*, which means, “A handbook,” so it’s a little handbook. It was his way of writing a handbook by which one could learn the fundamentals of the Christian faith. He wrote that to a particular individual. That was his most serious attempt to systematize his thought. He wrote *De Trinitate*, or “concerning the Trinity.” And in that gave final form to the doctrine of the Trinity particularly for the western church. And he also wrote *De Civitate Dei*, or “The City of God,” concerning the city of God literally, which is the foundation of a rational philosophy of history. In fact he is really the first to write such a philosophy of history. So you can see just from these five works, if he had only written these five things, that he would have been a well known Christian man. But this is just an incidental part of the vast amount of material that he has written, although the highlights of it.

In the matter of the gospel, Augustine regarded his controversy with Pelagius of the utmost significance. The problem is with us today, for Pelagianism was the daughter of legalism leading to an essential deism. And that is characteristic of much of our Christian church today and unfortunately characteristic of much of our evangelical church in which, the reason incidentally, I say that it leads to an essential deism is that God is not really directly concerned in our salvation until we ourselves have responded of our free will to him, then he becomes concerned. But everything hinges on the decision of our free will and thus so far as the essence of Christian salvation is concerned; God stands apart from us until we make the first decision to turn to him.

Now of course, Pelagius and Pelagianism in which it was taught that men are accepted by God according to merits, is essentially legalism. It was of course a historical manifestation of it and that’s why men have called Pelagianism the daughter of legalism. That is the principle is legalism, it manifested itself in Pelagianism in the fifth century, the

earlier part of the fifth century. It has manifested itself down through the years and is with us today in many of the churches in many of professing Christian churches in which salvation is not by the grace of God through the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross, but is through things that we do by which we gain merit before God. So that’s what we want to talk about and I’m going to give the points of the outline as I go along, if you want to make an outline, you can.

But Roman one in my outline, “Augustine, the man and his career.” No obviously from what I’ve said, I can only give you a reminder of a few of the chief features of it. Augustine in his background and that’s the subtitle, his background, was born of mixed pagan Christian parentage in three hundred and fifty-four A.D. His mother was a Christian, well known by the way, her name was Monica and his father was an unbeliever. He was born in Tagaste which would be in modern Algeria. So he was a North African. He grew up, became a rhetorician, taught rhetoric, in several places including in Italy in Rome and Milan. Lapsed into general skepticism in three hundred and eighty-three when he was about twenty-nine years of age.

Now his conversion, this is capital B in the outline. Augustine came into contact with some Neo-Platonists, that is who had espoused platonic philosophy but had modified it to some extent, are known in the study of philosophy as Neo-Platonists. And with the help of the Neo-Platonists, he came from skepticism ultimately he was converted to Catholic Christianity in Milano in three hundred and eighty-six. He was thirty-two years of age at that time. His conversion is very well known and in fact you may remember in some of the messages that I’ve given particularly in the Epistle to the Romans I made reference to the fact how one day he heard some words, *tolle lege, tolle lege* which means in Latin, to take up and read. And thinking that that probably had to do with the Bible, he took the Bible opened up and opened it up to Romans chapter 13, and began to read in Romans chapter 13 the 14th verse which was the climax, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and do not make provision for the flesh, for lusting or for lusts.” Augustine had

lived a very desolate life, he was as we would say today, a woman chaser, he was a drinker. He lived the kind of life that one lived who was not a Christian man and who was evidently a very gifted kind of fellow. But this conversion of his made a tremendous transformation in him.

And I’d like to move now to his career and his influence as a result. This is capital C under my main point Augustine the man and his career. Augustine became perhaps the most influential Christian since he has influenced both Roman Catholicism by its ecclesiology and Protestantism in his theology of grace. In fact if you were to look over the history of Christianity since the time of the apostles, the man who has probably influenced more people is Augustine. And that’s the reason, because he not only has influenced Protestantism with his theology of grace, but he has been a tremendous influence in the Roman Catholic Church by virtue of his systematizing of the ecclesiology. In which he had grown up and into which he was put when he came to personal faith in Christ. So here is a man who has been the systematizer of Roman Catholic ecclesiology, not its doctrine, for Aquinas later on modified that. But in the earlier days, even its doctrinal formulations and then was the man through whom the Reformation came into existence. So he is a man who has influenced Protestants, a man who has influenced Catholics, and not only influenced them, but influenced them tremendously, so probably the most influential mere human professing Christian since the days of the apostles.

We have today people who talk about secular humanism and one of the things that we need to remember in our castigation of secular humanism is to remember that humanism did Christianity a big favor at the time of the Reformation. It was by virtue of the humanism of the Renaissance that many people were delivered from the Thralldom of a church that was dead in tradition. And as a result of the Renaissance and the humanism of that men began to have more freedom with respect to learning, freedom with respect to study and our of that of course came a great deal of the things that led ultimately to the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. But the thing to remember is this that while we

may be grateful to the humanists, and I certainly am grateful to the humanists. In fact that was what I studied when I was studying the classics. I studied humanism essentially through the Renaissance and through the study of Latin and Greek and things like that which were things that had not been studied for a long time. My education was grounded in a great deal of that. The humanists are represented however by Erasmus. Now when the Reformation came to pass, Erasmus represented the humanism, and on the other hand, Martin Luther who himself had received a great deal of help from humanism, represented Augustinianism. And for the Christian church, the split that came at the time of the Reformation was a split that meant simply this, that Augustine theology of grace was a theology that in a sense won the victory over the humanism of Erasmus and others. So we are indebted to the humanists for the enlightenment that came to people at that time so that they could study things that ultimately led them through Martin Luther and Calvin to the truth of the doctrine of the grace of God.

So Augustine then is of the greatest of significance. He was a man in whom one well known theologian has said, “Two children were struggling in the womb of his mind, there can be no doubt which was the child of his heart, the very core of his being and that was his theology of grace.” But Augustine was in the Roman Catholic Church and his ecclesiology is and ecclesiology that is constructed around what is today the Roman Catholic Church. So Augustine believed as a result of that that Salvation was for example through baptism. He believed in the sacramental system. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield one of the finest of the theologians of the twentieth centuries said with reference to Augustine and he may well be right, that the problem with the Augustine was that he was converted when he was thirty-two years of age, and he began to think through the principles of the doctrine of grace and he didn’t know them all at the beginning. He talks about how he was wrong in the early days of his Christian church and he came to understand grace later on even after his conversion. Warfield says that as the years went by he began to integrate more and more his theology of grace. But unfortunately, he

didn’t live long enough to see that the theology of grace is opposed to the theology of sacramentalism. And if he had thought about it or had the opportunity to think about that finally professor Warfield feels quite sure that he would have dropped also the sacramentalism which was that in which he was born in which he grew up in which he lived day by day. But there’s no question that the thing that was deepest in his heart and the thing that meant the most to him was the doctrine of the grace of God that God had revealed to him.

So in one sense, the Reformation is the ultimate triumph of the doctrine of grace over the doctrine of the church as propounded by the Roman Catholic Church. And it’s the triumph of grace which may be called indispensable, prevenient, that is it is precedent to our faith, prevenient, irresistible, indefectible, it cannot fail and eternal.

Now with that as a background, let me turn now to roman two in the outline, the Pelagian doctrine of the human will. You’ll recognize immediately when we talk about the Pelagian doctrine of the human will that we’re talking about something that is with us in evangelical churches today under a different name.

Now again, this will be just a simple review because to do it justice would take us a number of lectures. I was a little disappointed that my memory is kind of bad I’ve been reading Augustine over and over over the past really about the past week, and then I went back today to write up a few little notes and I found I had already lectured five lectures on Augustine and I’d forgotten about them entirely and I had already done the work. So, it’s so easy to forget things that you had done a few years ago. But capital A, that’s Roman two, capital A, Pelagius the man and now Pelagius is spelled P-E-L-A-G-I-U-S, Pelagius. Pelagius was a British monk, his British name his English name was Morgan. And you may recognize that there is a connection between Morgan and Pel a gus which means sea in Latin, but at any rate, his name was Morgan, but he’s known as Pelagius the heresiarch, for that’s what he was, a heretic.

He arrived in Rome at the opening of the 5th Century. He was not known as a heretic, he was known as a godly man. In fact, there are testimonies to his piety. And the struggle with Pelagius took a couple of decades and at times he stood fairly well with the church, and at other times he didn’t. We don’t have time to talk about the details of it. So we’ll just talk about the doctrine, and this is capital B, Pelagianism, the doctrine. Pelagius denied fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. Now mind you, he was a monk who was in good standing from time to time with the church and in good standing when he arrived in Rome. So this will give you some idea of the situation in the church at that time.

He first of all denied the ruin of the race. He did not feel that men had fallen in Adam’s sin and therefore needed redemption. In fact, it made him mad, so we are told, when men said “it’s hard to live the Christian life, it’s difficult.” Because he understood that the Bible or the Scriptures taught that one could live the Christian life in his own strength. And when he heard Augustine famous remark which occurs a number of times in Augustine’s writings, “Give what Thou (that is God) Give what Thou God commandest, and command what Thou wilt.” Well that was too much for Pelagius and that started the difficulties. Because he couldn’t believe that anyone would actually believe “Give what Thou commandest and command what Thou wilt.” So he denied the ruin of the race. He denied therefore the necessity of the grace of God in human salvation.

Now when you deny the necessity of the grace of God in human salvation, certain things result from it. He believed therefore that all might be sinless if they chose to be sinless. In other words, it was possible for men to live a sinless life and in fact, some of the Pelagians even pointed to two or three people in the Scriptures of whom it is difficult to find a specific statement that they sinned. He also believed therefore that there was no original sin because he denied the ruin of the race. We do not inherit a sinful nature from Adam and we do not communicate it one to another as the generations pass. He also believed that there was no need for any kind of divine preceding grace or help for men in

their sin. In other words, he believed in the plenary, the full ability of man in his own strength to justify himself before God. Of course the Bible tells us that Christ came to save sinners. But these were the views of Pelagius.

Augustine made a very interesting comment and this I think will give you some picture of the disposition of this great man. He said, “Take away diseases, take away wounds, and there is no reason for medicine. If the Great Physician came from Heaven, a great sick man was lying ill through the whole world, and that sick man is the human race.” That’s right to the point, if the Lord Jesus is the Great Physician, men are sick and they need help. And that was at the heart of Augustine’s thinking.

Now let’s come to our third and final point, but don’t think I’m through. The Augustinian doctrine of the human will. This question has eternal relevance unfortunately. You know it might be nice if it had only relevance when professing Christians who said they were evangelical were talking with individuals who are not Christians at all. But unfortunately, the conflict is in the Christian church. Because the Christian church today by and large is Semi-Pelagian. The freedom of the will is a given in most professing Christian churches. Pelagius if he were not where he is should be very happy over that. Many of our articles in the encyclopedias, Christian encyclopedias will make the point in the Reformation, there was a great struggle over the question of the human will and the doctrine of divine grace, and the reformers basically won. But then the writers of the articles who are not necessarily sympathetic with the reformers will go on to say simply from the standpoint of history, that the doctrine is now back in the church under some different names.

Luther said, “If any man doth ascribe ought of salvation, even the very least of the free will of man, he knoweth nothing of grace and he hath not learned Jesus Christ aright.” We often hear people say “Well you can believe in the Lord if you will.” Well of course we can believe in the Lord if we will, but if you ever tried in your unsaved state to believe in the Lord if you will, because in your unsaved state, you don’t have any will to

believe in the Lord. As a matter of fact, you’re rebellious against him. You don’t want to will to believe in him. It’s true, you can believe in God if you will, but we need somebody to make us willing. And that’s what the gospel tells us that it’s through the work of the Holy Spirit that we are made willing, and God does that work. So the struggle then is between the if you will kind of doctrine, and the doctrine that tells us that God through the Holy Spirit makes men willing.

I think it might be helpful for us to read a few passages from the word of God, so we’ll turn to Zechariah chapter 1 and verse 3 for a text that might seem to support the opposite. Zechariah chapter 1 and verse 3, the prophet writes, “Therefore say to them, thus says the LORD of hosts, Return to Me, declares the LORD of hosts, that I may return to you, says the LORD of hosts.” “Return to me and I will return to you.” And of course that’s true, “return to me and I will return to you.” But I think knowing what I know of myself at that time, if I’d had been there I would have said, “Wait a minute Zechariah, I believe what you’re saying, but I find I cannot return to the Lord, I don’t have the strength to return to him.” Now that text is true, “Return to me and I will return to you.”

But I want to show you how the saints in the Old Testament reacted to the command to do this. We’ll turn to Psalm 80 and verse 7, and in Psalm 80 and verse 7 the psalmist writes, “Oh God of hosts, restore us and cause thy face to shine upon us and we will be saved.” And there arising out of the known desire to turn to the Lord is the request that he will accomplish it.

Psalm 85 verse 6, the Psalmist writes, “Wilt Thou not thyself revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?” You don’t find the Psalmists saying, “We don’t need the Lord’s help, he said turn to me and I will turn to you.” So why pray, go ahead and turn of yourself.

In Psalm 84 and verse 4 we have something like that too, “How blessed are those who dwell in thy house, they’re ever praising Thee, how blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee in whose heart are the highways to Zion.”

Now we turn over to John chapter 6 and verse 65, I don’t want to waste too much time turning to these passages in the Old Testament, if you’ll look up the term “Turn” you will see that in the Old Testament, often the prayer was made to “turn us to Thee.” In John chapter 6 and verse 65 in a well known passage, at least in Believers Chapel, I am confident that it is well known in Believers Chapel. I certainly hope it’s not a surprise to you when I read it and he was saying, “For this reason I have said to you that no man can come to me unless it has been granted him from the Father.”

Now I say that this is one of the basic problems in the evangelical church today. I have a good friend, and his whole ministry has been built around the term positive volition. That is if we’re on positive volition, everything is fine, if we’re on negative volition everything is bad. And the issue lies essentially with us, whether we’re on positive volition or whether we’re on negative volition. There is no indication so far as I can tell that a man is on positive volition because God in his grace has caused us to be on positive volition.

But now let’s turn to the condition of fallen man, capital A under our outline. Man is endowed, Augustine says, with a free will. Now that may seem strange to you and I’m sure would be strange if you had not read a good bit of Augustine. Because, you might be puzzled by that after all, I’ve talked about free will as if it were not a Biblical doctrine. And one of the things particularly that Augustine says in his earlier writings is that man has free will. That would seem to go contrary to what I’ve been talking about. But you know in order to understand a person you must understand the definition of terms. Now when we use the term free will today, we generally mean that an individual has the power to either turn to God or turn away from God apart from divine enablement. In other words, of himself he has the power to turn to God or the power to turn away from God. That is free will as we understand it in nineteen hundred and eighty-seven, in our society generally.

But now I when Augustine said we have free will, he didn’t mean that. He meant when we, he said, we have a free will he meant we have a will. Now we don’t deny that we have a will. And in fact Augustine was making that point over and over again. We have a free will as a faculty. So when he spoke of free will, he meant the faculty of a will. It’s free in its decisions, but not free from influence. For example, if an evil person uses his free will, the result will be an evil decision. And so for Augustine then, free will means the faculty.

But Augustine goes on to say that by sin freedom was lost. He states that particularly clearly in his later writings. He says as a result of the fall in the Garden of Eden we have a nature that can not will positively toward God. We cannot will things that please God. We always will things contrary to God. So the faculty of the will though it is free, does not keep us from making decisions that are negative toward God as the rule of fallen men. Under the power of Satan, his free will Augustine says is now injured wounded diseased, enslaved. And Augustine goes on to say the call of God is necessary for response to God. in other words, grace must be given by God to us in order that we use our wills positively toward God.

When for example, I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, that’s the decision of my will. But the reason that you or I have made a decision to believe in Jesus Christ is because grace has been given to you preveniently by God the Holy Spirit to bring you to make a decision contrary to your basic nature. That’s what Augustine said. That’s what he taught. That’s why his theology is called the theology of grace. The fundamental decision is made by God, not by man. The movement from an individual toward God is not made by man; it’s made by God first of all. We don’t make a self movement toward God; there is a God movement that causes our self movement toward him. All the difference in the world is found right there. The difference between salvation through human merit and salvation through divine grace is found right there.

Capital B, the necessity of grace. Grace is God’s liberating agent. As I say, it’s prevenient, that is grace liberates us and because it liberates us it therefore precedes our activity toward God. The theological term is prevenient. That is, it comes to us before we turn toward the Lord, it’s prevenient grace. It’s gratuitous; it’s given to us by God. He doesn’t say if you pay me fifty dollars, I’ll give you a little bit of grace or if he says, “If you do a little bit of this I’ll give you a little bit of grace, if you do a lot for me I’ll give you a lot of grace. No, the very fact that we call it grace of course means that it’s gratuitous, it’s free. In fact, Augustine uses that very term, free grace. Although why you have to add free to grace, you can only explain that by the fact that so often we fail to understand what grace really means. So grace is God’s liberating agent, it’s prevenient, it’s gratuitous, it’s the ground of God’s infinite mercy and undeserved favor to us. When we read in Romans chapter 3 and verse 24 these words, we are reading about divine grace, “Being justified freely, by his grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” That is gratuitous.

Now capital C and you’ll be happy to know this is the last point of my outline, the sub point C, the gift of saving faith. Free will, faith and grace coexist in Augustine thinking without voiding any of them. Free will meaning simply the exercise of our wills. Faith meaning the exercise of our will in believing, grace, that work of God by which our wills are turned to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. So by free will, we believe, but only when grace moves us do we use free will in believing. Faith is thus the gift of God because we are moved by grace to believe with our free will. I don’t want to use the term free will because that’s so misunderstood in our society today so I don’t use that, I say believe with our will. But when Augustine used the term, the term didn’t mean what it means today and in his time you could make that observation and still not raise questions.

Now I want to turn to a few passages from the Bible to show you that faith is the gift of God. Now mind you if it’s the gift of God it’s gratuitous. Because if it’s a gift, it’s

free. And furthermore if it’s a gift, it means that the gift precedes the exercise of it. In other words it’s prevenient; the grace comes before the faith. In other words, God’s activity precedes our activity if it’s a gift. Now, we’ll look at a few passages. John chapter 3 and verse 27, John the Baptist is speaking and we read, “John answered and said, a man cannot receive even one thing except it were given to him from heaven.” “a man cannot receive even one thing unless it were given to him from heaven.” What does that mean? That means everything that we have comes from God. If we have anything that pleases God it doesn’t come from man, it comes from Heaven, it comes from God. So when you hear people say, “We must believe with our free will,” as if God recognizes free will as a meritorious thing, John the Baptist argues against it. He says a man can not receive even one thing except it comes as a gift from Heaven.

John 6:36, turn on a few pages and we read here, “But I tell you that you have both seen me and you do not believe (verse 37) Everything which the Father gives me shall come to me, and the one coming to me I will be no means cast out.” Notice the first clause, “Everything which the Father gives to me shall come to me.” Augustine has an interesting little work it’s called *On the Predestination of the Saints*. Think of that, used that bad word, predestination, used it in the year around four hundred and ten or fifteen and so that’s acceptable, it’s been fifteen hundred years and we forgive him for fifteen hundred years. But nevertheless, he says in this book when he comments on this particular place he says, “Everything which the Father gives to me shall come to me what is the meaning of shall come to me but shall believe in me.” That’s precisely what it means. And in this passage if you’ll read through it you’ll find that’s exactly what it meant by it. Notice the 35th verse for example, “Jesus said to them, I am the bread of life, the one coming to me shall by no means hunger and the one believing in me (that explains coming, the one believing in me) shall by no means ever thirst.” So “everything which the Father gives to me shall come to me” that is shall believe in me.

Well we read 1 Corinthians 4:7, that’s the passage I said that Augustine said was the thing by which he discovered the grace of God. He makes reference to Cyprian as an earlier church father whose writings had said something along the same lines. But when he studied 1 Corinthians 4:7, “For who makes thee to differ? For what do you have which you have not received? And if indeed you have received it, why are you boasting as though not receiving it?” It finally dawned on him that we were not saved by the merits of our foreseen faith, but we were saved by the grace of God.

Let’s turn on to Ephesians chapter 2 verses 8 through 10. This text for those who would like to be technical demands a bit more of exegetical explanation. If you are interested, you can probably find some expositions of it in some of the tape ministry. But I will read it, make a few comments on it and try to point out what it must mean if not everything that it means. “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this not of yourselves, God’s gift it is, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them.” “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves.” Now it’s often pointed out by exegesis that the term “that not of yourselves,” is actually this being the nearer demonstrative is neuter in gender. And sense a pronoun would ordinarily agree with its antecedent in gender that this being neuter cannot refer to faith because faith is feminine in Greek, and grace is feminine and so therefore one might try to make a case for denial of this text as teaching that faith is the gift of God.

Well actually in the Greek language there are instances and in fact, believe it or not right here in the Epistle to the Ephesians an instance in which a neuter demonstrative pronoun refers to a feminine antecedent. But we won’t go to what is a rare usage, we’ll simply say this, if for by grace have you been saved through faith is the general statement, by grace you’ve been saved through faith, and then Paul says, and this not of yourselves and doesn’t refer specifically to faith or grace, he then refers to the whole statement of by

grace through faith salvation. I’m happy with that explanation, because you see it doesn’t really make any difference at all. If this refers to a by grace through faith salvation, it obviously since this is not of yourselves would compass grace and compass faith as well. Because if it’s a by grace through faith salvation and it’s not of ourselves that means the faith is not of ourselves, the grace is not of ourselves the salvation is not of ourselves. And so the faith referred to there has to be from God. As he goes on to say, “That not of yourselves, it’s the gift of God.” That is the by grace through faith salvation is the gift of God. And to make it even so obvious, it’s amazing, that a person could miss it, he says in the 10th verse, “For we are his workmanship.” His workmanship, not ours. His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, not by good works, for good works, that’s the product of our salvation, not the ground of it, it’s the product of God’s working, his workmanship as he says.

So, can there be any doubt that he’s saying that this salvation by grace through faith and all encompassed in it is the gift of God? Not unless you have a head as hard as a center in a football team such as well, I used to say about one of our recent presidents that maybe that was one of his problems, he played center for one of the Northern universities and may have been affected by that fact.

Now in the 6th chapter in the twenty – I liked him mind you but they, the media loved to get after Mr. Ford. In verse 23, that was a theory that had been propounded that he had played center too long. Tom Rafferty of the Cowboys I’m sure would like to say a word against that at least up to the present moment. “Peace to the brethren and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Did you notice that the faith comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ? Not us, it’s the gift of God.

Turn over a page to Philippians 1 verse 29. Here the apostle writes, he says in verse 28, “And your salvation and this from God because it is given to you.” And the word incidentally is the word from related to the word for grace, it is graciously given to you, it is given to you by grace. “In the behalf of Christ, not to believe in him but also to

suffer for his sake or in his behalf.” So, it is given by grace to believe in him. Faith is the gift of God.

Now turn over to 1 Timothy chapter 1, do I have to labor this point? It’s every where in the Bible. Now while you are finding 1 Timothy chapter 1 since I’ve already found it, I remind you that no man can call Jesus Lord except by the Holy Spirit. In other words, there has to be a work of the Holy Spirit to bring a person to confess Christ’s Lordship. No man can call him Lord except by the Holy Spirit. But 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 5, the apostle says now the end of the commandment is that’s not the text that I wanted to look at, let’s see, sometimes you know, sometimes humans make mistakes, so let’s take a look at verse 12, “I give thanks to the one who endued me with strength, Jesus Christ our Lord that he has counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry.” That’s not the one either. Ah, well he goes on to say, “But I have received mercy.”

The text that I really wanted you to turn to obviously is not that one, it’s 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 25. I had that next to that, I still think that I intended to do that but I’ll have to look at my other notes. 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 25 says what I want to turn to. He says, “Now concerning the virgins, I do not have a commandment of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who has received mercy from the Lord to be faithful.” “As one who has received mercy from the Lord to be faithful.” Now notice, he does not say, I have received mercy from the Lord because I was faithful, he says, I have received mercy from the Lord to be faithful. In other words, in order to be faithful, in order to believe, one must have mercy from God. I don’t have mercy because I have believed; I have mercy in order to believe. That’s what he’s saying.

Acts chapter 13 and verse 48 is a well known passage, we should stop here I guess. Where in recounting things that happened in Antioch, Luke says, “And as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.” As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. In other words, the appointment preceded the believing. Believing follows God’s determination in grace to bring certain individuals to faith.

So, let me conclude. Augustine has not left us with no questions for consideration. To the question of why God delivers some and not others, he replies, “His judgments are unsearchable and his ways past finding out.” That’s what I like about him; he just relies upon the word of God. He adds, “It’s better in this case for us to hear or to say Oh man who art thou that repliest against God then to dare to speak as if we could know what he has chosen to be kept secret. Since moreover he could not will anything unrighteous. In other words, Augustine says there are some things we finite people cannot fully comprehend. And it’s better for us to say we cannot comprehend than to say something unrighteous. That is to offer an opinion which may not really be true. So, when someone says why has he brought some to faith and why has he passed by others and not brought them to faith? We say, “His judgments are unsearchable his ways are past finding out.” In another place he adds “if the man is displeased with such an answer, he must seek more learned disputants, but let him beware lest he find presumptuous ones.” In other words, if you’ll looking for an answer to that, I cannot give it to you, if you want to get it from someone else, that’s fine, but be careful that you don’t get it from someone who’s presuming something that’s not found in the word of God. Further, it’s God who does whatsoever he wills in the hearts of even wicked men. He goes on to point out, “The innermost thoughts and hearts of men are not off limits to the movements of God’s grace.” And if you have a pencil, write in your notes 2 Chronicles chapter 21 verses 16 and 17 for an illustration of that.

When it is said if we like we may keep God’s commandments that is true only if our will is prepared by the Lord he says. He writes, “It’s certain that it is we that act when we act, but it is he who makes us act by applying efficacious powers to our will.” Who has said and listen to the word of God, “I will make you to walk in my statues and to observe my judgments and to do them.” What then is our responsibility in the light of this? To pray that he will prepare our hearts to do his will. In fact, and I’m offering this, that may be one of the reasons why one of the purposes why God stresses his sovereign

power in these commands causing us thereby to flee to him that we may find deliverance from our sins.

I know there may be one or two questions and I’ll try to take a couple of questions, I forgot about the questions actually I would have stopped a few minutes earlier, but maybe someone has a question so I’ll be glad to try to answer them providing you speak loud enough for me to hear.

[Question from the audience] If we understand this to be true then do you suggest that we pray for grace only or other things [Inaudible]

[Johnson] No, I would say if we were not Christians, we should pray for grace, to become such, recognizing our need. In fact, that would be a perilous thing for me knowing what we know now our lost condition and what that means, to realize that we may be lost and headed for a Christless eternity and to know that God passes by some but brings faith to others, I’d want to get down on my knees immediately and say oh God give me that faith and the grace and faith that means that I will come to know my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that’d be my first prayer.

[Question from the audience] What if you’re already a believer?

[Johnson] If you’re already a believer, that same principle works in the Christian life. The things that you see in the word of God that are apostolic counsel for us, exhortations, commands they are fulfilled through the power of the Holy Spirit and prayer to that end that God the Holy Spirit would work in us would be to my mind. Well it is in my life, I got down on my knees today by the side of my bed while Martha was gone, she didn’t see me in case you were denying that I prayed today. [Laughter] But she was out gallivanting of course. [Laughter] She was working in the library actually over here. That

was one of the things that I did, I got down upon my knees, I was reading Augustine and I got down on my knees and prayed that God would bring reality into my life concerning the very things about which I was reading. I think that’s something that we believers need to do constantly, often. Are you raising your hand Robert? Okay.

[Question from the audience] Two quick questions, one is in regard to what you just said,

[Johnson] You can always tell he’s from seminary when he says now this is a two or three part question. [Laughter]

[Question from same audience member] Actually they’re somewhat unrelated. If a person begins to ask for grace, I mean if they perceive their need and begin to call upon God for grace, isn’t that some evidence that God has already

[Johnson] It is.

[Question from same audience member] begun to make his grace available to them otherwise they—

[Johnson] It is. It certainly is, it’s the evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit probably in regeneration.

[Question from same audience member] The second question this is

[Johnson] Incidentally, that William G.T. Shedd has an article on faith in sermons for the spiritual man in which he deals with that very point. Points out that when a man prays he really is not, he’s responding something has already taken place in his heart.

[Question from same audience member] The second question is, deals with the chronology of events and I know that they happened rather instantaneously but as for quickened and regenerated that being the initial work of grace that brings us to faith, then in Romans 5:1 where it says, having been justified by faith we have peace with God, in that order can it be said that the justification follows the faith which follows the grace? I mean can you make that

[Johnson] I think you probably can yes, uh huh, because in the light of the fact that as you well know, in 1 John chapter 5 verse 1, John says everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God. That birth precedes the believing by virtue of the tenses. One of them is present tense, the other is the perfect tense indicates that the moment that a person believes he has been born and so therefore that would suggest that order. Some of those details are not spelled out too specifically because I want to feel like Augustine in some things it would be hard to answer and would leave them to other disputants. Yes Richard.

[Question from the audience] Can an unregenerate man exercise saving faith?

[Johnson] No, he cannot. Romans 8:7 and 8 says, “The mind of the flesh is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God. He goes on in the very next verse to say, “But you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit. If so, be it the spirit of Christ dwells within you.”

So, that text states plainly that a man in the flesh, not possessed of the Spirit, therefore, not a believing man, he cannot please God, faith pleases God.

I guess we better stop, so thank you for coming our and I hope that you all become Augustinians in grace but not in some of the other points. Augustine as you know believed that ...

[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]