



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Various

“Evangelicals and Catholics Together and the Grace of God, Part I” TRANSCRIPT

[Message] I'm very appreciative of the message that Gary has just delivered because there is so much in it that is profitable for us and I'm delighted to have a copy of it and I'm going to take it home and study some aspects of it that I didn't have time to read while he was giving his message. I hope that all of us will pay close attention to what he's saying. I was originally going to speak twice at the conference and I was going to try to give this message in one session, but since John Reisinger came down ill, and Gary called me and asked me if I would fill in and I just suggested since this message was rather long, this paper, that I could divide it into two parts acceptably and so that's what I'm doing.

The subject is the Church of Rome, the sacraments and the grace of God. And it's a paper that I wrote in response to the document “Evangelicals and Catholics Together, the Christian Mission in the Third Millennium.” I subscribe to *First Things Magazine* edited by Richard John Newhouse and I got the publication of it first because it was in that magazine that's a monthly magazine I believe, that contained it. And I was, I must confess, astonished to read it because I read through it and saw a number of things in it that to me were very questionable. It is an attempt on the part of Newhouse and Charles Colson primarily to bring about some kind of reconciliation between evangelicals and the

Roman Catholic Church. The idea back of it is that in the Roman Catholic Church there are evangelicals, many of them and if we could some how get together the evangelicals in evangelicalism with the evangelicals in Catholicism, then we would have unity. And after all, is that not what our Lord has been praying for?

Now in the document, there are things like this, “All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ, evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.” Now, that disturbs me. And I will tell you why, because in the Roman Catholic Church as you know, there is no forgiveness of sins without the observance of the sacraments, the seven sacraments. All of them have relationship to the forgiveness of sins, especially the doctrine of baptism or the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of the mass or the Lord’s Supper. Others also have reference to the forgiveness of sins, because if one does not observe them, there is necessity for forgiveness from the official representative of the church, the priest.

Again, in the document, there are many good things in the document, because the Roman Catholic Church stands against abortion as most evangelicals do. There’s some reason why in social issues they could and should stand together. But to then suggest that we stand together on the gospel is something else. Here is another statement, “We thank God for the discovery of one another in contending for a common cause. Much more important, we thank God for the discovery of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.” Now that to my mind is a justification of the Roman system. To say that they are brothers and sisters in Christ with us is to affirm that they’re doctrine is satisfactory to evangelicals.

Another statement, “The achievement of good will and cooperation between Evangelicals and Catholics must not be at the price of the urgency and clarity of the Christian witness to the gospel.” But the gospel is different as we shall, I hope be able to see.

Here again,

“Three observations are in order in connection with proselytizing. First as much as we might believe one community is more fully in accord with the gospel than another, we as evangelicals and Catholics affirm the opportunity and means for growth and Christian discipleship are available in our several communities.”

In other words, if you're Roman Catholic, all of the opportunities for edification exist within that community just as in the evangelical community. Then at the conclusion of the document we read,

“We do know that this is a time of opportunity, and if of opportunity then of possibility. For evangelicals and Catholics to be Christians together in a way that helps prepare the world for the coming of him to whom belongs the kingdom the power and the glory forever.”

You see, there are lots of good things in this, but there are lots of very very bad things. And I'm trying to show in the paper that I've written that it's a very serious error to do what some have done with reference to it. The participants who framed the document include Charles Colson, of the Prison Fellowship whose wife is a Roman Catholic and perhaps that's one of the reasons he has been interested in this. Others who were very active in it are Richard Land of the Christian Life commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Dr. Larry Lewis, Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. Now I believe as a result of the uproar, these two have requested that their names be dropped. But it's interesting that they signed it and now they have properly dropped their names because of the force of objection within the Southern Baptist community evidently, Richard John Newhouse the Institute of Religion and Public Life.

Incidentally, *First Things Magazine* is a very good magazine, I profit from it every

time it comes because there are some excellent articles in it and I think it's extremely worthwhile for an evangelical to read it. But one must read it with some discernment. It has been endorsed by Dr. William Abraham and the Perkins School of Theology, a very important man in contemporary theology, Elizabeth Achtemeier of Union Theological Seminary, an evangelical woman professor, at Union Seminary. Dr. Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ has endorsed it. Os Guinness of the Trinity Forum has endorsed it. Ralph Martin of Renewal Ministries, Richard Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, Mark Noll, well known Christian historian of Wheaton College has endorsed it. And then surprisingly, Dr. James I. Packer of Regent College in British Columbia endorsed it and the Reverend Pat Robertson of Regent University. I didn't list all of them, but just picked out some of those. These are men who have endorsed this document.

Evangelicals have been very upset about this, particularly in like R.C. Sproul, I think Michael Horton, other evangelicals, John MacArthur and still others and the result was that finally because of the controversy a meeting was arranged in Orlando. And there they gathered, some of these and sought to bring some kind of *rapprochement*. Actually, it was called by Charles Colson because he immediately began to feel the heat of the objections. And so the men met in Orlando and they issued a statement to the effect that there was some misunderstanding that had taken place.

But what was very interesting to me and I regard Jim Packer as maybe the most knowledgeable historical theologian in evangelicalism today. A man whose books I've read will continue to read too. Dr. Packer in responding to it wrote an article in *Christianity Today* entitled, “Why I Signed the Document.” In other words, he was not going to say, “I shouldn't have signed it. And he has gone on record as saying, “I signed it, I'm glad I signed it and this is why I did.” Essentially, I haven't read it in the last few weeks, and so I'm just going to go by my memory. Essentially what he said is it's an opportunity to have unity and unity is something that our Lord has prayed for and we should as evangelicals work toward unity with those who call themselves evangelicals.

And in this case with the Roman Catholic Church. Lying in the background is no doubt the fact that Dr. Packer, now here this is my opinion, Dr. Packer is an Anglican. And the Anglican doctrine of baptism is very very similar to the Roman Catholic doctrine. Not the same, but there is a definite similarity. It may be from that that Dr. Packer has written what he has written. I hope the time will come when he will say, “I probably should not have signed it,” and maybe write the article for *Christianity Today*, but it hasn’t come and I guess my hopes are probably not going to come to pass.

At any rate, that’s the background, after the conference in Orlando, a statement was issued, a kind of reconciliation statement. It did not mean too much to those who read it carefully. As a matter of fact, when John MacArthur who was invited to be there left after having met the meeting there said, “If I had done it I would have made it a great deal stronger,” which indicated of course that he wasn’t in complete agreement with the reconciling meeting.

Now what I’m trying to show in this document is that if we believe the Bible, we could not have signed that document. So that’s fundamentally what I’m trying to say in “The Church of Rome, the Sacraments and the Grace of God.” I’m going this morning to give the first half and we’ll stop at a point where I think is very convenient and then in the closing time tonight we’ll try to show specifically and I hope underscore the fact that an evangelical cannot sign such a document, cannot affirm that salvation is through the sacraments as well as through the saving work of Jesus Christ.

So, this is my introduction. The publication of the declaration Evangelicals and Catholics Together has raised among professing Christians the question of the nature of the Biblical gospel. There are now Catholics who surprisingly to Protestant believers confess that quote, “We are justified by grace through faith because of Christ,” unquote. The document affirms; quote, “Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ,” unquote. A statement that is astonishing in the light of history and in the absence of any historical evidence of a church council or of any other evidence of official doctrinal

reconciliation between Roman Catholics and Protestantism. Is it really true that the Catholic Church now preaches the same gospel that Luther and Calvin proclaimed, a gospel of justification by grace through faith alone by Christ alone?

Now I must say this that I put in Luther, but Luther made some very strange statements about baptism. As a matter of fact, he made some definite statements to the effect that forgiveness of sins comes through baptism. Now we understand that but anyway, he did proclaim justification by grace through faith alone. John Calvin however, did not follow Luther in that particular approach to the gospel. Have leading evangelicals been so out of touch with things that they have missed this historical rapprochement? Can evangelical protestant believers affirm the Catholic discipleship is quote "Authentic discipleship" unquote? One of my professors of Systematic Theology never tired of saying to his students, "Men preach an exact gospel." The advice seemed very appropriate to us, for there were in our minds many examples of inaccurate gospels, gospels of salvation by water baptism, salvation by church membership as well as salvation by human works of other types.

It appears to the writer that Paul's Epistle to the Galatians speaks specifically to the necessity of an accurate gospel. For the judaizers who were troubling the Galatians Paul had evangelized sought to combine sound theological facts with an alien theological requirement that produced an unsound gospel. They wished to add to Paul's gospel of salvation by the saving cross of Christ the requirement of circumcision. And Paul was not happy over it.

The heresy among the Galatian churches, commentators of all theological persuasions have agreed that the primary problem in the Galatian churches involved for justification the addition of the requirement of circumcision to that of faith in the crucified Messiah Jesus Christ. I mention some passages, you might jot them down, chapter 2 verse 1 through verse 5, chapter 5 verse 2 through verse 4 and 10 through verse 12, chapter 6 verse 11 through 16, we'll refer to some of them in a moment. The apostle thinks of

those who require circumcision for justification as quote “trouble makers,” unquote, chapter 1 verse 7 or agitators in chapter 5 and verse 12.

Why was the apostle so disturbed? To him circumcision and the observance of special days were religiously indifferent, but when added as necessary for justification, a thing that touched the terms upon which the gospel’s benefits are received, circumcision was anything but indifferent. That transformed the gospel of grace into a gospel of legal works involving one logically in the keeping of the whole Law of Moses, Galatians 3:10 and chapter 5 verse 2 through verse 4. The gospel then becomes no gospel at all in fact it is plain fatal apostasy from Christ, chapter 1 verse 6 through verse 9. A critical matter must be noticed here, there is no indication from Galatians that the judiazing, false teachers troubling the Galatians disagreed with Paul over the other capital doctrines of the faith such as the deity of Christ, his atoning satisfaction and the necessity of faith in him. That’s very important to note that there’s nothing in Galatians that indicates that the Judaizers didn’t agree with Paul regarding all of the capital doctrines of the faith, the most important ones with the one exception of circumcision.

Now there is a little reference latter on concerning the matter of meats, but that never appears as part of Paul’s argument. The thing that he’s concerned about is the addition of circumcision to the gospel of the grace of God. Let me just read you a couple of comments. F. F. Bruce comments “Paul indeed does not differ from the Jerusalem leaders with regard to the essential content of the gospel.” Christian Becker of Princeton Theological Seminary says, “What then were their convictions and how did they manage to make such a convincing appeal? To be sure, the opponents do not indeed to apostatize from the gospel, they only want to perfect what Paul has commenced. So, the one thing in which they differed was sacramentalism in the gospel. And for Paul that was a serious matter. Warfield says,

“The Judaizers also preached Christ, they preached Christ as the promised Messiah of Israel only through the acceptance of whom could entrance be had into the Messianic

salvation. To them too therefore the promised redemption was unattainable save through the promised Messiah. But though they preached that only in his name could salvation be had, they denied that it could be had in his name alone. Something else was requisite, men must accept the Messiah, but men must also be circumcised. Men must keep the law; men must enter into life by the gate of Judaism. It was this teaching, not the proclamation of an entire anti-Christian system which Paul brands as a different kind of gospel, or rather no gospel at all, but only a troubling of Zion by those who would pervert the gospel of Christ.”

Those are Warfield’s words from a little article he wrote called, “The Dogmatic Spirit.” This has important significance for the declaration, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” as we shall see further in this paper.

It may be helpful at this point to review a few of the important passages in the Epistle to the Galatians that bear on the question under discussion. The importance of underscoring the absolute necessity of clarity in the understanding of the grace of the gospel of Christ as over against the legalism of the law of Moses or any other legal system. Now I want to turn to a few passages and read the passages for you. We won’t have time to do exegesis of them. Let me just say in an aside, this is not in my paper. One of the things that we as evangelical people who believe essentially in reformed teaching concerning the gospel of Christ need to be careful to do is to carefully study the texts of Scripture. Very often in our particular body of believers in seeking to prove our points we go at it theologically, according to theological principles which is very valid, but we also need to be exegetical in our treatment of the text. It’s very important for a large group of people who would be influenced if we would ground what we are saying in the exegesis of the text of Scripture. That’s exceedingly important, and often it is overlooked in my opinion. Listen to what Paul writes in Galatians 1:6 through 9,



“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ to different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you, and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.”

The term that is used is a term that is used of Old Testament committal to divine judgment. Our popular rendering of this would be something like this, “If we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him go to Hell.” That is essentially what the apostle says. There are some connotations in our use of the term that might not apply, but essentially that’s it, what he’s suggesting is divine judgment for those who add just one thing, circumcision to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So let me say a few words about this. Contrary to his usual thanksgiving for the recipients of his letter, the apostle in astonishment rebukes the Galatians for so quickly turning from the God who called them in grace to a different gospel. The expression, “a different gospel is very important. It’s often been pointed out by expositors that there were two related terms used to express difference. One of them was the adjective *allos*, that’s the Greek term, expressing frequently a numerical difference. And the other was the adjective *heteros*, from which we get heterosexual for example expressing a qualitative difference. The former is often rendered by another, while the latter is often rendered by different. Now that’s a simplified explanation but essentially I think it’s true if you just take it as a simple distinction. Here, the sense of different is clearly correct, for the apostle goes on to say that the gospel that they’re preaching is not another. Longneck’s rendering is to a different which is not at all the same gospel. The gospel then which the Galatians were in process of following is a false gospel. A gospel might

be different only by way of presentation or emphasis, but as Linsky, the well known Lutheran commentator points out,

“When it’s different because it’s not another, the very substance of the gospel is changed. Such a gospel is a fake, a mere pretense or sham. Its proponents call it a gospel only to gain its acceptance as brass is sold for gold. Those who buy it are cheated. This is the charge Paul launches,” unquote.

There is only one gospel, only one Savior and only one saving grace and all is lost if the gospel that is preached is a different gospel which is not another at all. The sham and substitute gospels of salvation by sacraments are still with us. The last clause of verse 7, “But there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ is a bit difficult due to uncertainty over the rendering of the opening exceptive conjunctive phrase that begins it. Rendering the clause, by except in the sense that there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ indicates that Paul contends the gospel of the troublers and perverters of the gospel in the sense that it’s a false one, a perverted one. To add circumcision to the term by which the gospel is received, that is belief or faith, is to pervert it.

The verb rendered by pervert is the Greek word *metastrepho* and its fundamental sense is to turn about or to reverse. An instance of this is found in Acts 2:20 and perhaps in James 4:9. If this is the sense here, then to add the requirement of circumcision to the requirement of faith in Christ is to reverse the gospel, to change it from a message of grace to one of law works. The seriousness of the apostle’s message to the Galatians and to any who follow the path they were in danger of following is clearly seen in verse 8 and 9, for here Paul says that for anyone, “Even an angel from heaven” to preach a gospel message contrary to that gospel he preached to them is to fall under a curse, to be delivered up to suffer divine wrath.

Timothy George calls this quote, “One of the harshest statements in the entire New Testament,” unquote. Adding quote, “It does not set well on modern ears accustomed to tolerance at any price and a doctrine of God devoid of the notions of judgment and wrath,” unquote. Now Galatians chapter 5 verse 2 through verse 4, the apostle writes here, verse 2,

“Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing. And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who *attempt to* be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

That of course a reference to falling from the grace principle by requirement of circumcision. Let’s just put that in baptism for example, I Paul say to you that if you become baptized, that is to complete the gospel message, Christ will profit you nothing, I testify again to every man who undergoes baptism as means of forgiveness of sins is a debtor to keep the whole law and so on. Same principle is involved what we mean.

So, Galatians 5:2 through 4, verse 1 of chapter 5, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty in which Christ has made us free and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage,” is probably best taken as a summary of Paul’s message to this point, containing both the theological indicative and the ethical imperative of salvation as Paul saw it. Following verse 1, is some of Paul’s strongest theological language concerning his gospel. He asserts that when justification is in view to contend that the saving benefit which Christ has won by his cross suffering alone is then received not by faith alone but by faith and a sacramental work is to fatally destroy the essence of his gospel. Listen to his words, “Indeed, I Paul say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing.” For the first time, although the matter has been implicit chapter 2:1 through 10, the apostle mentions the issue of the requirement of circumcision for justification. And the

sharp antithesis in verse 2 emphasizes how polarized the issue has become. Law keeping demands total commitment.

Ritterbos has captured pointedly the antithesis with his title for the section verses 1 through 12; this is his title, “For the last time, everything or nothing.” The first consequence of requiring circumcision for salvation is that the sufficiency of Christ for justification is abandoned. It is Christ or circumcision, and the choice is clear for a man in need of redemption from the slavery of sin. Paul is clear and firm in what he says as his, “Indeed I Paul,” indicates. With the opening words more literally and forcefully rendered by, “Mark my words, I Paul.” That’s one rendering of the NIV that’s pretty good. [Laughter] “Mark my words, I Paul.” I was one of the translators incidentally of the NIV, so we can overcome even our own prejudices. And stressing the apostolic authority, Paul fiercely rejects the addition of the Old Testament sacrament and seal of circumcision as compulsory for salvation. George renders the words, “Look, listen mark my words, I Paul tell you.” See, how strongly the apostle feels about this.

An apostle of Jesus Christ is speaking ex cathedra and from a cathedra higher than John Paul’s introduces another blast from a disturbed apostle and spiritual father. What is his concern? It is that if the Galatians should be seeking to be circumcised in order to be freed from sin, they will find they have surrendered the work of Christ. The attitude of the apostle to the position of the judaizers has become more severe. The whole question of justification by anything more than that which our Lord has accomplished in his substitutionary sacrifice is both an attack on the principle of grace and on the glory of the Redeemer himself beside whom there is no savior.

It should be noted that the use of the present tense by the apostle implies that he does not believe the Galatians have taken the step of apostasy yet. But they are in danger, they are in process. Some of the commentators have sought to stretch the future, “Will profit you nothing, will be of no value to you,” as other versions put it out to the distant future of the final judgment. Others have resisted this position, correctly I believe,

pointing out that the final judgment is hardly found in this context. However the truth expressed by Paul is surely applicable to the final judgment whether in this context or not.

What then is the force of Paul’s severe everything or nothing wake up call to the Galatians who are seemingly drifting into apostasy? It is to remind them that everything does stand or fall in Christianity with the principle of grace, for there is no other principle upon which sinners may be delivered from their sins. Doctrinal drifters need some stridency upon occasion as the history of the church abundantly indicates. That’s a message for our day too; we don’t always speak in saccharine terms when speaking to a congregation about the gospel of Christ and other doctrines too for that matter. That is why what is transpiring in connection with Evangelicals and Catholics Together is so important. It is pathetically obvious that many evangelicals, some who have the stature of leaders among them need a shaking and arousal from doctrinal slumber.

John F. Kennedy’s Harvard thesis comes to mind. It was written to publicize Great Brittan’s failure to judge adequately the growing threat of Nazi Germany in the nineteen thirties and published in nineteen forty. The Second World War that soon followed justified its warnings. The thesis became a book entitled *Why England Slept* published in nineteen forty. President Kennedy was at Harvard at the time, but since his father was the ambassador to Great Brittan, he took off a year and went to London with his father and then while he was there wrote this as a kind of thesis because at Harvard and Princeton and others, you had to write a thesis to graduate. And so this was his attempt. The Second World War that soon followed justified its warnings. The thesis became a book entitled *Why England Slept* published in nineteen forty. Its title was taken in part from the New Testament. The text of Scripture from which the books title was drawn is found in our Lord’s parable of the tares among the wheat. The words in the parable are, “But while men slept,” Matthew 13:25, warning of the danger of overlooking in the growing of

wheat, the work of the enemy. The enemy of course is the great deceiver Satan himself, verse 25, verse 28 in Matthew 13.

The troubler of the Galatians is still with us. Verse 3 follows, “And I testify again to every man who become circumcised that he is debtor to keep, (literally to do, the NIV has keep) the whole law.” The “I testify,” is a legal term of the courtroom and it introduces a solemn statement characteristic of an oath in a courtroom. Not only has the person who has been circumcised for salvation lost the saving aid of Christ, he’s also obligated himself to keep the whole law. There is a play on words that ought to be noted. The word profit in verse 2 comes from the same root as the word debtor in verse 3 does. The verb root means to owe, to be a debtor. The sense resulting is that if one submits to circumcision, Christ will not benefit one in anyway, but on the other hand, he will owe the law complete obedience. Not a happy exchange is it to fall into the hands of the bookkeeping God of Judaism. The principle of legalism is opposed to the principle of grace.

I have some texts I refer to which are not necessary to comment upon them. As Bruce says, “One cannot hope to make the legal grade by merely token fulfillment of the law.” “For the Galatians then to accept circumcision and all that is implied,” George points out in his recent commentary “was for them to throw away the precious gift of freedom and step back on to the unceasing treadmill of self justification.” Circumcision, a simple operation surgically becomes an operation demanding total obligation to the Mosaic Law, if performed for spiritual salvation as the Judaizers demanded. It becomes what someone has called the sacrament of excision from Christ. Is this not parallel to the demand that one receive baptism for the forgiveness of sins?

Verse 4 continues Paul’s severe counsel to the drifting Galatians. He writes, “You have become estranged from Christ you who attempt to be justified by law, you have fallen from grace.” The apostle has already repudiated such a position in chapter 3 verse 11, but here he expresses the impossibility of justification by law keeping in a more

personal and straightforward way. He leaves the third person style and addresses the Galatians directly in the second person. To seek to be justified is to have been estranged or alienated or severed from Christ. The very moment of seeking legal justification supposes an alienation of heart from resting in the total sufficiency of Christ and his saving sacrifice. Paul will allow no mixing of Christ with the law. To mingle them is to lose him. To turn to the one is to forgo the relationship with the other. The apostle concludes the sentence with another metaphor that of falling from or out of grace. The New Testament occurrences of *ekipto* the verb that is translated fall from, include the illustrative metaphors of a withered flower blossom falling from its stem to the ground, James chapter 1 and verse 11, 1 Peter 1:24 or a ship's failure to keep to the intended course and run aground, Acts chapter 27 verse 17 and verse 26, or the cutting of ropes holding the life boat to a ship and letting it fall away, Acts 27:32.

The last clause of verse 4, this is the clause, “You have fallen from grace,” has been the cause of considerable discussion and debate among Bible expositors. In the past, the text has been used by many to support the teaching that one may after entering into spiritual life through faith in Christ, lose that life by sin. Several things should be kept in mind. In the first place, the apostle doesn't say that one falls from salvation by combining law works and grace. It is from grace that one falls and grace is not synonymous with salvation. The apostle has upon occasion spoken of grace as the means by which one is justified, Romans 3:24, as the sphere or means by which the believers are called, Galatians 1:6, the church elected Romans 11:5 6, and saved, Ephesians 2:5 and 8 and as a domain in which believers live, Acts 13:43, Romans 5:2, 2 Thessalonians 2:16 and in other ways. In the second place, in the context here the apostle is not speaking of one's moral conduct, but of methods of coming to Christ whether by law works or by gracious reliance upon our Savior's work. Chapter 1 verse 6, chapter 2 verse 21 and Ephesians 2:8 and 9 may be cited as parallels. A great sin in fact, does not lead to loss of salvation as both New Testament and Old Testament show; only think of David for

example. [Indistinct] regarding the perseverance of the saints in faith and grace, John 10:28 and 29.

As a matter of fact when a believer commits sin, he doesn't fall from grace, but into grace, the grace of a faithful disciplining and restoring Father. And if you say, “Well, you may not be restored.” Well if you are a true believer you'll be restored ultimately at the judgment seat of Christ. But nevertheless, you will be restored. You may have to live under the discipline of the Lord in the meantime; it's not an easy thing to fall into sin. When one falls into sin he falls into divine discipline. And divine discipline has at least three grades, some are weak, some are sickly, some have fallen asleep, Paul said using a specific term used of believers who die, falling asleep. So, when we think about sin, we need to think about judgment in the family of God. It's serious; it's as serious as your loss of physical life.

The apostle it seems to me the means by which one comes into possession of salvation in Christ. That is by means of grace, not by the works of the law. An older Bible teacher has said, “Falling from grace does not mean as something falling into some open sin, or becoming careless in the religious life. It means being unwilling to trust wholly in what the Lord has done in grace, and it manifests itself in the attempt to improve the Lord's work by adding certain law works.

What then is meant by falling from grace? It means to turn to what George has called, “a Christianity by amalgamation, a mingling of the grace of Christ with the merit of works.” He adds a citation from Calvin, “Whoever wants to have a half Christ loses the whole.” Galatians 6:12 through 14, the apostle writes in these verses,

“As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these *would* compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. For not even those who are circumcised are keeping the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except



in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

These verses form part of what Timothy George calls a parting blow. The apostle writes,

“As many as desire to make a good showing in the flesh, these would compel you to be circumcised, only that they may not suffer persecution for the cross of Christ for not even those who are circumcised are keeping the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh. But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Now when I read the text, I didn't realize I had that in my notes or I'd forgotten it, I'm sorry, we read the text twice. [Laughter] Isn't that a great sin? [Laughter] The letter is largely complete with verse 10 and now the apostle takes the pen from his amanuensis, and referring to his style of writing in large letters, probably for emphasis upon their content, he offers final words in admonition and benediction. The final blunt three pronged attack on the Judaizers states what Paul believes are their motivations in seeking to persuade the Galatians to permit themselves to be circumcised.

In the first place they wish to make a good showing in the flesh that is before men. Their compulsion to see the Galatians circumcised, to have the external mark of the covenant people is their consuming concern. The verb compel is again a conative present tense, meaning they're trying to compel you. Paul is not saying they have undergone the circumcision yet; he's just hard they're thinking about it, they're on the way to doing it. These people are trying to compel you. The Galatians have not yet yielded to the pressure.

In the second place, the Judaizers wish to escape the stigma of being associated with uncircumcised Gentile converts. The expression in verse 12, "For the cross of Christ," indicates the Judaizers did not want to suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. Fung's comments are very much to the point here. Here as in chapter 5 verse 11 he writes, "The cross stands for the whole doctrine of salvation through the crucified Jesus as against that of justification by works of law, and as presented as the cause of persecution, coming presumably from non Christian Jews." If this is so and I think it is, then the real issue that is in our terms the sole sufficiency of Jesus Christ's saving substitution on the cross for salvation apart from sacramental works of any kind that is the issue. Paul's other statements support this such as, the words of chapter 3 verse 1 where the apostle reminds the foolish Galatians that he had clearly portrayed Christ among them in just this manner, as having been crucified. Just as in chapter 2 verse 2 of 1 Corinthians, the apostle uses the same terminology essentially.

About five times Paul opposes the Judaizers demands for circumcision in addition to faith in Christ for salvation. The five times in the Epistle to the Galatians include these places in my opinion, chapter 2 verse 18 through verse 21, chapter 3 verse 1 verse 2, verse 10 through verse 14, chapter 5 verse 2 through 6 and verse 11, chapter 6 verse 12 and verse 14 and 15. Five times he underlines the point that he's making. It's clear that the salvific significance attached by the Judaizers to the sacrament of circumcision is without apostolic sanction. Further, the Jerusalem congress as you know confirmed this point, for that was the precise point that the Jerusalem conference came to a decision about. Christians are saved through the cross alone. Solo stauro, that's the Greek expression, solo stauro. Apart from the sacraments of whatever nature, the Judaizers did not like that idea and sought to blunt the truth of the sufficiency of the cross for human salvation.

The relation of this fact to the Roman system with its salvation through the sacraments is obvious. There too is the desire to escape the sole sufficiency of the cross alone for eternal life. Oh, if we could eliminate that the whole church apparatus would

collapse and we would be left with Jesus Christ and his saving cross alone as I hope. Christians are saved through the cross alone, solo stauro, apart from the sacraments of whatever nature.

The third motive of the Judaizers to compel circumcision is stated in the last clause of verse 13, "That they may boast in your flesh." "An ancient instance of the use of denominational statistics, self aggrandizement among the ancient religious folk, notching of Gentiles, mere scalp hunting" are Bruce's phrases for the legalistic brethren. Do not think for one moment that that is not involved in part in Evangelicals and Catholics Together. It was inevitable that reference to David's negotiations with Saul for the hand of Michael which led to the large scale foreskin hunting 1 Samuel 18: 25 through 27. "Figuratively," George comments, "Paul's opponents were doing the same things David and his soldiers had done of old, presenting Gentile foreskins as a mark of their own success and ingenuity as representative of the Jewish Christian establishment.

On top of their failure to appreciate the sufficiency of the cross of Christ, and their desire to boast in the number of Gentiles they have compelled to be circumcised, the Judaizers Paul says, "Do not themselves keep the law." "They were guilty of hypocrisy," Bruce says, "like the play actors of Antioch," chapter 2 verse 14 of Galatians. If others boast in the law or in ethnicity or in other externals, let them do it, but for Paul, his boast will be only in the Lord Jesus Christ. The first personal pronoun I, there's the emphasis of verse 14. The things in which the apostle could legitimately boast such as the things mentioned in such passages as Philippians 3:4 through 6 and 2 Corinthians 11: 21 through 33 can in no way be given the status of the cross. They suggest the life of the old man outside of Christ, but the cross suggest that of the new dominion of his Messiah and Lord underlined by the fullness of the titles Lord and Messiah given to him.

The word Crux or cross was unmentionable in polite Romal society. Bruce writes, "Even when one was being condemned to death by crucifixion, the sentence used an ancient formula which served as a sort of euphemism, 'Hang him on the unlucky tree.'"

The little word except excludes all other grounds of boasting, including the sacramental. That is the right of circumcision which marked him out as belonging to the ancient covenant people who possessed the ancient promises to Abraham, David, as well as those of the new covenant Jeremiah. Is it not obvious that the cross was the one and sufficient ground on which to build? The cross was utter end of the legal system and its rights and ceremonies that pointed on to the coming Messiah and its death was ratified by the rending of the veil in the temple when he died. How could circumcision be a requirement for salvation? The cross alone has become the ground for boasting before God having brought about a radical reassessment of everything.

Now I'm just half way through this paper, well I'm a little over half way through and the bulk of what I want to draw by way of conclusions we're saving for tonight, but if you have paid careful attention, you will probably note what I'm going to say and how it may be spelled out.

I have a quotation from John Calvin which I just saw; it has to do with Galatians 2:21 which bears on this topic. There the apostle writes, “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, (That is through faith and circumcision) then Christ died in vain.” This is what the greatest of the reformers said about I do not reject,

“There is great weight in this word, for how dreadful is the ingratitude of despising the grace of God? So wonderful in itself and obtained at such a price, yet he accuses the false apostles of this sacrilege, for they were not satisfied with Christ alone but introduced other aids for salvation. For unless we renounce all others and embrace Christ alone, we reject the grace of God. And what is left to a man who refuses the grace of God and makes himself unworthy of it?”

And then on the words, “For if righteousness were by the law, Christ died in vain,”

“Gratis, for nothing, here means in vain, that is there would have been no value in the death of Christ, or Christ would have died without any reward. For the reward of his death is that he had reconciled us to the Father by making atonement for our sins. Hence it follows that we are justified by his grace and therefore not by works. The papists interpret this of the ceremonial law, but who cannot see that it covers the whole law? For it is as if Paul had said if we could produce a righteousness of our own, Christ has suffered in vain. For he suffered to procure it for us, and why should we need to get from elsewhere what we could give ourselves. If the death of Christ is our redemption, then we were captives, if it is payment, then we were debtors. If it is atonement, we were guilty, and if it is cleansing, we were unclean. And so on the other hand, he who ascribes his cleansing pardon atonement righteousness or deliverance to works makes void the death of Christ.”

Now tonight, if I live long enough to do this, [Laughter] we'll talk about the gospel and the sacraments of Rome and then go on to talk about some theological consequences of that fact with observations, reflections and judgments which is really of course, the main part of my paper. But you can see why signing that document, endorsing that document is such an error on the part of evangelicals. And I might say this, too, I probably am going to say it later on anyway, but twice won't hurt, the very fact that these men endorsed it or approved it in anyway is an evidence of the status of the understanding of Christian theology in our day.

Where is our master of ceremonies? Should we close in prayer?

[Prayer] Father we give Thee thanks for this time together. Thank Thee for these great truths, we thank Thee for the apostle to whom Thou didst give such an understanding of truth and not only an understanding of it but a reception of it in his own

“Evangelicals and Catholics Together and the Grace of God, part I” by S. Lewis Johnson  
Copyright © 2008 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

heart, that he has marvelously been used as an instrument of Thine to enable us to come  
to an understanding of all that Thou hast done in the gift ...

**[AUDIO ENDS ABRUPTLY]**