



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

“The Apparently Ideal Church”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, it's just about time. Let's open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the opportunity again to open the Scriptures and study them. We thank Thee for the provision that Thou hast made for us of the Holy Spirit to be our teacher. And we thank Thee for the way in which the Holy Spirit has used the word of God to give us enlightenment and then to give us enablement in order to live the life that Thou wouldst have us to live.

We thank Thee for the assurance of the happy conclusion of this present life for all who have believed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the hope that we have. We thank Thee for the revelation of Jesus Christ in the future for which we look. And we ask Lord that in the meantime that our lives and the lives of our loved ones may be pleasing to Thee.

We pray particularly for those of our families who do not yet know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We pray that by thy grace Thy wilt touch their hearts, too, that they may sense their need and the provision that is available freely for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

We pray for some, Lord, who are ill and sick, and we especially remember them. We pray that by Thy wonderful grace Thou wilt move in their lives in a physical way,

enable them thereby to be pleasing in their lives and useful in their lives until Thee decreed end of the life of each one of us.

We give Thee thanks for the blood that was shed on Calvary’s Cross, and we pray that our studies together may exalt him who took our place as our great covenantal mediator and has won for us a glorious future. We commit this evening to Thee. We pray Thy blessing upon it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] We are beginning tonight a series of studies in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. His first letter, one of the really important epistles of the New Testament, and I think it’s fair to say that, except for scattered passages here and there, one that is largely neglected today.

It’s remarkable how many things in this epistle touch the present life and concern of the church of Jesus Christ as we know it. I sat down a week or two ago and just listed some things that come up before us in some detail in 1 Corinthians. For example: The nature of the gospel; just precisely what is the gospel? And that particularly comes up for us in the earlier part of the epistle and then, of course, in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter in which the apostle again touches upon the significance of the gospel, there, particularly, with the resurrection. The principles of Scriptural interpretation; how do we come to understand Scripture? And 1 Corinthians 2 and 3 is probably the leading portion of the New Testament – not the only portion – but the leading portion of the New Testament on Biblical illumination, how we may come to be in the proper frame of mind and heart to be taught by the Holy Spirit’s Scripture.

The nature and function of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper, in fact, particularly the Lord’s supper, in that it comes up for special mention in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. Then the aspects of church discipline that appear in a number of the chapters in 1 Corinthians – exceedingly important, because all churches need to know what the Bible says about discipline because so often those members of our flock stray from the word of God. In fact, as you know, the Reformers defined the essential features of a

Christian church as a group of people who meet regularly in one particular place for the observance of the ordinances for the ministry of the word of God, and for church discipline or discipline under the officers of the church. In fact, the Reformers insisted that if there was not discipline, the practice of discipline, the provision and practice of it, that one did not have a Christian church.

And so, consequently, you can see that this is extremely important for a New Testament church. And we have in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> chapters, as well as the 7<sup>th</sup> for that matter, some important things that have to do with discipline, marriage, divorce, and remarriage – chapter 7 of the epistle to the Corinthians. 1 Corinthians 7 is, again, probably the leading passage on that topic outside of our Lord’s words which are found in two of our gospels. We have a chapter or two, more than one, dealing with indifferent things. That is, certain principles of how we should respond to various types of things that are not necessarily wrong but may, under certain circumstances, be wrong. Eating meat sacrificed to idols is the issue that the apostle talks about, but that, of course, broadens out into the principle that is found in connection with it.

We have instruction concerning spiritual gifts. This is probably this most important epistle on that point. And if you know anything about what has happened in evangelicalism in recent years, we have had again a resurgence of the practice of charismatic gifts, and the claims on the part of many that the kinds of things that have been going on in charismatic-types of churches are the things that the apostle is speaking about and that we should practice those things, too. Well, that’s, again, one of the things that appears in this epistle more than one place, but particularly in chapters 12, 13, 14, along there. We have tongues, signs and wonders, prophecy – these are things with which the church in Corinth was involved and the apostle writes his letter in understanding of what was going on and in order to correct as well as to counsel with reference to those manifestations that appeared in the days of the apostles.

There are aspects of Biblical eschatology, such as chapter 15, one of the greatest of the chapters on Eschatology. The resurrection, the Second Coming, the Kingdom of God, the Rapture of the Church, all of those things appear in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, that long and significant chapter. And, of course, throughout aspects of the Christian church itself, its structure, its practice. Would you have recognized, for example, an early, apostolic Christian church if you had wandered into one and did not really know what you were wondering into? Would you think that the apostolic church was a church that had all of the things that the apostles expected a church to have, or should they look for other things that are so often so characteristic of groups of people who meet in our day and call themselves Christian churches?

Now, we have many of the things that have to do with the local church in 1 Corinthians chapter 5, chapter 11, chapter 12, 13, and 14, again with tongues, signs, wonders, prophecies, and chapter 16 as well. And then one final thing, and I just listed the things as I sat down in front of my computer screen and set them up, checked them out with Elder Pryor in order to have some comments from him, and, incidentally, he added one thing that I had on here but did not specifically mention. And he said, “Well, what about what the Scriptures have to say about women?” Well, this, of course, is also a book in which that subject comes before us in two places, chapter 11 and chapter 14.

But one final thing and I think it is extremely important, is the relationship of the believer to the law. And that is especially appropriate for those who think of themselves as being influenced strongly by the Reformers. And so if you for example think of your doctrine of God, your doctrine of Christ, your doctrine of the atonement as being harmonious with the Reformer’s doctrine of those great truths, then, of course, you would be interested in what this book has to say about the law of Moses with reference to the way in which the Reformers have often thought of the law of Moses, making the Ten Commandments applicable to us as the way of Christian living. That comes up, and in a very significant section of chapter 9, the question is raised.

So we have lots of issues to think about as we come up, and I hope that in our studies we’ll be able to solve some of those problems that we’ve referred to, and, as a result, when we finish our studies, the Lord willing, that we understand Scripture in a better way.

Now, the subject for tonight touches 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 1 through verse 9, which is really part of an introduction. And in order to truly and properly introduce it, I want to turn over to Acts chapter 18 and read the account that Luke gives us of the founding of the church in Corinth. And so I’ll read verse 1 through verse 11 of Acts chapter 18. Remember, the apostle is on his second missionary journey. He has gone back over the ground of his first journey, and now he has launched out and has come over from Asia into Europe. He went to Philippi, then he came down to Athens or to Berea, and then down to Athens. And now in chapter 18 he moves to Corinth, further south on the Greek peninsula. And we read in chapter 18 and verse 1,

“After these things Paul departed from Athens, and went down to Corinth;

And he found a certain Jew name Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla; (because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to depart from Rome:) and he came to them.

So, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and worked; for by occupation they were tentmakers” -- or perhaps the term should be thought of as meaning leather workers.

“And he reasoned in the Sabbath – or Synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded -- sought to persuade both Jews and Greeks.

When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ.

But when they opposed him, and blasphemed, he shook his garments, and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean. From now on, I will go to the Gentiles.’

And he departed from there, and entered the house of a certain man, named Justus, one who worshipped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue.

Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

Now, the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by vision, ‘Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city.’

And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

But when we think of the Apostle Paul, of course, coming to the city of Corinth and knowing something about Corinth, there are lots of things that come to one’s mind. To move, for example, from Athens to Corinth would be like moving from Boston, Massachusetts, to New York City. Thinking of Boston as a more intellectual kind of place and New York City—well, we know what New York City is like [laughter]. An Englishman has suggested that it would be like moving from Oxford to London. Well, we know that Corinth was a city that was characteristic of licentiousness, debauchery. G. Campbell Morgan has said, “If Athens was a center of clouded light, Corinth was a center of corrupt life. If Athens was full of idolatry, Corinth was full of sensuality.” It was kind of like the Vanity Fair of the ancient world.

It was a very important city commercially because of its location. If you’ll remember in the Mediterranean Sea and the peninsula of where Greece is, down into the Peloponnesus in the southern part, right in the center of Greece there is nothing but a little five-mile, approximately, stretch of land that connects northern Greece with southern

Greece. And so consequently, if you lived in northern Greece and you wanted to go, in the ancient days, to Sparta, which was in the Peloponnesus, then you would have to come and cross that little strip of land, an isthmus.

I’m trying to say “isthmus,” and I’ve tried that so long and [am] so happy to know, Martha told me, it’s pronounced “ismus.” It’s not “isthmus.” Well, anyway it was the isthmus, 5 miles wide. A gulf comes in from the east, a gulf comes in from the west, and all of the trade that came from east to west tried to go in that little Saronic and Corinthian Gulf area, in order to escape the southern part of Greece. To travel around the cape at the bottom of Greece, someone has said, would be as dangerous as going around Cape Horn in a sailing vessel. And so sailors tried to escape it, and the way that they could escape it would be to go through the center and cross over and do that. In fact, that little cape, which was called Malia, it was said with reference to it -- I’m told that this was a common saying -- that if you’re planning on sailing around Malia, you need to have your will made first before you try it. So naturally they attempted to move through and over the isthmus in order to get from east to west.

Therefore, Corinth became a very exceedingly important commercial city. It was the bridge of Greece, as it was called, but it was morally a depraved city and a debauched city. In fact, it was so well known that it was that kind of place that whenever anyone looked at a theater and was looking at a play and a Corinthian came on the stage, he always came on the stage as a drunk man. Like in Britain, in some generations back, whenever an Irishman came on the stage, it would be something about him that might suggest a little tipsy. And if wasn’t an Irishman, it would be a Scot. And so the Greeks, the Corinthians were thought along those lines. And, in fact, the very name, to be a Corinthian or the term “Corinth” itself, was made into a verb. *Corinthiodzane*, which meant “to play the Corinthian,” which would be to lust. And so to be a Corinthian or to act like a Corinthian would be to act lustfully.

What made it even worse was that the temple of Aphrodite was located in Corinth on the Acropolis. And at one stage in Corinth’s history, one thousand women priestesses or prostitutes served that temple. And so every evening they would come down into the city. And so, consequently, the city with a thousand harlots roaming the streets at night was not the kind of city that you would want your family or your children to be in. It was said of some that no man was wealthy enough to go to Corinth because of the opportunities for sin there.

Well, the apostle came there. You can see why the Holy Spirit, I think, led him there, because it was very, very important place, although an exceedingly wicked place. We’re not surprised when we read through 1 Corinthians, and 2 Corinthians, too, for that matter, to note how many of the verses of this epistle have to do with things that characterize a debauched society. But God works in those societies, too.

And so here we have the apostle coming. There are really three stages in his ministry. In the first four verses, the statement is made that Paul has entered the city from the north where he had been preaching the word of God having success in Philippi and having success in Berea and having questionable success in Athens, at least some turned to the Lord. He comes to Corinth where, ultimately, there was unusual success, but at any rate he came. The first four verses tell us about it.

And, evidently when he came, at first he was not preaching in the Sabbath as -- in the synagogue on the Sabbath as forcefully as he did turn to do when we read in verse 4. And he reasoned in the synagogue of every Sabbath and began to persuade, or tried to persuade is probably the way the tense of that verb should be understood, both Jews and Greeks.

One of the very interesting things that arises when you read something like that is, “What was Paul preaching?” Well, the next verse tells us. When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. So in the beginning, he had not done that. What he had done, we

don’t know. There is an indication, in one of the manuscripts of the New Testament, one of the older manuscripts of the New Testament, Codex Bezae. It has an addition. It’s probably not genuine, but it may reflect what the apostle was doing. It’s attached to verse 4, “and he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath.” And there is a reading in Codex Bezae that adds these words, “inserting the name of the Lord Jesus.” Rather strange thing to find in a Greek manuscript, “inserting the name of the Lord Jesus.” So he reasoned in the Sabbath -- reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and sought to persuade both Jews and Greeks *inserting the name of the Lord Jesus*.

Now, if you’ll think just a moment about the preaching that you have in the Book of Acts, one can see a very significant similarity. Because when one turns to the Book of Acts and listens to the Apostle Paul’s preaching there, Stephen’s preaching there, what characterizes their preaching? Well, the thing that characterizes their preaching is that they turn to the Old Testament, and they tell the story of the Old Testament, making application of those events and texts of the Old Testament to the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So that may tell us that what Paul was doing in Corinth was what Stephen did and what Paul himself did in, for example, Acts chapter 13 when he preached the word of God. So that characteristic of the preaching of that time -- I don’t think there’s any doubt about this, generally -- characteristic of the preaching of that time was the taking of the Old Testament and applying it to what they know of the historical ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that what they did was to go over the Scriptures that their audiences were familiar with, and then point out how the prophecies of the Old Testament find a perfect fulfillment in what they now know of the historical ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. So they, in effect, then took the Scriptures and pointed out the significance lay in what Christ had done when he was here. And you can see that that would have been extremely effective, and that’s what the epistles of the New Testament do also, because they turn, so

frequently, to the Old Testament Scriptures and point out that they are fulfilled in certain aspects of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, Paul tells us, of course, in 1 Corinthians 2 in verse 2 -- one of the aspects of his ministry that is extremely important, and I think you can probably get a sense of it when you notice the 5<sup>th</sup> verse of Acts chapter 18 when Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. And so now the ministry has evidently taken a more direct change. Paul felt it was now proper to go ahead and preach very plainly and as boldly as possible that the Lord Jesus was truly the Jewish Messiah.

Now, when he writes to the Corinthians later on he will say to them, remember, I determine not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and this one as one having been crucified. So that will give us some understanding then of what the apostle was doing.

Now, the other aspects of the ministry are described in verses 5 and 6 and then in verse 7 through 11, and this is essentially the background, the historical background, of Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. He stayed there, and you’ll remember that he had remarkable success. The ruler of the synagogue was converted. In verse 17 we read that all the Greeks took Sosthenese, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat but Gallio took no notice of these things. And then when Paul begins the Corinthian epistle, remember in the very first chapter he says, Paul called to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God and Sosthenese, our brother. Now, we’re not absolutely certain this is the same Sosthenese, but it certainly seems likely. If that is so, then two rulers of the synagogue were converted.

Now, Sunday morning when I came in for the eleven o’clock meeting, after the meeting was over a man came up to me. I hate it when they do this to me. This man is about -- he’s probably 50 years of age. I hope I’m doing him justice. He walked up to me and looked at me, and he said, “Do you know who I am?” [Laughter] “Do you

recognize my face?” And I did recognize his face in the sense that it was somewhat familiar to me. Then he said, “I’m one of your former students.”

And once he said his name, of course, I knew who he was because, oh, about every three or four years he calls me on the telephone. He’s a fine Christian man, studies the Bible, he’s not in the Lord’s work, but he lives in Dallas, not far away from here. He may be here tonight. But at any rate, he loves the Lord and he drives a truck, a van, all over this country. He’s done this for a number of years, and obviously is making a good living doing it. But anyway, [he] embarrassed his old teacher. But he mentioned -- somehow or another 1 Corinthians came up, maybe he asked me what I was going to be teaching, and I told him. And he said, “Oh, by the way, I remember one thing you said in the Corinthians class that has stuck with me,” and then he told me what it was. I’m so glad he didn’t say, “Do you remember what it was,” because... [laughter] But at any rate, he said, “It was this. You said that when Sosthenese was beaten, that evidently his conversion had done him some good, or something like that, that he was beaten and then evidently became converted,” because we do read the Greeks took Sosthenese, the ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And I had said in class he said, “perhaps that beating did him some good and he turned to the Lord.” He remembered that comment. I don’t think it’s in my notes [laughter], but now it is [Johnson laughs].

What are the chief characteristics of the epistle to the Corinthians? Well, the emphasis on the local church and its order and its problems certainly stand out, and we’ve listed all of those. There is no need to go over them again. One other thing is characteristic of it -- I don’t know whether you’ve realized this or not, it’s Paul’s longest letter. It’s actually longer than Romans. It’s his longest letter. So if there is nothing else about it that you remember, tell your friends it’s the longest letter. Or if you want to embarrass them like my friends want to embarrass me, “Do you know which is the longest letter of the New Testament? It’s 1 Corinthians.”

Well, that’s a lengthy introduction, but I think it’s important. So I want you now to turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, and I’m going to read verse 1 through verse 9, which is our introduction for the night. And then we’ll look at the salutation and thanksgiving, and that will be our exposition of the opening part of the epistle. Verse 1,

“Paul called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenese our brother.” The great text says simply “the brother,” but perhaps this is accurate, “our brother.”

“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours:

Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given you by Christ Jesus.”

Now, if you’ll just remember what a city – what the city Corinth was like and what the Corinthians were like, I think you can enter into the sense of thanksgiving which the apostle must have had when he remembered what they were in that vile city. And now this godly group of people who meet in the name of Jesus Christ as the Messiah.

“That you were enriched in everything by him, in all utterance, and all knowledge;

Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you:

So that you come short in no gift; eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Now, it’s interesting that he does associate Sosthenes with him in this letter, and it may well be that his beating did ultimately become a blessing for him. But Paul addresses the Corinthians as those who are called -- I’m sorry -- He speaks of himself as one who is a called apostle. I think that’s important because we have it three times in these verses. We have in verse 1, “Paul, a called apostle,” then he speaks of them as “called to be saints” in verse 2, and verse 9 he speaks of them as “called into the fellowship of his son Jesus Christ our Lord.” So it’s important for us to understand what is meant by this term “called.”

What he means essentially by it is that they have been by God, brought into a relationship with the Lord God that is divinely initiated. *Called*: it’s divine calling. When God speaks, he speaks with authority, and his initiatives are always carried out, always successful. So he speaks of himself as an apostle by *calling*. That’s designed, of course, to remind the Corinthians -- for they had questions about Paul, some of them, that he was a divinely chosen minister of God’s truth to them -- he was an “apostle by calling,” “a called apostle.” Not a self-chosen apostle, not one who thought it would be nice to be an apostle, but one who was *called by God*. This, incidentally, is what every Christian worker should be, *a called worker*.

Now, we know that everyone of us, as we will read, is called into the Christian life by the work of the Holy Spirit. But in our service as well, we should have the sense that God has initiated our work for the Lord. It’s by means of that that we have confidence that it’s God’s determination to be with us and bless us in the preaching of the word of God. So *called*, a called apostle, one sent forth by the Lord God., not one of the Twelve, but a special calling given to him on the Damascus Road. This is a necessary source of the purposed fruitfulness which God intended for the apostle.

He goes on to underline it. He says, “Through the will of God.” As our Lord told the apostles you have not chosen me, I have chosen you. And so the apostle is an apostle by calling through the *will of God*, not the will of man. He does not say “through my will,” though, of course, Paul responded. But fundamentally he lays stress on that that initiated the relationship. It was God working in his heart. Every Christian should have that sense in his heart that he belongs to the Lord God, not because he has made the fundamental decision, but that God has made the fundamental decision and given him the faith that has brought him into this relationship that means eternal life.

I don’t think there is anything that is more important for truly understanding Christianity than to understand that, that fundamentally, we are Christians because God has made us Christians. He’s *called* us. That’s our hope. That’s the beginning. That’s the source of fruitfulness. It’s the source of effective service.

Of course the Corinthians, with their question, when they heard the apostle or read the apostle say, “through the will of God,” they probably heard it because these epistles were read in the gatherings of the saints. We know [this] from other things Paul writes when he says “give attention to reading.” And we know in the case of the Book of Revelation, there was a reader, and people who sat and listened to the word of God being read. Well, everybody didn’t have an NIV in those days or and NASB or a King James Version, and they had to listen to reading. And so they did have to hear these things being read, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ and by the will of God, not by the will of man.

But as I started to say, since he underlines this, *by the will of God not the will of man*, I assume there may be some feeling here that there are those who oppose him, and he wants to remind them that if they oppose him as an apostle, they’re not opposing simply the apostle, they are opposing God because he considers himself God’s sent one, by the will of God.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse, he addresses his addressees as “the church of God.” Many faults, many weaknesses, you read through this epistle and at times you want to say, “Were these people really believers?” There are people today who tell us that you are not a believer if your life is not on a certain high plane, often the kind of high plane that they have determined as the proper plane. But you read through the Corinthians, it reminds you of Jacob. It reminds you of many of the saints of the Old Testament who were godly men but who also had many, many ungodly characteristics and many ungodly faults in their lives, but fundamentally like Jacob, were ultimately men of God.

Here is a church with many faults, many weaknesses, but it’s the *church of God*. Notice, *it’s the church of God*. So when you see a body of people who are meeting together, you don’t expect it to be a church without spot or wrinkle. We have many spots or wrinkles in Believer’s Chapel. As a matter of fact, if you started listening to spots or wrinkles, we’d reach the end of the hour before you go through with them. Because everybody who is a regular attender of Believer’s Chapel has some spots or wrinkles, even those that stand behind the pulpit. In case you wonder about that, ask their wives. [Laughter] Ask their wives.

So in all of that remembrance, the church of God, these were people in whose hearts God had worked, and they were far from being mature, far from being practically sanctified. But notice what Paul goes on to say about them. He says to the church of God, which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus. These are saints. And the wording of this particular statement is who -- I’m going to do it literally -- *to those who have been sanctified*. They’ve been brought into this position. That’s why they’re called saints. Spots, wrinkles, and everything, but still saints. They have been sanctified.

Now, of course that doesn’t mean that they are totally good. They’re anything but that. But there are differences now since they’ve listened and heard the gospel and responded to it. They’re different. They look the same, but there are characteristic differences about them. There may be just a few, but they’re there because they have

been sanctified. It’s a long way to go. 16 chapters only tell us some of the things that need to be done in their lives by the Holy Spirit. This term, as you know, I don’t have to label the point, means not to be saved. It doesn’t mean to be made holy. It means to be set apart *for* holiness by the Lord God.

It’s very striking that in the Old Testament, the parallel route of the Old Testament is sometimes in some contexts referred to Sodomites. They are individuals who have been set apart, using the Hebrew parallel expression. In Hosea verse 14, harlots are referred to as those who have been set apart like the prostitutes for the temple of Aphrodite in Corinth. Those prostitutes attached to the temple were holy ones, set apart ones, sanctified ones, set apart for prostitution in service of Aphrodite or Venus.

So the Christians are those who have been sanctified. They have been. It’s a finished work. They have been made saints. And you’ll notice they *have been made* saints. God is the one who made them saints. The tense itself referring to the past experience when they receive Christ as their Savior, and the voice suggesting, since it’s passive, that they have been wrought upon by God the Holy Spirit, and he has made them saints, a completed work, accomplished by another party, the Lord God himself. So you are saints if you are a believer in Christ. You are not holy yet. In case you didn’t know that, we’ll tell you that. But you’re not yet what you’re going to be. And it’s marvelous to think about what we’re going to be. I don’t have time to talk about four-fold sanctification. Some time we’ll do that, but now we’ll move on because we need to finish this introduction.

Paul goes on to say *called saints*, that is, they’ve been brought into this relationship by the Lord God. It’s he who called them. It’s not they who of their own free will responded and became Christians and saints. It’s they were called by God. He took the initiative and moved their wills. As Dr. Barnhouse used to say, jiggled their “willer” so that their “willer” responded positively to the message the apostle was proclaiming.

I don’t know why it is, except it’s characteristic of human nature to rebel against the word of God. That men should want to rebel against the word of God, that tells us that it’s God who moves in our hearts and overcomes our resistance and brings us to the knowledge of Him. That’s the most marvelous thing in the word of God that you could imagine, that the sovereign grace of God has overcome my resistance and has brought me into the church of God. I’d certainly rejoice in that. Because if it had depended upon me I know my heart well enough, how rebellious it is even yet, I would never have responded to that marvelous message concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, and the blood that was shed for sinners.

He speaks about saints with all, who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ both theirs and ours. There’s the oneness that exists in the body, and Paul particularly is concerned about this because his ministry, you see, has now gone out to the Gentiles after having been rejected by the Nation Israel. Not by every Israelite, but by the nation officially in the crucifixion of the Son of God.

Notice what he says with reference to believers. He says to the church of God, which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints with all who in everyplace call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both theirs and ours. In other words, how would you define a believer? He is one who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is by a figure of speech called synecdoche in which a part is used for the whole for total profession of faith in Christ. We often use a part for a whole. You might be describing some battle in history past and you would say that Admiral so-and-so came with fifty sails. Well, he couldn’t win a battle with fifty sails. You can’t even stay afloat with fifty sails. But the sails stand for the ship as a whole. And so consequently when we say, “What a creature that guy is.” Well we use the term “creature” by this kind of a metaphor, too, for human being. But any rate, here when we read, “all on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” that includes all that is involved in being responsive to the

message of God. All Christians are those who call upon the Lord. That's their description that Paul gives of them. The total profession.

Now the thanksgiving follows. He says, "grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ." You'll notice the grace comes from God our father, and the peace and grace both from the two members of the Godhead, the father and the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the thanksgiving begins with, "I thank my God always concerning you."

This is not ironical. He's not saying I thank my God in spite of the kind of vile people you are or the horrible mistakes that you've made in your Christian life. He's not being simply courteous, I thank my God always concerning you in a courteous kind of way, wanting to win friends and influence people. This is a truthful estimate of them. "I thank my God always concerning you, for the grace of God which was given to you through Jesus Christ." You can see that when you get infected with divine grace it appears everywhere, doesn't it? It was given to you. Not what you earned, not what you sought after. If you did seek after it, it's because it was given to you by the Holy Spirit to do that, but he underlines the fact that this grace is given to you in Christ Jesus.

Now, I think in the light of the epistle to the Corinthians that what he means by the grace is not simply the principle, though that's involved, of course. Probably he's referring to the gifts lavished upon them. The grace of God that has been given to them. Because he goes on to say that you were enriched in everything by him in all utterance and knowledge.

The Corinthians, as we read through the chapters, it's evident, were a group of people who were given by God the Holy Spirit unusual gifts of utterance. And later on when we come to the sections that have to do with spiritual gifts, we will see how significant that is. There were prophets among them. There were those who were speaking with biblical tongues. There were words of knowledge that they were giving out, things like this. And so when he says they were enriched in all utterance and all

knowledge, he’s approving the ministry of the Holy Spirit working in these individuals in a remarkable way. It was a church that had remarkable gifts.

Now, of course we know from what appears later on that here and there, there are evidences that they were quite proud of that. And the apostle will later on reprove them for the misuse and the misappreciation of what God in grace has given to them. But here he is thankful that they were given these marvelous gifts of utterance and knowledge. Even he says, as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you. Confirmed I think in the sense that they experienced those things.

Now, we have in the New Testament some evidences of what this may mean, and I’m going to turn over to Galatians chapter 3 and just read a couple of verses there, because Paul writing to the Galatians speaks about those gifts that were in those early days given in the apostolic ministry to confirm the things that they were preaching. Notice he says to the Galatians in Galatians 3 in verse 2, “This only I want to learn from you, did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you suffered so many things in vain, if indeed it was in vain? Therefore he who supplies the Spirit to you, and works miracles among you, does he do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”

So he refers to the preaching of the gospel accompanied by signs and miracles. And then in Hebrews chapter 2 verse 1 through verse 4, the same thing is referred to by the writer of the Epistle of the Hebrews. He says in chapter 2 verse 3 and verse 4: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, with various signs, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, or Holy Spirit according to his will?”

So probably Paul refers to a similar thing when he says that they were enriched in everything by him in all utterance and in all knowledge, even as the testimony of Christ

was confirmed among you. The whole purpose of that gospel was to, as Calvin said, to lay open to us Jesus Christ, and that's what, through the apostle, was being done.

Then he said in verse 7: So that you come short in no gift. What a remarkably gifted church. All of the gifts described in, for example, chapters 12, 13, 14; those gifts Paul says were manifested in the Corinthian assembly. What a blessed assembly from the standpoint of God's sovereign blessing poured out upon them. So that you come short in no gift as you eagerly await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know, I think that as I look around the Christian church today, and particularly certain aspects of it and certain emphases of it, one of the things that is not as characteristic of the church today -- and I mean the believing church today, as it should be -- is this eager awaiting of the coming of our Lord.

Now, we observe the Lord's Supper every Sunday night in Believer's Chapel, as most of you know. And we often cite the passage in chapter 11: As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show forth the Lord's death *until he comes*. Characteristic of the early church was that pneumatic sense or at least the sense of the possibility of the Lord coming in the immediate future. So it appears to me that if we lose the sense of the imminent return of our Lord, we've lost something that's of great significance for Christian living.

I know there are debates that are raging back and forth over the question of precisely what is meant by that, but regardless of whether some of the fine points may need some careful attention, the fact is that the New Testament clearly presents the fact that those believers were looking for the Lord's return in a very vital way. And we get down upon our knees by our bedsides, our thoughts should always enclose the possibility of our Lord's return before we get out of our bed in the morning. So eagerly awaiting, incidentally, that is the rendering of my text, and that's the meaning of that Greek word, *eagerly awaiting* the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, he says, “Who will confirm you?” Isn’t that interesting? We have a God who will never give up. Isn’t that nice? He will never give up. If you belong to him, he will not give up. You will be sanctified and saved, finally and completely. He will also confirm you. That word “confirm” was used in the Greek of the time -- the everyday Greek of the time as a legal term for “properly guaranteed securities.” So it will *confirm* you. He will not give us up. He will confirm you to the end that you may be blameless. What a vivid adjective that is. It means not simply without guilt, it means unchargeable, that no one can even lay a charge against you, unchargeable. It’s the word that is used in Romans chapter 8 in verse 33. That is, the verb of this same root is used when the apostle says in verse 33: Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect, it is God who justifies. Chargeless, unimpeachable, that is our future. And then finally in the 9<sup>th</sup> verse, God is faithful, is steadfast, unwavering purpose.

Immutability. God’s the only person who is immutable. And I do thank him from the bottom of my heart that he is immutable in his determination to sanctify Samuel Lewis Johnson, Jr. He may be saying, “This is going to require all of my power, but I’m going to sanctify him.” He will not give up. It will be accomplished. God is faithful.

By whom I have been called into the fellowship, the communion. This is a word that means all things common, so that I have all things common, having been grafted into our Lord Jesus Christ, into the fellowship, having all things common with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. We look to ourselves. We have anxiety, despair, discouragement. If we look to him, confidence in his sovereignly bestowed blessings in which we have all things common with our Lord Jesus Christ. I’m going to anticipate and just read the last 3 verses of chapter 3, Paul writes:

“Therefore let no one boast in men for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come, all are yours and you’re Christ’s, and Christ’s is God.”

What a magnificent introduction. If you read something like this and your heart is not moved by it, your heart is made of stone. May God the Holy Spirit so touch you as you think about what God has done in the desire to accomplish his will and the giving of the Son of God. May as you reflect upon that and realize that this is something of which I may be a part. May you flee to him. Believe in him. Give yourself to him. Call upon his name with those old Corinthians and these new Corinthians. Call upon his name and come into fellowship with Jesus Christ, and in him have all things. Let’s bow in a word of prayer:

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee and thankful for such a magnificent gospel message which has been given to us at such great, great cost. How blind we have been. How hardened we have been and often are. Lord, soften our hearts. Give us new, fresh determinations to be more fruitful in our Christian life and testimony. We ask Thy blessing upon this group of people and their families and their friends. And upon this assembly, this church of God, bless it Lord richly.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.