



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 10:7-18

“Measuring the Ministry”

TRANSCRIPT

Again, we turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 10. And our Scripture reading for this morning is 2 Corinthians 10, verse 7 through verse 18. The apostle is now in that part of the epistle in which he is defending his apostolic authority, and he writes in verse 7 of chapter 10,

“You are looking at things as they are outwardly. If anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ's, let him consider this again within himself, that just as he is Christ's, so also are we. For even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame, for I do not wish to seem as if I would terrify you by my letters. For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’ Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present. For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the

measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even as far as you.”

Now, in case you have a little difficulty in understanding what Paul is talking about, he’s talking about the fact that his apostolic ministry is a ministry to the Gentiles and the sphere that has been apportioned to him is the sphere of the Gentiles as over against the sphere of, say, a Nation Israel and of the Jews. So when he uses the expression here “the measure of the sphere which God has apportioned to him,” he’s talking about his ministry as apostle of the Gentiles.

“For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men’s labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you.”

And he means simply by that that he hopes that as they become more mature, they will be able to help him in his ministry of going beyond them in the preaching of the gospel to other Gentiles. In Romans chapter 15 in a passage that is closely connected with this one, he speaks about wanting to go on further to the west and even to Spain with the gospel, and so that’s what he has in mind when he says he hopes that as their faith grows, they might be the means by which he would reach further in his gospel ministry. Verse 16,

“so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another. But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord. For not he who commends himself is approved, but he whom the Lord commendeth.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are indeed thankful for the privilege that is ours today to turn again to the holy Scriptures, to enter into the mind of the great apostle as he sought in obedience to the command that Thou didst give him, to take the gospel to the Gentile world. And we thank Thee for the success of the apostle and for the fact that that ministry has reached even to us, and we today in the city of Dallas in Believers Chapel are the recipients of the ministry which the apostle faithfully carried out. We are indeed grateful.

And today we thank Thee and praise Thee for the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and of the gospel of Christ as seen in Christ’s face. We’re so thankful for all of the ministry that Thou hast given us the opportunity to receive and to participate in as well. We pray for the whole church of Christ today. We ask Thy blessing upon all of the members. We pray for our country. We ask especially as well for those in Believers Chapel who have special needs. And we pray particularly for those who are in the hospital or are going into the hospital for operations such as [name redacted]. And we pray, O God, Thy blessing upon each of these. We thank Thee for those who have requested our prayers, and we do pray for them and pray that Thou wilt answer their petitions and meet their needs.

We thank Thee for the elders of the Chapel and their desire to please Thee and their faithful ministry and for the deacons and others who share in the work here; for the staff. For those who work in the tape ministry and the publications ministry, we’re grateful to them and for the sacrifices that they make in order to have a part in preaching Christ. And in our meeting today, Lord, as we meet, may we have the sense of Thy presence and blessing as we study the Scriptures together.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] Well, as I look out over the audience today, I notice particularly that the men are exhibiting the signs of the pains of withdrawal. No NFL football. And in case some of you read in the newspaper yesterday, Mike Royko’s comment about visiting the clinic for people who were attempting to get off of NFL football directed by Dr. Quickwhistle, you may remember that the way in which it is done is, first, by looking at outstanding plays on the first day; 60, 80 yard runs, long passes, tremendous plays; the next day you are shown less spectacular plays, occasionally a little drowsiness begins to appear; third day, commercials, one yard gains, fumbles, penalties, etc; I think the final day was that you had to look all day long at Tom Landry on the sidelines with his arms folded like this. And by the end of that fourth day, people were crying out, “Get me out of here! Get me out of here!” So you, this morning, it looks as if you’ve survived the beginnings of the withdrawal pains, and I hope that you are able to make it through to looking at Landry on the sidelines with his arms folded all day long.

Today, since we don’t have any game to look at, I can just preach on and on and on this afternoon. There isn’t anything that you have to do so... [Laughter] But we’ll try to stop at 12:00 anyway.

We are looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 10, and our subject today is “Measuring the Ministry” or “Paul’s defense of his apostolic authority.” I think if I were looking at a passage and saying, that’s one that does not appear to be so good for the ministry of the word of God, then this would one of those passages, verse 7 through verse 18 of 2 Corinthians chapter 10.

And, in fact, if I did not realize that the apostle was inspired by the Holy Spirit and therefore, this passage in the word of God by divine intent, I might even think that Paul did not do as well on this part of the letter as he does in so many of the others. But since all of Scripture is ultimately from God, we treat it in that way.

There are some important practical lessons that are found in this very difficult section. Incidentally, it is difficult in the original text as well. That is, grammatically and syntactically. For example, the apostle gives us some clues as to the use of spiritual authority. Many people, when they think of authority, and even of spiritual authority, think that the proper way to exercise spiritual authority is to do it as one might exercise his authority as the president or chief executive officer of some corporation.

The Lord Jesus had a word to say about that in the incident in which Peter, James, and John -- or James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him and said, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” And he said, “What do you want me to do?” And they said, “Grant that we may sit in your glory, one on your right and one on your left.” And our Lord, remember, replied to them, “You don’t even know what you’re asking about. You drink of the cup of which I shall drink and be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” And then in a moment, he called them to himself and said unto them, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles, lorded over them and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The epistle illustrates that in this incident because being an apostle and having all of the authority of an appointed representative of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, he exercises the kind of meekness that characterizes an apostle and does not lord it over the Corinthians as the Gentiles do in the way they do things.

The Corinthians were very immature believers. It is very evident that they were because the men that came in among them were able to lead them away from the teaching that the Apostle Paul had given them. And so we have a contrast here between the meekness of the apostle and the Judaizers’ personality power.

A friend of mine who has written a commentary on this book, and I have cited him more than once, Warren Wiersbe, says in his little book on 2 Corinthians that some friends and I once listened to a man preach whose entire sermon was made up of impressive big words, an occasional quotation from the Bible, usually taken out of context, and many references to world events and the signs of the times. As we left the meeting -- he’s describing the meeting -- one of my friends said, “1 Kings 19:11 describes that performance perfectly. The Lord was not in the wind.”

And Mr. Wiersbe went on to say, “Yet people around us were saying that it was the most wonderful sermon they had ever heard. I seriously doubt that ten minutes later, they were able to recall one concrete thing that the preacher said.” We’re living in days like that in which the test of the popularity of the preacher is his personality power or his ability to entertain.

I have a good friend in the ministry. He has taught at two theological seminaries, and last week I was in the Washington area to give some lectures on the use of the Old Testament and the New Testament in some eschatological passages, and he’s on the faculty of the institution at which I was teaching for four days. Two weeks ago, he wrote me a letter in which he wanted to tell me some things to do when I came there. One thing was please be sure to bring your golf bag. Well, I was unable to do that, but nevertheless in the letter he told me of some of his experiences that he had just recently had.

He was speaking at Cedarville, and he was speaking along with a certain man, a psychologist preacher from North Carolina, and he wrote me these words. These are his very words. “He is a very fine man, Lewis, but he’s speaking with all humor and joviality along with some common sense advice about marriage. No text was ever preached, although he occasionally referred to the Bible for text to support his marriage counseling advice.” If Christian audiences really seem to like that kind of an approach, little wonder the church is so anemic spiritually.

Three weeks earlier, he said, I was paired with -- at a Bible conference with a certain man -- he mentions his name but I won’t mention him -- a fill-in for Ian Thomas who preaches the standard Ian Thomas line. He had mastered Don Rickles, but not much theology. About every other sentence was a one-liner in Don Rickles’ style. The audience guffawed riotously with each punch line. The Lord rebuked him when at the end of the conference during testimony time, a woman stood up and thanked him for bringing humor and comedy to the pulpit. I think he was properly embarrassed. That’s all the Lord needs, another comedian in the pulpit.

Well, that’s really true and it’s unfortunate that in the pulpit, that’s what some people like. It’s a revelation of the immaturity of us as believers when that’s what we look for when we enter into the meeting of the ministry of the word of God. So I think the apostle points out, first of all, that one uses spirituality through the Holy Spirit, and in the meekness that should characterize a servant of God as did characterize the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord was not in the wind.

Another thing that appears here is the necessity of truthful evaluation. The apostle begins by saying, You’re looking at things as they are outwardly. In fact, that particular statement may be taken in three ways, for the Greek verb is one that can be an imperative, it can be an indicative and therefore it may be a question, or it may be a statement, a categorical statement. It is translated here: You are looking at things as they are outwardly. It could be rendered: Are you looking at things outwardly? Or it could be an imperative: Look at things as they really are.

Now, I think that is probably the force. Literally it’s: Look at the things according to the face. That is, look at things as they really are. Face the facts, and that’s something that is also of practical significance for us.

A third lesson of a practical kind that Paul mentions here is the proper measure of ministry. Many problems are traceable to an improper measure of ministry. When the Lord Jesus gave his letters to the churches in the Book of Revelation, of one church he

said: You think you’re rich, but you’re miserable, poor, blind, and naked -- and poor. So the fact that we think of ourselves as -- in one way, is not necessarily the way in which God thinks of us. We are afflicted by the snare of statistics, the desire for entertainment, the desire for the like things, and we also have a reaction -- a negative reaction toward any kind of theological thinking that makes us use our minds as well as our hearts in the things of God.

Some years ago, one of America’s large denominations had as its theme “A million more in ’64 and everyone a tither.” Some of you may remember that, and my friend said he heard a preacher by his side when he mentioned that “A million more in ’64 and everyone a tither” add, “If we get a million more like the last million, God help us.” So we need some reality in the Christian ministry.

Now, in the third section of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, as we have said, he’s turning his attention to his adversaries who have objected to his claim to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has discussed ministry. He has discussed Christian giving or Christian stewardship. And now he turns to deal with those who have attacked his claim to be an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so he’s going to discuss his authority in view of them.

And one may ask, who were they? Who were Paul’s opponents? Unfortunately, Paul doesn’t tell us, my opponents are such and such and this is what they believe and this what they say. We must read the epistle. Read it over and over and notice carefully the things to which the apostle alludes, the things the apostle says directly about these individuals. Putting it all together, the picture that emerges is something like this: They were intruders from without. That is, they were not Corinthians. They were individuals who came in among the Corinthians. And, in fact, Paul’s statement in chapter 3, verse 1, “We don’t need letters of commendation.” And others indicate that they came in as strangers and brought some kind of letters of commendation to them, perhaps. He makes reference to this type of thing in verse 12 here: For we are not bold to class or compare

ourselves with some of those who commend themselves; but when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. So they were intruders from without.

Second, they claimed superiority. In fact, Paul eludes in this epistle in the 11th chapter to super-apostles. And evidently, he uses that ironically. These individuals claim to be men of superior authority. They also evidently were of a Judaizing type. In 2 Corinthians chapter 11 in verse 22, the apostle says: “Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.” And the very fact that he deals with the law in the section on the ministry would indicate that they were individuals who were of a Judaizing character.

Specifically what they are, he doesn’t say. They evidently were libertines because Paul in the letter exhorts the Corinthians to perfect holiness in the fear of God. And they claimed superior knowledge so we can call them gnostics, not in the technical sense, but individuals who especially claimed certain knowledge that others didn’t have. Perhaps that’s why, in verse 5 of this chapter in the preceding section, the apostle says we are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we’re taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.

And then finally, they were mercenary-minded. They came with the expectation and evidently the demand that the Corinthians support them in their ministry. Now, the apostle lays some stress on that, too. In chapter 11 in verse 7, he says: “Or did I commit a sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted because I preach the gospel of God to you without charge?” Verse 9, “And when I was present with you and was in need, I was not a burden to anyone. For when the brethren came from Macedonia, they fully supplied my need and in everything I count myself from being a burden to you (that is, the Corinthians) and will continue to do so.”

In chapter 12, verse 13 through verse 15, this was something that was important to Paul. He say, verse 13: “For in what respect were you treated as inferior to the rest of the

churches except that I, myself, did not become a burden to you? Forgive me this wrong. Here for this third time, I am ready to come to you and I will not be a burden to you for I do not seek what is yours but you. For children are not responsible to save up for their parents but parents for their children. And I will most gladly spend than be expended for your souls. If I love you the more, am I to be loved the less?”

Can you imagine our television evangelists saying today, “Now we don’t want you to send in any money for us”? Can you imagine? No, you cannot. You couldn’t imagine it because everybody who comes on the radio or television is anxious to done you for something. In that, they are thoroughly out of the Pauline spirit and pattern. And the apostle then speaks of them as intruders, they claim superior authority, they were Judaizers in measure, they were libertines, they had certain ideas that they considered to be super knowledge, and they were very much in it for some money.

Now, let’s turn to the section that we are looking at today and first of all in verse 7 through verse 11, Paul states that his authority is effective on paper and in fact. He begins by saying you’re looking at things as they are outwardly. Now, it’s possible to take it that way. In other words, Paul is saying you’re looking at things as they are outwardly. You’re looking at the appearance of things. You’re judging by appearance. But it’s also possible to take it, I say, as meaning simply, Look at the things face to face, or face the facts. I personally think that’s probably what he means. Face the facts. I am the servant of Christ and the servant of Christ as you Corinthians, of all people, should know. So he says if anyone is confident in himself that he is Christ’s, let him consider this again within himself that just as he is Christ’s, so also are we.

Now, you can see the immaturity of this congregation of people in Corinth that the one who has come by the grace of God, brought the gospel to them, brought them to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, is the one of whom they have doubts at the moment and even that he belongs to Christ.

Now, I don’t think that means that they doubted Paul’s salvation. I do think that those that came in as intruders may have had that thought. When he speaks about being Christ’s in the light of the context and in the light of the claims of the Judaizers, he was probably thinking about Christ’s servant rather than I am a Christian. They were doubting that he was truly a servant of Christ. And of course, if it were true that he made all of these claims of being an apostle and they were really not true, then that might reveal that he was not a believer at all. But I think that what Paul means is that if there are people who think that they are Christ’s servant, we are, too. And of all people who ought to believe that, the Corinthians were in the forefront because they were brought to the Lord through the apostle.

Now, he justifies further glory in verses 8 through 10. “For even if I boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame.” Now, that’s an interesting statement. Paul says he has authority but notice he has authority. It is given by the Lord, of course, Acts chapter 26, verse 16 through 18 in Paul’s description of how he was called to ministry of the Gentiles is apropos. We don’t have time to look at that text, or Acts chapter 9 in verse 15. Note them in your Bible and read them, but you’ll see that God called the apostle to minister to the Gentiles.

Now, when he was called, he was called and given authority for building up. Edification is the goal of apostolic ministry not destruction as is the case of the adversaries. They have come in among the Corinthians not to build them up but to tear them down. And so Paul says that the Lord gave him authority for building up not for destroying you, and if he should boast somewhat further, he would not be put to shame. What does that mean? He would not be put to shame. Well, probably it means this: that if he were to boast further that there would be no exposure of him as a pretentious boaster.

He’s no Syracuse Joe Patton, the rhetorical kleptomaniac who graduates number 76 in a class of 85 people and claims he graduated in the top half of the class. He’s no guy like Biden who cannot tell the difference between truth and error, evidently. Johnny Carson said the other night that -- so incidentally, I made this comment this morning, someone came up to me afterwards in the hall back there -- I get lots of information in the hall after the message, after the first message. And he came up and said, “Did you hear what Johnny Carson said?” Well, I haven’t heard Johnny Carson since 1981, I don’t think. But anyway, he said Johnny Carson said the other day that Biden said that he would have resigned from the race a whole lot sooner but he couldn’t find the speech. Well, when the apostle states here -- some of you not getting it -- but anyway, go ahead, keep trying. The apostle says for even if I should boast somewhat further about our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame. That is, I will not be exposed as a pretentious boaster. Everything that I say can be backed up, is simply what he is saying.

Now, he goes on in verse 10 and says, “For they say, ‘His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.’” You don’t often find Paul using ironical language, but this is clearly ironical. He’s citing these fellows. First of all, he says I am not going to scare you out of your wits by letters, I don’t wish to seem as if I would terrify you by letters. They say these things about me. They say his letters are weighty and strong, his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech contemptible.

Now, that gives the wrong impression, I think. I don’t think that they meant that Paul’s speech was contemptible in the sense that it was filled with objectionable language. That isn’t the sense in which it is used. This Greek word is the word that is derived from the word for nothing in Greek. And it means to count as nothing. And what they were saying, to use our slang if I may be permitted that; they were saying as far as Paul’s

speech is concerned, it’s just a big zero. That’s exactly what that word means. His speech is contemptible.

So what’s meant by the statement here, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive”? What did Paul look like? We would like to know that. It doesn’t really have any theological significance, but it’s one of those things that we would like to know. He’s been described by some as short and insignificant. Some have even called him -- and this is terrible -- an ugly little Jew. And that he had revolting infirmities such as an ophthalmia. There is no indication of that at all. At times, his eloquence seemed godlike when he was in, I believe, Lystra in Acts chapter 14, at least, when he was preaching. Those people there were so impressed by him that they wanted to come and worship him as one of the gods, and they called him Hermes or Mercury. So evidently, at times, when he was the chief speaker, he was regarded as a very effective one. But he was not like Apollos who did have true eloquence.

Though of the descriptions that have come to us about the Apostle Paul, there is only one of them that is at all likely to be based on early tradition, and that’s the well-known one in the work called “The Acts of Paul in Thecla”, a document in which Sir William Ramsay, an early archaeologist believed was a first century document. These [indistinct] acts exist in Syriac, in Latin, in Greek, and Armenian, and in Syriac are believed to embody the earliest form of the story.

The description in Syriac of the Apostle Paul is as follows: “A man of middling size (this is a quotation from it) his hair was scanty and his legs were a little crooked, and his knees were projecting or far apart.” The poor fellow, according to this description was bow legged, like some of you in this audience. You ever seen a group of men in which you didn’t have somebody -- or two or three -- who are bow legged? It’s characteristic of the frailties of us masculine sex; bow legged. He had large eyes and his eyebrows met and his nose was somewhat long. And he was full of grace and mercy and at another, he seemed like an angel. [Laughter]

That’s an interesting description, isn’t it? It may be true. Actually, when we read here in this verse his letters are weighty and strong, his personal presence is unimpressive, it’s not altogether sure that personal presence is designed to be a physical description. It just as likely is not a physical description, but a description of his person, his character. So his personal presence is unimpressive. His speech is a big zero.

Now, Paul finishes the section by saying, “Let such a person consider this, that what we are in word by letters when absent, such persons we are also in deed when present.” There are not many people who can maintain a consistency and constancy in their Christian profession and in their Christian life. The apostle was one who could. What a wonderful thing it is for us to have a consistency, a constancy, in our Christian life that you can say on that individual what he is in word, he is in deed. I wish it were true of me. It would be a wonderful thing to be that constant. What I say is what I am. What I am and what I do agrees with what I say. That’s a measure of maturity that all of us should seek to possess.

Now, Paul goes on to say, “Look. Corinth is my territory.” And that’s what he will talk about in verse 12 through verse 16 for he says, “For we are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves (In other words, I’m not going to dare to class myself with these fellows. He continues); compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. But we will not boast beyond our measure, but within the measure of the sphere which God apportioned to us as a measure, to reach even unto you. For we are not overextending ourselves, as if we did not reach to you, for we were the first to come even as far as you in the gospel of Christ; not boasting beyond our measure, that is, in other men’s labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.”

This is a very difficult section. It’s difficult grammatically. It reminds me of something one of my old teachers used to say and wrote in one of his books. “Brethren,” cried Father Taylor, the sailor preacher finding himself entangled in a sentence from whose labyrinthine subordinate clauses there seemed to be no exit, “I’ve lost the nominative of this sentence and things are generally mixed up but I’m bound for the kingdom anyhow.” [Laughter] Sometimes I feel that way when I read Paul’s writing because Paul is the kind of person who uses anacolutha; that is, constructions that don’t necessarily follow. It’s not easy to read some of his Greek in this section through here. The latter part of 2 Corinthians is one of the most difficult of Paul’s writings.

First of all, he speaks of the foolishness of self-praise. We are not bold to class or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are without understanding. That means they have no sense at all. That’s the way the Greeks put it. Look, if we measure ourselves by ourselves, there’s no objective standard, is there? We’re measuring ourselves by ourselves. And furthermore, if we measure ourselves by ourselves, we cannot help but achieve one hundred percent success. We rate one hundred percent all the time if we compare ourselves with ourselves. In other words, if we become a mutual admiration society, we are not comparing ourselves with anything that counts.

So Paul says he’s not among those who measure themselves by themselves. His measurement is the will of God, and that’s what he points to. He said, Look, God has called me to be an apostle to the Gentiles and he has given me a certain sphere of ministry, a certain authority to be exercised in a certain sphere. That’s that by which my life must be measured. These fellows needed letters of commendation. He has a sphere marked out by God, and the Corinthians were within his sphere. In other words, he came to the Corinthians first. They were in his sphere and priority of service to them gave him a prior claim on them for he was the first to reach even unto them. Therefore,

he says, “I’m not overextending myself if we reach to you because we were the first to be there and bring the gospel of Christ to you. These other fellows are intruders. They have come afterwards and they are not, therefore, to be followed by you.”

Now, two things, it’s obvious, dominated Paul. First: his apostleship to the Gentiles. Corinth is his territory. He was the first there and, therefore, they should be following him if they are following anyone. Secondly, it’s evident that he had the principle of not building on another man’s foundation. That’s clear from the statement that he makes here in verse 15 and 16, “not boasting beyond our measure, that is in other man’s labors, but with the hope that as your faith grows, we shall be, within our sphere, enlarged even more by you, so as to preach the gospel even to the regions beyond you, and not to boast in what has been accomplished in the sphere of another.”

He did not poach on other men’s preserves. He had before him the call to be the apostle to the Gentiles, and he was always moving toward those who had not yet heard and when he was, by God’s grace, unable to bring to a certain measure of maturity those to whom he had preached. Corinthians were obviously immature. They needed another visit from the apostle, but he said, “I hope that when I come, it will be possible for you to help me to go on to the regions that are beyond you with the gospel. In Romans, he talks about how he wants to go to Spain and preach the gospel to them because they are within his sphere, also.

So he’s not going to build on another man’s foundation. Look, my Christian friends, if you look around in the professing Christian world today, what you have today is here and there a church that honors the word of God, honors the Lord Jesus Christ, preach salvation through the grace of God grounding the merits of salvation in what Christ obtained for us in his sufferings on the cross.

Also we are filled with all kinds of cultists. The Witnesses, the Mormons, the Unity, Christian Science and all the rest -- these are the cults. The cults could not exist at all were it not for the existence of the real thing. They are the parasites, and they prey on

the truth, and it’s not long before they are able to pick up some people from the truth. Those who are in those organizations generally began their existence by being connected, in some measure at least, with the Orthodox. Every one of them exists as a parasite. They would not exist at all were it not for the existence of the true church grounded upon the ministry of the Lord Jesus as the Son of God, grounded upon the doctrine of the Trinity and the saving ministry of the Lord Jesus as the one who has offered the atoning sacrifice by which sinners may be saved.

John Calvin has a comment that I think is right to the point. He says, “He now reproves the false apostles more freely as men who stretch out their hands to reap another man’s harvest and who yet dares to revile those whose sweat and labor had prepared the place for them.” That’s true.

Now, these statements of the apostle suggest some very practical questions for you and me. We’re not apostles. Some of us preach behind a pulpit like I do, but most of us don’t at all. Most of us are Christians. We’ve been told in the word of God that we have a spiritual gift, and we are to exercise that gift in service. We are -- therefore, those who have a ministry -- we all have a ministry – ministry is not for a few, ministry is for every one of us.

Now, if it’s true that we all have a spiritual gift and we all have a ministry, then Paul’s principles, by which he is operating here, are applicable to us. He said he had a call, a ministry. He had a gift. He was an apostle. He had guidance from God to serve as the apostle of the Gentiles, and so that was his calling; that was his work. And the test of Paul is the faithfulness with which he carried out his ministry. This seems to me to be perfectly good ground for asking ourselves questions like these. Am I where God wants me to be? Am I, in my personal life, where God wants me to be?

And, secondly, is God glorified by my ministry? Do I have any ministry? Have I bothered to find out what my ministry is? Is he glorified in my exercise of my spiritual gift? Can he really commend my personal life and my personal ministry? Can he really

commend that? These are questions that, it seems to me, that the apostle asks with his broad calling and his significant ministry but which may be asked of every one of us in the limited sphere in which we may be ministering but with our spiritual gift and the same essential responsibility before the Lord God.

And, finally -- our time is just about up -- games are not beginning, however -- and we read in verse 17 and 18 from Paul that self praise is worthless. God’s praise is glorious. But -- this introduces sanity into the idea of boasting. But he who boasts let him boast in the Lord. The apostle, when he talks about the doctrine of justification by faith in Romans chapter 3 in verse 21 through 26, you may remember that after he reaches his climax there in verse 26 by saying of the Lord Jesus Christ, that he might be just and the justify of the one who has faith in Jesus asks the rhetorical question: where then is boasting? It is excluded he says. By what kind of law? Of works? No. But by the law of faith.

Speaking to the Corinthians in the first epistle that he wrote to them, he says in chapter 1, verse 26 through verse 31: For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are wrong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that he may nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by his doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that, just as it is written, "LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD."

The only proper object of boasting. And evangelists and preachers and Christians are often tempted to overestimate their own powers is the Lord God himself. If you’re going to boast, boast in the Lord. He’s the only object who may be properly extolled and who may be properly the object of boasting. As we sing the hymn often, “To God Be the Glory,” that’s the sentiment that the apostle speaks of here because, listen, if there is any

spiritual blessing at all, it is the product of God’s working in us. Our salvation is of the Lord. The decision of our wills is of the Lord. The salvation, the sanctification, the ultimate glorification, the experience of all Christians is of the Lord. It’s not of ourselves. It’s of the Lord.

And in the final analysis, the ultimate standard is not my approval, not my approval of myself, not even my wife or my friends’ approval of me, but God’s approval. That’s the ultimate standard. Self-commendation may produce an impressive personality, but that’s not synonymous with apostleship. C. K. Barrett says, “Every man, then, has his special gifts, his work of service, all related to the gospel ultimately.” We submit to the Lord God himself.

I like what Mr. Whitfield said once. He said, “Other men may preach the gospel better than I can but no man can preach a better gospel.” And so, consequently, we are everlastingly at preaching this better gospel. Others will do it better, will do it better than I do or do it better than you, but we have a better gospel -- the only gospel, in fact, that is a gospel itself. Therefore, we seek praise only from the Lord, not from anyone else. Men love Thee, praise Thee not, the master praises what are men.”

So the apostle’s heart one can see. Please the Lord, not men. Do the work that he has given us to do, not what others say we ought to do, but what he has given us to do. I trust that you will take a good look at yourself, analyze your own spiritual gift, think of where he has placed you and in your own place, and in your own life, in your home, in your business, among your friends, whatever it may be, ask God to enable you to be a faithful servant there. May the Lord help you to do it.

If you’re here and you’ve never believed in Christ, then, of course, your first responsibility is to recognize the fact that you need the Lord, that you are, as Scripture says, without Christ, without God, under divine sentence of condemnation. Christ died for sinners. If you recognize that you’re a sinner and wish to be delivered from your sin, the deliverance is offered you in the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to him, confess your

condition before Him, and God says you may receive as a free gift eternal life. May God move your heart to flee to him. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the word of God and for these very personal words that the apostle spoke of himself and then of the significant words that -- which he described the intruders who had come in. Enable us to be delivered from measuring ourselves by ourselves. May, Lord, we measure ourselves by the call and the guidance that Thou hast given to us. And, O God, by Thy grace enable us to be faithful to that to which Thou hast called each one us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.