



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

“The Marks of an Apostle”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] I certainly do hope that we will take advantage of the opportunity of having Dr. Gerstner. It is a real privilege for us to have him at the Chapel. John Gerstner has been one of the really leading evangelical professors and preachers throughout the last generation. Dr. Gerstner was, for many years, Professor of Church History and Government at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, a Seminary of the Presbyterian Church. He has been a leader in evangelical thinking. Almost all of the significant movements in evangelicalism, he is not only familiar with, but has generally been involved in them. And it's really a great privilege to have him here.

You can read some other things about him. I didn't put everything about him in the bulletin because it would take the entire bulletin. But he has written many books. He has been lecturer at many, many schools, is still on the faculty, though he is retired from his post that he was -- in which he was professor for several decades at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He still lectures at various theological institutions. He was selected by the editors of the Yale University Press edition of Jonathan Edwards' works to edit, a volume or two of that ten-volume series which will give you an idea of how accepted Dr. Gerstner's has been in the scholarly world, non-Evangelical world. And he has

distinguished himself as a preacher. He is not simply an outstanding teacher but an outstanding preacher.

And, furthermore, Dr. Gerstner may be, to my mind, the most converted professor in Evangelicalism that I have ever met. You never get any other impression, but that he is truly a man of God and has truly been converted. That will come through in the earnestness with which he preaches the word of God.

These subjects were partially chosen by me and by Dr. Gerstner because they are subjects that are particularly of interest to him and reflect his training through his years of teaching since he was Professor of Church History and Historical Theology to talk about Martin Luther, to talk about John Calvin, to talk about Jonathan Edwards are things that are of second nature to him. So Martin Luther and *The Bondage of Will*, John Calvin and “The Doctrine of Election” on Saturday night, and then Jonathan Edwards and “Justification by Faith” on next Sunday morning are the topics. But on Saturday morning, he is giving a special lecture on reformed evangelism. Essentially to answer the question, how is it possible for someone who believes in divine election to preach the gospel to every man? So he will deal with that topic.

One of the other things that characterizes Dr. Gerstner is the fact that he may be one of the finest teachers in evangelicalism. And his method has been Socratic, and he’s great at answering questions and also asking questions. Now, we will ask him to have a question-and-answer session after the meeting on Friday and Saturday, in the morning and the evening, and I have a hunch he will not refuse because that to him is what he lives for, and we’ll try to tell him not to ask questions of you. So feel free to come. He’s not going to embarrass you. He’ll never do that. Even if he were to ask you a question, he’s just remarkably skilled in teaching by asking questions and answering them, but he will just answer them. So we hope that you will be here Friday night, Saturday morning, and Saturday night, and then of course next Sunday morning.

And I’m responsible for this comment that is found in the bulletin that “no respectable member of Believers Chapel should miss hearing Dr. Gerstner at all the meetings,” and so if you are a respectable member of Believers Chapel, we expect to see you here Friday night, Saturday morning, and Saturday night. And who knows but Bob Reese will probably videotape these meetings so that we can have an official check of your respectability. [Laughter] So we hope that you will take advantage of this. This really is a great privilege to hear a man like Dr. Gerstner. I’m looking forward to it myself very much.

The Scripture reading for today, as we continue our exposition of 2 Corinthians, is chapter 11, verse 16 through verse 33. The apostle writes,

“Again I say, let no one think me foolish; but if you do, receive me even as foolish that I also may boast a little. (Now you’ll remember he began the chapter by saying “I wish that you would bear with me in a little bit of foolishness.” So he’s picked this up again and now in verse 17 continues.) that which I am speaking, I am not speaking as the Lord would, (that is as a commandment of the Lord) but as in foolishness, in this confidence of boasting. Since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also. (And the many, to which he is referring, are the false apostles that he’s alluded to in verse 13, “such men are false apostles, deceitful workers disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.” And evidently they were boasting in their accomplishments or privileges or prerogatives. Verse 19,) “For you, being so wise, bear with the foolish gladly. For you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face.

To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison. But in whatever respect anyone else is bold--I speak in foolishness--I am just as bold myself. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. (Incidentally, this will give you some idea of what kinds of individuals they were.) Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I.

Are they servants of Christ? -- I speak as if insane. (In other words, it’s as if Paul were to say I’m speaking as if I were out of my mind engaging in this boasting because they have done this and you have taken it in.) -- Are they servants of Christ? -- I speak as if insane--I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, (of course he refers to the Jews here) dangers from the Gentiles, (so whether Jew or Gentile the apostle suffers) dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern? If I have to boast, I will boast of what pertains to my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, He who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. (And then in what appears to be just a little P.S., which we will talk about later on, he writes) In Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and so escaped his hands.”

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

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for this catalog of the apostle’s activities as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, as an apostle. And we thank Thee for the evidence that it gives us that he was truly a servant of Christ. And we pray, Lord, that we, ourselves, may learn the lessons that we need to learn as we contemplate the

devotion and dedication of this great man of God. We thank Thee for the marvelous results that flowed from a ministry that seemed to be primarily a ministry of suffering, but oh what blessings down through the centuries have come because this man and others with him, faithful men, were true to the commission that Thou didst give to them. We are grateful, Lord, and we pray that we may realize this and live accordingly in our day.

We ask Thy blessing upon the whole church of Christ today, upon every preacher of the gospel as he preaches the word of God, upon our country and its needs, upon our church here and its needs, our elders and deacons, and for the members and friends and the visitors here with us, Lord, we ask that Thou wilt minister to them out of the richness of Thy grace. We thank Thee for the day in which we live and the privilege of serving the Lord within it. We pray for the sick and for the bereaved particularly and for others, Lord, who have needs who’ve requested our prayers, we pray for them and ask that Thou wilt minister to those who minister to them, to their families and friends and give healing as it is Thy will.

We pray Thy special blessing upon the meetings of next weekend. May Thy hand be upon Dr. Gerstner as he speaks to us, and may we profit from the ministry of the word. We commit this meeting to Thee now.

In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today as we continue our exposition is “The Marks of an Apostle.” After his description of the Corinthian intruders or interlopers, Paul continues what he calls in verse 1 of chapter 11, “a little bit of foolishness.” I have a friend, a younger man, a very intelligent professor of New Testament who has written a little book on this section of the epistle, and his subtitle of his exposition of this chapter is taken from Proverbs chapter 26 in verse 5 in which Solomon says, “Answer fools according to their folly,” and that is what the apostle is doing. He is answering fools according to their folly.

When one looks at the lessons of chapter 11, verse 16 in following these things come home to me, first of all that Christian boasting is a spiritual tragedy. It may be the in thing down here for Christians to boast, characteristic of our meetings is the kind of boasting that I’m sure, from what Paul says, would not be the in thing in heaven. The simple reason why Christian boasting is so out of place is the fact that the apostle in 1 Corinthians 4 in verse 7 makes it very plain that if there is anything that we have that is acceptable to God, it is something that has been given to us. He writes, “For who regards you as superior or what do you have that you did not receive, but if you did receive it why do you boast as if you had not received it.” So everything that we have that is worthy of approval is something that has been given to us by God. And if we boast about the things that we have then we are simply robbing the Lord Jesus Christ of the glory that belongs to him. So Christian boasting is truly a spiritual tragedy.

Another thing that stands out is that love without moral indignation is substandard love. In fact, love without moral indignation is surely not Christian love at all but merely sentimentalism. One only has to read the things that the Lord Jesus said about the Pharisees, for example, and the Sadducees in Matthew chapter 23 to understand specifically that Christian love is not love at all if it is not characterized also by moral indignation toward that which is contrary to the truth of God. Moffett in his translation of verse 29, for the words “who is led into sin without my intense concern” renders it this way. “Whose faith is hurt and I am not aglow with indignation.” So love without moral indignation is not Christian love.

And then, thirdly, an eternal problem in the divine work among men is treachery within. The treachery that the apostle speaks about, the individuals that he calls false apostles, deceitful workers disguising themselves as apostles of Christ, these are men in the church, not outside of the church. Just as the story of Judas is a message to the church not to those outside the church, so an eternal problem in the divine work among men is treachery from within. From the Garden of Eden through Moses and the prophets

to our Lord with his Judas and Paul with his Judaizers or false apostles, there is treachery within the church.

And when the apostle spoke to the Ephesian elders, as I mentioned last week in Acts chapter 20, he warned them that there were men in the assemblies themselves and particularly in the Ephesian assembly who were wolves and sought to destroy the sheep. And furthermore, he said after I’m gone there shall arise from the midst of view just such men. So we take that seriously, and we believe that in Believer’s Chapel if we are doing anything that is acceptable to the Lord God you can be sure that Satan has his wolves in our midst. This is something we need to keep in mind and elders of the flock of God must always keep in mind. It is an everlasting problem, treachery within.

We turn now to the section, and we look first of all at verses 16 through 21 in which the apostle offers an apology and a scathing denunciation, and we’ll just call these verses 16 through 21 as a word to the wise from a fool. Now, in my notes I have that word “fool” in quotation marks because obviously the apostle is not a fool but he says I am taking the place of a fool. That is, I’m going to have to boast in order to recover the immature among the Corinthian assembly.

Now, he’s just digressed in verse 13 by saying “Such men are false apostles, deceitful workers disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light; therefore it’s not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness whose end shall be according to their works.” But now he returns to his topic that he mentioned in the very first verse of the chapter. “I wish that you would bear with me in a little bit of foolishness.” So he’s going to turn to the subject of boasting, and it’s very plain that he wants no part with the interlopers, and he begins with an apology. Again I say let no one think me foolish, but if you do receive me even as foolish that I also may boast a little. That which I’m speaking I’m not speaking as the Lord would, that is, either as one would see from the

Lord’s practices or as if I have a command from the Lord, but as in foolishness in this confidence of boasting since many boast according to the flesh, I will boast also.

In other words, the church problems in the church at Corinth, not the Lord’s command nor even the Lord’s practices force him to boast. What he’s interested in doing is clearing away confusion among immature believers who have responded positively to these negative men who have come in among them, and the scathing denunciation begins in the 19th verse. And you will notice the verses, the sentences that the apostle writes are sentences that drip with irony. 19, “For you being so wise bear with the foolish gladly for you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you, if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, if he hits you in the face. To my shame I must say that we have been weak by comparison, (that is with these men who’ve come in the midst.) But in whatever respect anyone else is bold, I speak in foolishness, I’m just as bold myself.”

So turning to the false apostles, he describes them in ways that are certainly very, very degrading. He says you tolerate foolish boasters to the point of slavery. They’ve made you slaves. They’ve put you under the Mosaic law, and therefore you have become slaves. Furthermore they have exploited you. Look, you bear with anyone if he enslaves you, if he devours you. That is your physical goods these men are after. They want your money. They are exploiting you and, furthermore, they want to dominate you. He says if he takes advantage of you, if he exalts himself, they are proud men who want you money and who want to put you under the Mosaic law and make you slaves. And, finally, they even hit you in the face. Commentators wonder if that can really be true physically.

Well, there is a question about this, whether Paul is speaking figuratively or whether he is speaking literally, but we remember that there were individuals who smote Paul in the face later on, and we remember also that our Lord was treated the same way. And so most of the commentators feel that it is at least likely that the apostle is speaking partially in a physical way. So these are individuals who have so taken the position of authority over the Corinthians that they not only make them slaves to the Mosaic law, not

only exploit them for their material possessions and not only exalt themselves in the midst of them but even strike them physically, and yet the Corinthians bear with it because of their claims that they are the apostles of Christ. They are braggarts, and they are tyrants, and they are setting themselves forth in the assembly at Corinth as models.

Now, it is striking to me that these individuals, so far as we know, believed many of the same facts about the Christian faith that the apostle believed. We have no indication they did not believe in the incarnation of Christ. We have no indication that they did not believe in the death of Christ. We have no indication they did not believe in the burial and resurrection of Christ. We have no indication they did not believe in the second coming of Christ. And yet we know they preached a false gospel because in verse 4 he says, “If one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached or you receive a different spirit which you have not received or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.”

So the Corinthians were so immature that they could not tell the difference between the truth and the things that these men were saying. In other words, they clothed the things that they were saying in a whole lot of scriptural language, evidently, which was acceptable language so far as it went. We’ve talked about that. We won’t talk anymore about it. I’ll simply say this that it’s obvious they were deluding the Corinthians because the Corinthians were not knowledgeable in the things of the word of God sufficiently. That is really the source of most of the deceit that takes place in so many of our churches and why so many people are led astray.

It’s not surprising, too, that this came from within the church. This past week I spoke with a young man from an area in the east. And in the course of the conversation he mentioned two experiences that he had had in local churches in the area of Philadelphia in which elders were derelict of their duty; actually, carrying on the oversight of the local churches contrary to the word of God and even some of the men in the churches acknowledged he was but were afraid to do anything about it. Amazing, isn’t it?

Professor Barrett, one of the leading New Testament scholars, a British scholar, who has written a number of outstanding books on New Testament epistles, has said, “The Corinthians were not the last Christians to find ecclesiastical pomp and circumstance impressive. Groveling submission to it is hardly less evil than the original arrogance. And then another man, a former colleague of mine in a theological seminary in Chicago, says the wound to the Corinthians’ ego like the wound of a surgeon is designed to remove a particularly vicious cancer. Few malignancies are more dangerous than arrogance fed by ignorance or triumphalism nurtured by a secular mind.” And what he means by triumphalism is the idea that is found implicitly in the health and welfare gospel which we hear so much about today.

Now, Paul will engage from verse 22 through verse 31 in his boasting, and we might call this a fool’s boasting. The intruders came in and they boasted in external advantages and privileges. And so Paul says he, too, will boast as well, verse 18. So in verse 22, he says as he begins the account of his own heritage, “Are they Hebrews? So am I.” Now, when he says Hebrews, he means that he is a Hebrew Jew. Now, that seems a strange expression and the reason that I’m using it is in order to make a distinction between a Hebrew Jew and a Hellenistic Jew. A Hebrew Jew was a Jewish man who lived in such a way that he spoke the language and lived according to the culture, the Jewish culture. An Hellenistic Jew was just as much as Jew ethnically, but nevertheless he lived in a society in which he spoke not Hebrew, and Hebrew was no longer his language, and he lived also in a culture that was no longer the culture in which his people had grown up.

So Paul says, Are they Hebrews? He means, what he says in his letter to the Philippians, that he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. That is, he’s not simply a Jewish man, but he spoke the language, he lived in the language, and he lived according to the culture. As a matter of fact, you know from the Book of Acts that he was brought up in the city of Jerusalem though he was born in Tarsus, and he was trained at the feet of

Gamaliel the great Jewish rabbi. So he writes then from that background and says, “Are they Hebrews? So am I.” The language and the culture of the ancient people is Paul’s language and Paul’s culture. In other words, he’s saying I’m not a Hellenistic Jew. Now, there is nothing wrong with being a Hellenistic Jew, of course, but when you are talking about privileges and background, Paul says mine is without any question the ancient background.

Further he goes on to say, “Are they Israelites? Well, so am I.” Now, when he says Israelite, he means he belongs to the people of God. And in belonging to the people of God, he is possessed of the privileges and the status of the people of God as in Romans chapter 9, verse 3 and 4 and 4 and 5, he says “Who are Israelites to whom belong the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the law and the temple service and the promises, who’s are the father’s, and from whom is the Messiah according to the flesh who is over all God blessed forever.” So are they Israelites, members of the people of God? So am I.

Then he says, “Are they descendents of Abraham? So am I.” And being a descendent of Abraham he is possessed of the specific Abrahamic promises which are promises concerning the Messiah, promises concerning ultimate Gentile blessing, and promises concerning the land as given to the nation Israel. So he says, “Are they descendents or seed of Abraham? So am I.” In other words, all that is meant by a Hebrew Jew, an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham belongs to the Apostle Paul. Now, he goes on to say, are they servants of Christ or of the Messiah? I speak as if I am out of my mind -- or in our language I speak as if I’ve gone round the bend or I speak as if there are too many birds on my antenna [laughter] or I have a loose shingle on my roof or I’m dotty or loopy or flakey. That actually is just what that word means. I speak as if I’m insane. The idea of an apostle having to say the things that he says seems to him to mean that he’s acting like a crazy person. “So I speak as if insane.”

Now, this is in a sense, as someone has put it, a *reductio ad absurdum*; that is, a reduction to the absurd, because what they were boasting about were outward privileges and status. What Paul is going to boast about is something quite different. You might imagine Paul, if he were a minister today and engaged in proclaiming the health and welfare gospel or in some kind of triumphalist theology in which if you are a good Christian everything will go right with you. You’ll never have any problems or trials or anything like that, and the fact that you are having trials and problems means you are not living according to the faith of the word of God.

You would imagine somebody like that saying at this point, are they servants of Christ? I more. I’ve established more churches. I’ve preached the gospel in more lands. I’ve preached on every one of the continents. I’ve preached to more ethnic groups. I’ve preached to black and white and to all in between. I’ve traveled more miles. I’ve won more converts. We have more decisions. Look, last year we had one hundred and eighty-five decisions of one million eight hundred thousand or whatever, I have won more converts. I’ve written more books. I’ve raised more money. I’ve dominated more gatherings of Christians. I’ve walked with God more fervently. I’ve seen more visions.

And Paul will talk about a vision in a moment that even modern-day men -- well, most of them, in their right mind -- cannot compare with. He says, I have commanded the greatest crowds and performed the most spectacular miracles of all. This is the way in which we would commend ourselves today, boastfully. How different this is from the apostle. Wake up my Christian friends. Wake up. How does Paul defend himself, by telling us things like that? No. He tells us how massively he’s suffered for Jesus Christ. That’s what he says. What I have suffered for Christ is the thing that counts.

Now, listen, notice what he will say. He says “Are they servants of Christ? I more, in far more labors.” Incidentally when he says far more labors, in 1 Corinthians 15 he says and I labored more abundantly than they all yet not I but the grace of God that was within me. So don’t misunderstand Paul knows he’s talking like an insane man to boast

about these things. He knows they belong to the glory of Jesus Christ, but he’s talking down to the level of immature people who find it difficult to understand simple things like that that every spiritual blessing is traceable ultimately to the Lord God. “In far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.”

Now, I’d like to stop for just a moment and mention the imprisonments. The reason I mention this is because if you read through the Book of Acts and trace Paul’s life in the Book of Acts with the epistles that he wrote, it’s clear that when he wrote 2 Corinthians the place in the Book of Acts at which we would place this epistle and the writing of it would be Acts chapter 20 in verse 1.

Now, if you went back and read through Paul’s story in the Book of Acts to Acts chapter 20 in verse 1, you’ll find how many imprisonments? One imprisonment, and yet the apostle at that very time says in far more imprisonments. So it’s evident that Acts is a very incomplete book. Acts doesn’t tell us all the sufferings of the Apostle Paul. Acts only gives us a little bit of what the apostle went through.

Now, Paul doesn’t give us a resume. That’s become a habit of evangelical Christians incidentally. Get you resume together and send it out and apply for positions. Go at it like the world goes at it. How ridiculous. Look at Paul’s resume. What would it read? Professor of Systematic Theology at such and such a place, pastor of such and such church, beaten with rods, stoned, three times shipwrecked, frequent journeys, dangers from rivers, from robbers, from my countrymen. How many church boards would accept a man who sent in a resume like this. They’d say there must be something wrong with a fellow like this. Must be something real wrong, he suffered so much. The whole world seems against him. We don’t want a fellow like that. This church will be torn apart to have a fellow like Paul there. Well, it probably would if Paul came in our churches. They probably would be torn apart, but it would be good ultimately, I’m sure.

Anyway, we go on, “And far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death.” Matthew Henry, one of the old commentators, has something to say about this. He says, “When the apostle would prove himself an extraordinary minister, he proves that he had been a extraordinary sufferer.” The jail and the whipping post and all of the other hard usages of those who are accounted the worst of men were what he was accustomed to. Often in danger of death, in the 24th verse he says, five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. These were mandated by the courts that were attached to the synagogues and so when Paul would go into one place and there was an uproar and the Jewish people and don’t forget the Gentiles too, when they were upset with the gospel that the apostle was preaching, as a Jewish man he was brought before their courts and was sentenced according to Deuteronomy chapter 25; and, that is, he should be beaten with lashes.

Now, to receive thirty-nine stripes or forty less one was quite an experience. The reason it was forty less one is because there was a penalty in case you beat a prisoner more than you should beat him, you had to go into exile. And so they always stopped short of the forty, which was permitted, so some miscounting might be allowed. They did this by the means of flogging and the kind of whip that they used had three prongs so that when they struck a man once they really were striking him three times so they did that thirteen times. They put him down on the ground. They tied his hands to some pillars, and he was lying on his stomach first and then they beat him with one third or so of the lashes and then they turned him over and beat him with the last.

Now, when they beat him they were told to do it with one hand but as hard as they possible could. And those thongs tore up the flesh of individuals, and they sometimes died from them. The very fact that the apostle had born five of these is evidence that he was in fairly good health. So he says “five times I have born the thirty-nine lashes.”

Now, we don’t read about these things in the Book of Acts. We do read of him being beaten in Philippi, and that may have been one of the instances, but we don’t read of five times. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, we do read of that in the Book of Acts. That was at Lystra. Three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. Now, that doesn’t mean he spent underwater a day and a night. If one read this just literally you might think that, but I don’t think that is what he had in mind. And nor is he speaking of this figuratively.

I was in a meeting in December in Chicago at the biblical inerrancy conference and application, and there was an Assemblies of God minister, a very sound man, had been professor at one of the institutions for a number of years. He spoke about being in a meeting. And he said I was in this meeting, and we were listening to a very long and difficult lecture which was rather dull and the text of Scripture that came to mind was a day in the night I have spent in the deep. [laughter] Now, that is not what Paul is talking about either. He doesn’t say I have to listen to some messages. He’s talking, of course, about the fact that he was in a shipwreck and as a result he was hanging on to a piece of wood or something for a day and the night, no doubt in the Aegean Sea. So a day in the night in the deep he spent.

He goes on to say, “I’ve been on frequent journeys in dangers from rivers, robbers, my countrymen, Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers in the deep, dangers among false brethren, treachery within the church.” What he speaks about in Galatians chapter 2 in verse 4, those individuals in the church who sought to bring the Christians who were come to know free grace through the apostle’s teaching back to bondage under the Law of Moses. In other words, legalism versus the exclusive sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness of sins and justification of life, and these are false brethren. These are the Ahithophels, the Judases, the Ariases, and others. They are the men who persecute men like John Huss and Wycliffe and Tyndale, and on down to the present day.

I had a young man from south Texas called me on Friday, very fine young man, very intelligent man, graduate of a Baptist theological seminary, has been in a church, he is a man who believes in the doctrine of the grace of God. He went into a church in which he did not want to inflame the situation in the church because they might discover that he believed in the grace of God as sovereign grace. He began preaching on the Ten Commandments. When he got to the fourth commandment he was told by the officials in the church that they didn’t want to hear any more of that.

I asked him specifically what were you preaching, he said well I was preaching about the nature of God and his attributes, I was preaching about sin, and I was preaching about the redemption that is in Christ. I was not trying to labor the doctrine of sovereign grace. I was simply preaching those things that come from the preaching of the Ten Commandments. They do point out, you know, that we are sinners. Paul says by the law is the knowledge of sin. He spoke about nature of God and his attributes. But he was asked to leave. It turned out that an individual within the church, very close to him, had started a whispering campaign against him to the effect that he believes things about sovereign grace that would be incompatible with us, and he has been forced out of his particular position. Lovely young man, and I’m sure is going to be a successful servant of Jesus Christ. His father was a well-known preacher of the word, but this is what Paul is speaking about when he says dangers among false brethren.

“I have been in labor and hardship through many sleepless nights in hunger and thirst often without food.” That may be a reference to voluntary fasting, or it may be involuntary fasting. We are not sure specifically. The preceding words say in hunger and thirst, so often without food might suggest this was voluntary. He did fast on occasion -- “in cold and exposure.”

So here is an individual who did not live just under the poverty level. He would have had to have a big raise to reach the poverty level as he says over here in verse 9 of the same chapter “and when I was present with you and was in need so in hunger and

thirst often without food,” that may be a reference to voluntary fasting or it may be involuntary fasting we are not sure specifically, the preceding words say in hunger and thirst so often without food might suggest this was voluntary. He did fast on occasion -- “in cold and exposure.”

So here is an individual who did not live just under the poverty level, he would have had to have a big raise to reach the poverty level as he reads -- as he says over here in verse 9 of the same chapter “and when I was present with you and was in need, so in hunger and thirst and often without food in cold and exposure.” There are people who think that if you’re a preacher of the word and if you are a true preacher of the word, well, my goodness you should earn a huge salary, command multiplying assets, and be driving the finest automobile and dressed in the finest clothes and have all of the experiences of life that go with the upper tiers of the materialistic society and standard of living that we see in that kind of society today. The apostle would have been totally out of place in our society, and I must say that it’s to our blame. At any rate, he finally winds up in verse 28 by saying apart from such external things there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.

Look, here is a man who had to deal with subversive doctrine. He had to deal with unseemly behavior. He had to deal with internal discord. And every day when the apostle awakened he said to himself I wonder what it is going to be today. Look, he says “apart from such things there is the daily pressure upon me of concern for all the churches.” When you finish reading this, and you realize that Acts has only a few of these things within it, then I think you must reach the conclusion, we don’t know much about what Paul suffered for Christ. We know very little about Paul’s devotion to our Lord.

The final touch I said I was going to say something about “in Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the King was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, and I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and so escaped his hands.”

Luke writes that as a testimony to the providence of God that enabled Paul to escape even though he would have probably been put to death if they had caught him. Paul doesn’t look at it quite that way, it might seem here, because he is talking about his weakness. He says “who is weak without my being weak. If I have to boast (verse 30) I will boast in what pertains to my weakness.” How could he possibly talk about weakness here when this, as Luke says, is a testimony to the providence of God. Well, there are two ways of looking at it. Luke was correct. It was the providence of God. But from Paul’s standpoint, here is a man of the greatest courage.

Now, in ancient times when an city was attacked -- when the Romans attacked a city and, of course, they had to fight first to get into the wall, to get over the walls into the city and the individual who managed to get over the wall first received an award, a garland, a wreath which was called *corona muralis*, which means the garland or the wreath or the reward or award of the wall. In other words, the first person over, that was an honor in the face of the enemy to scale the wall and get into the city to overcome the city.

Now, Paul says, If the *corona muralis* is the first man over the wall, I was the first man down the wall. In other words, you can see that the apostle regards this as a rather ignominious way to get out of the city and regards that as something that he personally was not all that happy about, a humiliating escape that underlines his weakness. I’m not sure that’s what he means but it may well be in the light of the context.

Let me sum up by saying this, what we have here then is a surging tract against Christian boasting, Christian triumphalism, against the health-and-wealth gospel which essentially robs Jesus Christ of the glory that belongs to him. My Christian friend, if we have anything at all that is acceptable to God, we’ve received it, received it. It’s a gift of grace and, of course, that pertains to our salvation through Jesus Christ, the forgiveness of our sins, the justification that we enjoy, and the faith by which these things become ours. Let us give God the glory.

And, second, this is a kind of positioned paper on the Christian criteria of self-assessment. How shall we assess ourselves? Overblown self-esteem, I have self-esteem, artificial self-loathing. I loathe myself but I really think I’m pretty good, or valiant attempts at trying harder, I’m doing the best that I can. No. The Christian criterion for self-assessment is submissive devotion to a genuinely valiant savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s the servant’s credential. Paul wears them like decorations. He says but I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself in order that I may finish my course and the ministry which I have received from the Lord Jesus to testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God.

Are we servants of Christ? What would our resume look like? Actually, our Christian resume written by the Lord God, what would it have on it? On September the 27, 1978 he boldly spoke to his neighbor about the fact that he was a Christian. What would our resume really look like in the light of Paul? What if we suffered for him? What kind of personal cost has being a Christian meant to us today? In the light of this catalog and what the apostle has set forth, I speak only for myself, but I think I speak for many of you. This is humiliating. This is humiliating to realize how little a servant of Christ I really am. May God speak to us through the Scriptures. If you are here today and you’ve never believed in Jesus Christ, we invite you to trust in him who offered an atoning sacrifice for sinners such as you and I are. Come to him. Give yourself to him and serve him. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these words that the great apostle wrote. Foolish he said, but not foolish to us, for he has written to us as immature believers. We are so inclined to respond to the methods, to the characteristics, to dispositions of the worldly society about us. Help us, Lord, to look at spiritual things in the light of reality and may, by Thy grace, it ultimately be said of us that we, too, while failing and weak, were servants of Christ.

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For Jesus’ sake. Amen.