



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians chapter 13, verse 1 through verse 14

“The Place of Self Examination”

TRANSCRIPT

We are very grateful to Dr. Daniel for the series on the cults. He's saved me from Jehovah's Witnesses, from the Mormons and last Wednesday night from Christian Science. And this week for those of you who are great admirers of Dr. Donald Curtis, I know you'll be interested in the message on Unity; that will be given on Wednesday night. And we invite you to come. I know that you will profit from the time there and if you know Dr. Curtis, invite him to come also, [laughter] because we would like nothing better than to see him exposed to the truth about Unity.

Isn't a striking thing at the Christmas season and also throughout the year, as far as Unity is concerned and others, that the cults have no hymnody -- no hymnology -- they don't have anything really to sing about. So they have to sing Christian hymns. And you will hear them sing Christian Christmas hymns -- Isn't that striking? And fortunately in our Christmas hymns there is often more good sound theology than in the everyday hymns that so many evangelicals sing. So at the Christmas time, I always smile when I hear some of the cultists singing, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” and so on because it's obvious they're not paying any attention to the words that they're singing.

So anyway if you want to be saved from the cults come and hear Dr. Daniel on Wednesday night. I know you will profit from it. I have profited from hearing the messages that he has given.

Today is the final of our series of studies in 2 Corinthians. This is study number 36 and we’re going to attempt to cover the entire 13 chapter of 14 verses. So if you have your New Testament with you or your Bibles, turn with me to the 13 chapter of 2 Corinthians and we’ll read the entire chapter for our scripture reading. The apostle writes,

“This is the third time I’m coming to you. Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses (now that is a citation in the Book of Deuteronomy repeated in the New Testament several times by the New Testament authors, obviously it had become a well known text. The apostle cites it here with reference to the fact that he’s going to follow the rules of the Mosaic law and confirmed also by the Lord Jesus himself in dealing with the Corinthians and the necessity of discipline). I have previously said when present the second time and though now absent I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare anyone. Since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me and who is not weak toward you but mighty in you. For indeed he was crucified because of weakness yet he lives because of the power of God (incidentally when it says that Jesus Christ was crucified because of weakness, it doesn’t mean that he could have prevented what happened to him had it been his will to do so, but rather the weakness is the weakness of the incarnation itself. And all that was involved in taking to himself the infirmities of human nature) for we also are weak in him but yet we shall live with him because of the power of God directed toward you (Paul is not speaking about the future when he says, “Yet we shall live with him,” that is the future in the sense of after the resurrection; he’s talking about, he’s coming to Corinth and the fact that he will come in the power of a resurrected Christ.) We shall live with him because of the power of God directed toward

you. (You can see those last words that he is speaking about being with the Corinthians). Test yourselves to see if you’re in the faith, examine yourselves or do you not recognize this about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you unless indeed you fail the test, but I trust that you will realize that we ourselves do not fail the test. Now we pray to God that you do no wrong, not that we ourselves may appear approved but that you may do what is right even though we should appear unapproved (in other words what he’s saying is, we would be most happy if you would do the will of God and set things straight in Corinth) and when I come, if it’s not necessary to exercise any discipline at all then I may appear unapproved because I’ve been so disturbed, but you are now right with the Lord. (As far as he’s concerned that’s fine. He’s mainly interested, principally interested in the fact that the Corinthians are right with the Lord, even if he should appear -- appear to be unapproved, seeking discipline when it is not necessary) For we can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth (that’s one of the great texts of the apostle, it unfortunately we don’t have time to devote to it today but, it’s a remarkable statement; “We can do nothing against the truth but only for the truth.”) For we rejoice when we ourselves are weak but you are strong. This we also pray for that you may be made complete. For this reason I am writing these things while absent in order that when present I may not use severity in accordance with the authority, which the Lord gave me, for building up and not for tearing down. Finally brethren, rejoice (that’s a word that, in this context may mean simply, goodbye or farewell) finally brethren, farewell. Be made complete, be comforted, or perhaps respond to our appeal, be like-minded, live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

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

[Prayer] Father, we approach Thee through the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the grace shown to us by which we have come to understand the great truths of the word of God, concerning salvation through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ and concerning the present communion that we enjoy with the triune God through the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross and the communion that we enjoy with one another in him.

We thank Thee for this day in which we live, and we pray Thy blessing upon the whole church of Jesus Christ. Not simply upon the chapel, but upon all of the Christian churches where the Lord Jesus Christ is lifted up. And Lord we pray at this Christmas season in which we have special opportunities to present him, that there may be responsiveness to the truths concerning the one who became incarnate and died and rose from the dead that we might have life.

In these critical days in which we are living Lord, continue Thy work building up the church of Jesus Christ, enlarging it; strengthening each of us through the word of God. We thank Thee for the Chapel’s ministry and pray Thy blessing upon its outreach, upon our elders and deacons, the members and friends and especially the visitors who are with us today. Lord, may this be a spiritual experience for all of us as we sing together and as we listen to the word of God and ponder it.

We pray particularly for those unable to be with us, and who’ve requested our prayers. Lord, minister to them in a physical way and give healing in accordance with Thy will. Give wisdom to those who do minister to those who are sick. We pray that other needs that exist may also be met. For those specifically mentioned in our calendar of concern, we pray especially for them, Lord bless them, answer their petitions and our petitions as well and glorify Thy name. We praise Thee for the opportunity to proclaim the word of God and may Thy hand be upon the ministry of Believers Chapel that Christ may be exalted and glorified, for Jesus’ sake, Amen.

[Message] The subject for today is, you will note from our bulletin, is “The Place of Self Examination.” The great second -- really the fourth, so far as we know, Epistle to the Corinthians draws to its end with important lessons.

One of the lessons that immediately appears to the reader is the necessity of church discipline. The apostle doesn’t hesitate to say that it might be necessary for him when he comes to exercise discipline; to exercise severity, which he doesn’t want to do but nevertheless which he feels he might have to do, he says he will not spare. He doesn’t want to use severity but it might be necessary. In fact, he says, “I’m writing these things while absent in order that when present, I may not use severity,” but he realizes it might be necessary, “church discipline.”

A second thing that immediately appears is the stress on self-examination and the fact that the apostle says it twice. Test yourselves; examine yourselves, indicates that for him it’s rather important and furthermore in the original text there’s a great deal of stress upon yourselves. So the apostle affirms the importance of self-examination.

If there’s a third lesson, it would be simply this; that he prefers self-examination, the second important thing in the chapter, to church discipline; the first thing that I have mentioned and the first subject in the chapter. So the necessity of church discipline, the importance of self-examination and the preference of the second to the first, if one has a choice. I think the thing that I think about when I think about this chapter is the fact that it concludes with one of the truly outstanding texts of the New Testament; “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

In fact, no one so far as I know, has ever sought to justify this statement but it’s likely to be relatively true that it is cited just about as often as any other biblical text because it makes such a nice benediction, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” The apostle aspires to the

idea that the Corinthians might live in the atmosphere of saving grace. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, because after all that’s the fountain and that’s the origin of divine redemption. And if it’s the fountain and the origin of divine redemption and if divine redemption is what we need more than anything else as sinners, then surely you can see how important he regards the sentiments of verse 14.

But let’s look now at the chapter -- the last of the chapters that we’ll look at in this great epistle. In the first four verses the apostle expatiates upon the theme of the threat of discipline. The apostle longs for peace but he will not have peace at any price. In fact, that sentiment is a sentiment that many of us Americans had hoped that our President and others associated with him in their dealings with the fellas across the Atlantic to the east, that they would exercise the same kind of attitude that the apostle does. He longs for peace but not peace at any price. In other words the truth of God for Paul is so important that peace is not acceptable if it means there is no handling of the difficulties and problems represented in the Corinthian assembly, so far as he has heard. If the healing medicine fails, divine surgery may be necessary and that’s a fact of human experience as we all know.

Now he begins by saying, “This is the third time that I’m coming to you.” We know from this statement, there’s a great deal of discussion over these points but I’m going to give you my opinion. We know from this, at least I think I know from this, that the apostle has already made two visits to the church of Corinth. One of them is clearly set forth in the Book of Acts, the other is implied by some things that the apostle has already written. It was a visit that was not a very happy visit. He went there he discovered there were things in the assembly that were dishonoring to the Lord. There were things that made him very unhappy and he left. He has been writing letters to them, this is the fourth that we know Paul wrote to the Corinthians though we only have the first and this last one. But for the second and this last one.

Now when he says, “This is the third time I’m coming to you,” he affirms then that he did make a visit, a short visit in which there was very much displeasure but now he’s going to make his third visit and this time he says, “I want you to understand that I’m going to follow the Mosaic rules for discipline.” That is, every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. Moses makes that plain from Deuteronomy chapter 19, verse 15, a text cited in the New Testament three or four times, alluded to in various ways. So the apostle is going to follow the Mosaic way, and he’s going to follow the dominical way for the Lord -- *Dominus*, the Lord -- that’s the Latin term for it, also cited this text, for example, in his great section on discipline in Matthew chapter 18. So Paul lets the Corinthians know right at the beginning, he’s going to do it legally. He’s going to require proper witnesses to carry out the discipline.

He speaks in verses 2 and 3 of the severity of the action, “I have previously said, when present the second time and though now absent, I say in advance to those who have sinned in the past and to all the rest as well, that if I come again I will not spare.” In other words he will carry out the discipline. He will not as he did on the second of his visits, not carry out the discipline. Then he used patience that has reached its end at the present time if the Corinthians do not respond to the things that he is writing.

Now the fact that he says, “I will not spare,” is rather interesting because Corinth was a local church. It was in a sense independent of other churches. In fact today, local churches are independent of ecclesiastical authority over them. There isn’t anything in the Scripture so far as I can tell. And I can assure you there are some things in the Scriptures of which I am probably ignorant. But so far as I can tell there is no indication of ecclesiastical hierarchy over local churches.

However, when Paul was living things were a little different. There were apostles. The gift of apostle was something significant. They were personal representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so they had an authority that we do not have today represented in any individual. So the apostle could say, as he says here, “I come again, I will not spare.”

He as an apostle had authority to exercise discipline. He speaks about it later on. In verse 10 he says, “I am writing these things while absent in order that when present I may not use severity in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.” So the apostle had authority to carry on the work of the Lord as the Lord’s personal representative, and it’s on that basis that he will exercise authority. To challenge Paul is to challenge ultimately, the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

It’s important for us to remember some of these points. James Denny, one of the finest of the Scottish Theologians of a generation or so back, wrote, “The cross does not exhaust Christ’s relation to sin. He passed from the cross to the throne and when he comes again, it is as judge. It is the sin of sins to presume upon the cross. When Christ comes again he will not spare. The two things go together in him; the infinite patience of the cross; the inexorable righteousness of the throne.” And so the apostle, in the same spirit, reminds them of the fact that the Lord Jesus is still living. He has -- it’s true -- died for sin but he’s gone to the right hand of the throne of God and he is coming again.

And the ultimate separation that discipline demands, final discipline will be carried out by the Lord Jesus in his Second Advent. Read the details in the Book of Revelation, for example. So when Paul says, “I will not spare,” let us not remember -- let us not forget that there is a time coming when the Lord Jesus Christ will not spare either and his second advent and discipline shall be carried out as it should be carried out. And those that belong to him will be separated from those who do not, things that are wrong should be made right by the Lord. We look forward to that day even though we look forward to it with some fear and trembling. The apostle says in verse 3, “I will not spare anyone. Since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me and who is not weak toward you but mighty in you.” Evidently, among the Corinthians, some of the interlopers and intruders who had come in after Paul had been there and had preached the gospel; were challenging the authority of the apostle. We’ve talked about that a lot. I won’t go into it further.

Now in this thirty-sixth message, but they questioned whether he was a bona fide messenger of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now Paul has been seeking to show particularly in these chapters of this epistle, from chapter 10 on, that he is just that. They’ve been seeking for proof, and Paul says he’s going to have to give them proof when he comes. But he’s made already preparation for it. He said, for example, in the preceding chapter in the twelfth verse, “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles.” He stated that in Romans chapter 15, he stated it in Galatians chapter 3. So among the churches, particularly the churches founded by the Apostle Paul, it was well known that accompanying his ministry, there were the signs and miracles that affirmed his apostolic authority.

So the apostle says, “He’s not going to spare since you are seeking for proof of the Messiah who speaks in me who is not weak towards you but mighty in you.” Now one might ask the question here, just for speculation, “What does Paul mean when he says that he will not spare; just exactly what will he do when he comes?” Well of course the apostle doesn’t reveal to us specifically what he’s going to do this time. But we know from at least two other passages, what he might do. In the first letter that he wrote to the Corinthians -- and maybe that’s why he doesn’t say anything now because they would have know this -- he said, “I have decided (concerning the person who was guilty of incest which the Corinthians have not disciplined he says,) “I have decided to deliver such an one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” In 1 Timothy chapter 1, he makes the same statement again, delivering someone to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. So we know that the apostle was able, authorized by the Lord Jesus to exercise severe discipline. He doesn’t, as I say specifically tell us here, what it will be when he comes. But he’s already warned the Corinthians in a previous letter; 1 Corinthians, of what might take place.

Now, when you think of the apostle, you ordinarily don’t think of someone who is as bold as this. But he was very bold when it was necessary to be bold. But other times

he was just the opposite. For example, in the tenth chapter -- giving some of the comments that have been made by others -- he says, “For they say his letters are witty and strong but his personal presences aren’t impressive and his speech is the kind of speech that one might set at not, its contemptible speech.”

It reminds me of Warren Wiersbe’s statement, that he had a pastor friend, who’s now in heaven, who had a very quiet manor of delivery in the pulpit. And after hearing him preach, a visitor of the church said with reference to him, “I kept waiting for him to start preaching.” Well, she was accustomed to hearing a loud preacher who generated as much heat as he did light. This man did not go at it that way, but as Mr. Wiersbe said, “He was a man of God and he built a very strong church because he knew the standards of ministry. He knew how to be weak but also how to be strong.”

The apostle of all people knew how to be weak and how to be strong. And if they are looking for proof of Christ speaking in him, in the sense of opposition to his ministry, well, the Corinthians will find out what strength is in the apostle. He justifies it in the sense in the fourth verse by saying, “Well indeed he, Christ, was crucified because of weakness.” That is he entered into the weakness of the incarnation, took to himself the infirmities of human flesh, subjected himself to maltreatment by men and others but yet he lives by the power of God. In the resurrection, he is the risen Christ into whose hands, has been given all authority and power upon the earth.

And then Paul says, “There is a similarity between the Lord and who now is strong. In his case, we also (he replies or continues) we also are weak in him, yet we shall live with him, that is if we must exercise discipline when we come into your midst, we shall live with him because of the power of God directed toward you.” So the apostle says, “The history of the Lord Jesus’ weakness and then the strength manifested through the cross and the resurrection will be seen in my dealings with you. I may come and I may be very weak in your midst but when exercising apostolic authority, I spare not anyone. You will see the power of God working through me to glorify the Lord God.”

It’s a rather terrifying thing to think about and I’m sure the Corinthians must have thought a great deal about it. He will follow in the train of the Lord Jesus, in the experience of death, in weakness, but resurrection power. One of the startling things about the gospel of the Lord Jesus is the power that exists in the word of God.

H. A. Ironside was a man that in Dallas -- Christians who’d been around Dallas for a long time had many opportunities to hear. I think I heard Dr. Ironside preach probably a hundred and fifty times, because he came every year. And for two weeks I listened to him, morning and afternoon. And then of course in other meetings around the city and I grew to appreciate and love this man of God.

In one of his books, the book on 2 Corinthians, he tells of how on one occasion in New Guinea there was a communion service and around the communion service there were several people at the table. One of the one’s sitting around the table was a missionary of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ -- a very fine Christian man who had actually been the son of a missionary as well -- and beside him sat an elder of the native church on New Guinea. What was striking about it was that the individual who was the missionary, had a father who was a missionary, whom the natives of New Guinea had put to death. They had martyred him. And in fact, the person who had been responsible for his death was the father of the elder, who was sitting at the table next to the son of the missionary. And these two were sitting in happy Christian fellowship around the Lords’ table. Now that’s the power of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Mr. Ironside, in illustrating the fact that the Lord Jesus was crucified in weakness, but nevertheless raised and acts of the power of God -- I use that as an illustration. There is a story he has also told of Ka-jarnak -- the first convert of the Moravian Missionaries whom came to Greenland. When they went to Greenland they discovered a people on the Island of Greenland that were so steeped in iniquity that they said to themselves, “These people will never understand the gospel. They are drunks, they are glutens, they’re adulterers, they are living the vilest of lives. They won’t

understand the grace of God. If we preach to them about the grace of God in Christ, they’ll just use that license for further sin.” So they determined the thing to do was to preach the “Law of Moses,” so for one year they preached the “Law of Moses,” and people would listen and go out and continue to sin.

There came a man also about a year later, who was with the Moravians, Hans Egede. He was a wealthy young man from a wealthy family who had been converted by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he came to Greenland and as he came there one of the first meetings they had two or three hundred people gathered together to hear him preach. Instead of preaching on the law, he preached on the “Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.” And very tenderly, for an hour or two explained what Christ did when he died upon the cross and how he suffered and bled for the redemption of sinners.

When he finished, Ka-jarnak -- a young chief of the Eskimo tribe -- who had been listening to him, sprang forward and cried -- now these are his words, “Missionaries, why didn’t you tell us this before? You’ve been with us a year and you never told us before. You told us of a God who created a world, and it didn’t make us hate our sin. You told us of a God who gave his holy law. We learned the Ten Commandments. We went out and got drunk again. And today you’ve told us how our sins have broke the heart of God and he came to redeem us from our sins. Missionary, Ka-jarnak cannot sin against love like that. From now on Ka-jarnak will be a Christian.” He became an outstanding Christian testimony to the gospel of the grace of God.

You know in the final analysis -- I have to say this to my friends who like to believe that we ought to preach the law, and I do believe that it’s proper to preach the law, Paul states that in 1 Timothy chapter 1. He states it’s proper to preach the law. And through the law many people are brought to a conviction of their sin. But I’d like to say to you this, that in my opinion, preaching the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ and what it says about human sin and what it says about the need of human redemption is to my mind one of the strongest means by which men may be brought to the conviction that

they are sinners. When we recognize that it is we who are responsible for the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, then of course, there comes tremendous conviction.

I don’t deny the usefulness of preaching the law, but I do believe that the preaching of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ is also a means by which men are brought to the knowledge of their sin. And surely in this case at least, it’s an illustration of that possibility. The apostle now turns to the necessity of self-examination. He states in the fifth verse, “Test yourselves to see if you’re in the faith. Examine yourselves.” They had been testing him. He turns the table on them and twice and emphatically says, “Test yourselves.” He uses that word in the emphatic position twice, “Yourselves test,” “Test yourselves.”

Now in stating this it’s very plain why he says that. If they fail the test, they have no right to blame the apostle for anything. If they’re not believers, if they fail the test and they don’t even belong to the Lord, what right do they have to criticize an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ? And turning it on the other side, if they pass the test, how can they blame the apostle because the apostle is the one who brought them the knowledge that they claim that they have. So the apostle has them on the horns of a dilemma. The irony is obvious, if they pass they cannot blame Paul, if they fail they cannot blame Paul. The fact that they are a Christian Assembly is testimony ultimately to the faithfulness and the authenticity of the preaching of the Apostle Paul. So if they fail, they cannot blame him. If they pass, they cannot blame the evangelist who brought them to the condition in which they are passing the test.

When we say, “Test ourselves or examine yourselves,” we’re saying something that we need in the United States of America, and in fact, in the Western world. There are literally millions of professing Christians who need to pay attention to this statement of the apostle. They have entered into a shallow commitment to Christianity, they’ve joined the church, they’ve been baptized or they’ve done other things that might make them think that they are genuine believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. They’ve been encouraged to

think that, by men who’ve not been careful to point out that there is more to becoming a Christian than subscribing to a statement. They don’t hate sin. They don’t love holiness. They do not pray. They do not study the word of God. They do not walk humbly with God. These individuals, so many of them stand in the same danger in which the Corinthians stood. And the apostle’s words, “Test yourselves to see if your in the faith, examine yourselves,” are valid words that each of us should ponder.

Now the apostle goes on to say in verses 7 through 9, that I’m not looking for approval. Someone might say of Paul, “Paul is just looking for approval -- personal approval. He’s saying things so he’ll look good.” Paul says, “Look, I’m not looking for personal approval, as a matter of fact, I would be happy if you do what’s right and I come to Corinth with these threats of discipline and it turns out that you don’t need discipline and it looks as if I’m going to prove myself. I would be happy even then because I’m concerned for your welfare. Listen to how he puts it, “Now we pray to God that you do no wrong not that we ourselves may appear approved.” In other words we want you to be right with God not so people will say, Paul did a marvelous job with them, but that you may do what is right even though we should appear unapproved by making these threats when they’re not justified.”

The Corinthians really are a lovely, marvelous group of believers and Paul’s been saying these sharp things about not sparing. He’s going to look bad when he gets there. He said, “That’s alright that -- I wouldn’t even mind that if you are in good condition before the Lord.” That’s the true under shepherd. He’s not like Jonah. Jonah went to Nineveh and preached yet forty days and the Lord’s going to destroy Nineveh; called upon them to repent and when they repented -- what did Jonah do? He went out and lamented the fact that they repented. He was unhappy over the fact that they repented. The apostle’s not that kind of individual. He’s not so happy to preach judgment that he doesn’t enjoy more positive response to it. In the tenth verse he tells us why he wrote the letter; “For this reason I’m writing these things while absent, in order that when

present I may not use severity in accordance with the authority which the Lord gave me for building up and not for tearing down.”

Now the final words of the epistle and they are magnificent words. They really deserve an entire message. He affectionately concludes with what someone has called, “A Succession of Staccato Injunctions,” “Rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like minded, live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you.”

Incidentally that’s the only place in the New Testament in which we have the expression, “the God of love.” So he appeals to the Corinthians. If you pardon the expression, after all this has been a big week. Dexter Manley of the Washington Redskins said that he’s happy that Gorbachev has gone home so that they can get down to the business of playing the Cowboys. That he would be happy if he could, as he said it, “Get the H out of town.”

Well, one of the words that has been common in the news papers has been *perestroika*; restructured. Mr.Gorbachev [laughter] – Gorby [more laughter] has been talking about *glasnost* and -- which means openness and *perestroika* which means restructuring. So the apostle is calling for a restructuring in Corinth. He says, “Rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, mind the same thing, be like minded, live in peace and the God of love and peace will be with you.”

When he says incidentally, “Be of one mind,” he simply means not that we agree on everything. If we were to agree on everything then you would have to believe everything that I believe. That would be healthy for you -- I admit [laughter] that’s expecting too much isn’t it? Why there are things that I think that I’m not sure about myself. I wouldn’t want anybody else to rest their eternal destiny on my thought. No, what Paul means is not that we agree on everything. We could never agree on everything. He means something like we should agree not to disagree over nonessentials. In other words, unity in the essentials is important in a Christian local body. We ought to

be able to agree on the essentials of the Christian faith. And then we ought to agree not to fight over differences in non-essentials.

Now we cannot help but believe some things are essential when another person will believe they are non-essential. But we have to leave those things to the Lord and in the meantime await the judgment seat of the Lord Jesus Christ. A salutation properly follows that; “Greet one another with a holy kiss.” We must put that in the context of the ancient times. In the synagogue the women sat in one place and the men sat in another. The greeting of a holy, in a holy kiss was not a cultic thing but something similar, it was a custom. The men greeted the men with a kiss and the women greeted the women with a kiss. Not the men the women and the women the men.

In fact, in the Christian church that was carried over. When I first went to preach in the City of Basel in Switzerland, I walked into the local assembly there, about twenty seven years ago and I looked around and the women were all sitting on one side and the men were sitting on the other side. I wasn’t sure I was in the right place. [laughter] But nevertheless that’s the way they did it. They’ve changed, incidentally. If you go there now they don’t sit that way. But that was the way in which their culture controlled the local church. And Dan Duncan mentioned to us, if I remember, that when he went to Romania in the assembly that he went to there the women sat in one section; the men sat in another section, that’s very common. So to greet one another with a “holy kiss” is to be understood in the light of that. Now Paul says, “To greet one another with a holy kiss,” that’s the important thing; it’s a “holy kiss.”

Now we don’t have the custom although it seems to be becoming part of our culture as well. We greet everybody and hug everybody. But we could say in case you have difficulty with that, greet one another with a “holy handshake.” Now, what that means is you don’t greet a fella and say, “Brother it’s really wonderful to see you today,” and then turn to another fella a few moments later and say, “I cannot abide that fella, he just gets on my nerves,” that’s an “unholy handshake.” What Paul is talking about is a

“holy kiss,” a “holy handshake.” In other words the sense of the belonging to the Lord God separated to him both of us, and the kind of affection that we ought to have for those who are in the same family, with whom we don’t agree necessarily on every non-essential point but who are our brethren. I’ve mentioned this before. Some of you haven’t heard it. But I have a friend who is a Baptist preacher in the State of Michigan, lovely fella, a little older than I am, so he’s a pretty old fella, but he’s still preaching. He told me many years ago of how he was invited to speak to the River Brethren.

Now this is in the day that all of us had clean-shaven faces. And he said, “Lewis I was invited to preach a conference for the River Brethren, they are a sect that is somewhat associated with the Mennonites, and he said, “These River Brethren all have long beards” but he said, “Lewis they practice greeting one another with a “holy kiss” and I want you to know Lewis it was a ticklish situation.” [laughter]. He has a great sense of humor.

But they also -- they also don’t believe in wearing a tie. He said, “When I finished the weekend of meetings, one of the -- well a body of the men came to me and said, Mr. Segden, they said we just want you to know that we have really enjoyed the ministry of the word this week even though you have worn a tie to all of the meetings. But they believed in greeting one another with a “holy kiss -- holy kiss.” And Paul then says, “All the saints greet you.” And concludes with this great benediction, this magnificent often cited word, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”

Now when he says, “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,” he means the grace that comes from Jesus Christ, not grace shown to him. And the fact that he says that and the fact that he means that indicates that when we read “the love of God,” it’s not our love for God but his love for us. And the communion of the Holy Spirit is not that which we are responsible for but that which the Holy Spirit has created through the baptizing work on the Day of Pentecost, uniting all of the believers into the church; the body of Christ. In

other words the apostle lays stress on the fact that the divine persons initiate the work of God. It’s the grace that flows from the Lord Jesus Christ.

And incidentally the order is somewhat unusual. You would expect the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but it’s the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit. Indicating that the primary place that he gives here is to the redemption that is wrought by the Lord Jesus Christ and that’s not surprising because remember this is the epistle in which he states in chapter 8, verse 9, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sakes he became poor. That yee through his poverty might become rich.”

And of course the fact that he mentions; the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit, in a day in which there was no clear, well formulated doctrine of the Holy Trinity yet. What we have here is probably a first step -- one of the first steps, a building stone for the doctrine of the divine Trinity grounded in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ -- the love of God, the communion that the Holy Spirit brings into being. Grace for our sins, the love of the Father to cheer and to sustain us, and a sacred communion with the Holy Spirit and with other believers by which we enjoy our great salvation.

Oh, the blessedness of being a church addressed and ministered to by such an apostle of grace. What a magnificent thing it must have been for some of those Corinthians at least to realize; “We have been marvelously blessed to have Paul preach the gospel to us and to explain the faith to us and ground us in the grace of God, the love of God, the communion of the Holy Spirit.”

One naturally asks the question, “Did the Corinthians respond to this letter?” Well, we have some indication that at least for a time they did because in Romans Paul tells us he writes Romans from Corinth. He was staying in Gaius’s house there. He wrote to the Romans. He didn’t say anything about any difficulties that were there. In fact he speaks about the fact that he’s looking toward going to Spain. He has anxiety about the future but none about the present. The visit to Spain supposes peace in Corinth.

Furthermore, we know they contributed or at least Achaia contributed to the poor saints in Jerusalem and so he was happy over their contribution to the poor saints in Jerusalem. So there is every indication or at least sufficient indication that the letter did have a positive response among the Corinthians. And we don’t read in Romans about any of those interlopers or intruders still being there in Corinth. Evidently when this letter arrived they took off for some other place. Maybe one of those churches that Dr. Daniel’s been talking about. But at any rate that’s not in the New Testament.

Now one final comment, in about 95 A.D., Clement from Rome -- from the church at Rome, wrote a letter to the church at Corinth. It’s called 1 Clement because there is another spurious letter called, “A letter by Clement.” In 1 Clement, surprisingly, it’s evident that the church at Corinth is divided. There is dissension in the midst. They have not made great progress toward maturity. So it leaves us with the sense that there is always need for concern and care; that we seek the face of the Lord, constantly, no matter how good a beginning we might have.

It’s necessary that day-by-day we learn what it is to walk with God. Dr. Chafer use to tell us, “Gentlemen, keep short accounts with God.” If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in Christ, we invite you to respond to the cross. He was crucified in weakness that he might lay the foundation for the salvation of sinners and the blood that was shed for sinners, baring the penalty and judgment of sinners. We pray that by God’s grace the Holy Spirit may bring you to the conviction of your sin and your need of Christ and that you will within your heart; flee to him. Confess your sin. Confess your need. Acknowledge what Christ has done and receive marvel of marvels, wonder of wonders; the free gift of eternal life by a merciful loving God. Come to Christ, believe in him and trust in him and enjoy the communion of the Holy Spirit in eternal life. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] We thank Thee Lord for the movement of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the great apostle, as he said with pen in hand -- Apaporis or whatever and inscribed this

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magnificent letter to the church at Corinth which we had the great privilege of reading over his shoulder. Lord, we pray that through the Holy Spirit who guided him we too would be guided into the truth, as he understood it. We pray for each one present.

May Lord this Christmas season, be a season of rededication. A dedication to a holy life, to a love for the word of God, to a love for the saints; the genuine saints of God and to a love of Christian service, be with us now as we part.

For Jesus’ sake, Amen.