



**BELIEVERS CHAPEL**

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Paul and the Ministry: 2 Cor. 2:14-17

“The Solemnity of the New Covenant Ministry”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this privilege, the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the Apostle Paul and for the dedication of life that characterized him, and we pray, as we consider some of the things that he has written to the Church in Corinth concerning his ministry, that they may be things that will stir us to an effective service for the Lord Jesus Christ. We realize that we are not apostles, but we do serve Thee as servants, and we pray that the lessons that are seen in his life may be lessons that are manifested in ours by Thy grace. We ask Thy blessing upon each one present, through this class, and then in the classes that follow.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we are beginning just a few studies of the subject of “Paul and the Ministry.” And I know that if you have read very much in the writings of the Apostle Paul, you would immediately know that the things that I have to say undoubtedly will have a great deal to do with Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, because that is the epistle in which he gives the fullest exposition of just what his ministry was. So would you take your New Testaments, and would you turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 2,. And the subject for tonight will be verse 14 through verse 17, and specifically, “The

Solemnity of the New Covenant Ministry.” 2 Corinthians chapter 2, verse 14 through verse 17.

The world of the minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ is quite different today from that world of just a generation or so ago. A generation or so ago, our society was characterized by materialism. That has not changed much. It was characterized by progressive liberal thought, and that, of course, is still with us in many ways. It was also characterized by a sense of self-sufficiency. We lived in an age, a generation or so ago, in which we really thought that we were sufficient for all things. In fact, it was I think, the disposition of the times to think, “Would not social effort reinforced by all the resources of increasing skills and technology, speedily bring the New Jerusalem down to earth from heaven?”

Today however, things are different. We are still materialistic. We still have a great deal of liberal progressive thought with us. I’m using the term “progressive” with quotation marks around it, as specifically liberal theological thinking and liberal philosophical thinking, but there is I think, a note of doubt about our self-sufficiency, not only in the economic sphere, but in other spheres as well.

Things a few years ago were so filled with the sense of self-sufficiency, that it was not long ago that a plagiarizing hymn was written by an individual who took the famous hymn, “Nearer my God to Thee,” and plagiarized it to, “Nearer Mankind to Thee; Nearer to Thee,” a sentiment that G. Key -- G. K. Chesterton tersely -- if somewhat scurrilously, someone has said -- commented upon by saying that, “That always suggested to him the sensations of a strap hanger doing -- during a crush on the tube.” “Nearer Mankind to Thee.” Thomas Hardy even went so far as to say that, “Christianity ought to throw in the sponge and say; I’m beaten, and let another religion take its place.” Today we know that as a society, as a culture, in fact as a race, we do not have the answers, and from that standpoint, it’s an easier thing to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ today. Occasionally,

you will have people say, “Is there not some word from the Lord?” using Jeremiah’s actual expressions.

Well, we turn to 2 Corinthians and Paul’s treatment of the ministry with, I think, a great deal of anticipation, because the apostle is one who has given us, I think, an exposition of just what it means to minister the gospel of Jesus Christ. Put in other terms, “to serve him effectively,” and I think the lessons we learn from Paul will be useful to us, even in our daily experience of witnessing for Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians is an epistle. It has been taught here in the Chapel before, and many of you have attended the exposition of it. It is an epistle in which there are three primary subjects. The first seven chapters are chapters that have to do primarily with the ministry of the Apostle Paul. Then in chapters eight and nine, the apostle expounds the doctrine of Christian giving against the background of the historical giving of the Macedonian and Achaean churches. And then in the final chapters of the epistle -- chapters ten through thirteen -- he gives an expansion of some of his ideas on the authority of his apostleship, similar in some ways, to some of the things that he says in the Epistle to the Galatians.

Now, in the opening part of the epistle, he is apologizing for his conduct. He has been to Corinth. He has been instrumental in the founding of a church there. He was very concerned about them, because they were largely his converts. He’s carried on a convert -- correspondence with them. He is passing through the city of Ephesus, and is very much concerned about them, writes to them. Not hearing from them, he sent Titus, in order that Titus may give him a report. He tells us that he had become so concerned over the Corinthians, that he left the city of Ephesus and went up to Troas, and there waited for Titus. But again, being so anxious over the condition of the Corinthians, he took leave of Troas and made his way toward Macedonia. And evidently, he met Titus on the way, returning from Corinth, and there received a very favorable report from Titus about the effects of the apostle’s letter among the Corinthians.

The apostle -- just as you might expect -- was a preacher of the truth, and therefore, he had his enemies. And even in places where he had founded the churches, there were enemies. In Corinth, there were enemies of the doctrine that he proclaimed. He had men in that congregation who were legalists, and consequently, they did not like the free grace teaching of the Apostle Paul. So they -- when the apostle said he would come to visit the Corinthians and did not come exactly as he had said he would -- he had said incidentally, that he would come immediately to them, and he had come another way. They said, “Well, Paul is fickle.” They took every opportunity they could to be critical of him. So the apostle answers some of these criticisms of which he has heard.

But now having seen Titus and having received a good report, he launches into a discussion of the ministry. And I’d like to read verse 12 and verse 13, in order for us to get the historical background of this section on “New Covenant Ministry.”

“Furthermore,” he says, “when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord. I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother, but taking leave -- taking my leave of them, I went from there into Macedonia.”

And so he crossed over evidently, by the Dardanelles, went around the northern part of the Aegean Sea over toward Macedonia, and there he met Titus. And Titus gave him a good report.

It’s rather interesting, is it not, that the apostle says, “He had no rest in his spirit.” And is it not the apostle, the one who tells us in Philippians chapter 4 in verse 6 that, “We should not be anxious.” Well, the reason the apostle is anxious, is not because of things that have to do with himself, but things that have to do with his converts. And putting these two passages together in which the apostle says, “Be anxious for nothing,” but here says that he is very anxious, we learn that it’s perfectly all right for us to be anxious about

other believers, but not to be anxious about ourselves and our own relationship to the Lord. Paul was anxious, but Titus gave him a good report.

And now without a word of explanation, the apostle seems to leap out of the slough and despond, and springs like a bird to the heights of joy, and he writes in verse 14,

“Now thanks be unto God, who always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of the knowledge by -- of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God, a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other, the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, who corrupt the Word of God, but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.”

So what we have here is a matchless discussion of the ministry, and surprisingly, it's due to the very dejection of heart that characterized Paul when he did not hear about the status of his Christian friends and converts in the city of Corinth. Often God gives us his greatest blessings in the experiences of our life, when things don't look as if they are right for the blessing of God at all.

Let's look now at Paul's thanksgiving, first of all. It's really a declaration of his thanksgiving to God for the ministry that he has given to him. He speaks first of the triumph in Christ, and then of the testimony to Christ that they are able to give in grace. “Now thanks be unto God, who alls -- always causeth us to triumph.” Now, I want you to notice the adverb “always” first. Now, Paul has learned by this experience, something that he probably knew before, but we have to learn it over and over again; that the sun shines at all times, even when we are in the valley. And he was very disturbed by the fact, that the Corinthians had not responded exactly as he thought they should to his

ministry -- concerned enough to send Titus, concerned that Titus had not come back, disturbed and anxious in spirit, but now he says, “Thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph.” So even when we are in dejected, nevertheless, we are in Christ’s triumphal train. He says that first.

Now, I want you to notice secondly here, this expression translated in the Authorized Version, “causeth us to triumph.” Now, students of the Greek language feel -- and I think rightly -- that this word translated, “caused to triumph here,” found also in Colossians chapter 2, should be rendered not “caused to triumph,” but “leads us in triumph.” Not a whole lot of difference from the standpoint of English, but a little bit different from the standpoint of its meaning. What he is suggesting here, is that his relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ is very similar to the relationship of captains -- of captives in a procession designed to honor a Roman conqueror.

Now, it was the custom in Paul’s day for Roman generals, if they had done certain things that were laudable by the empire, to have a triumphal procession in the city of Rome. And certain relationships took place -- I’ll speak of them in just a moment -- by which the whole city gathered to honor a general who had accomplished an important task. So Paul is using a figure which was well-known to individuals acquainted with the empire in which they were living.

Some of the things that were characteristic of the Roman triumphal procession were these: if a Roman general had, by virtue of his skills in combat, been enabled to win further territory for the Empire, and if he had conquered a certain number of -- and -- and had been able to conquer the enemy and capture a certain number of enemy soldiers -- about five thousand -- if he not simply had repulsed an attack, or had gained back some territory that Rome had lost, but if he had gained for the empire, further land, further territory, then he was eligible for the Roman triumphal procession.

And coming back to the city of Rome, there was an elaborate parade. Priests were involved in it. People were involved in it. The Roman general himself was involved in it.

Usually hung over his head, was a crown and the word, *Il triumphad* were on it; “Victory for Jove” and other things. In addition, in that train were the captives. Julius Caesar, for example, when he conquered *Vercingetorix*, kept him as a captive in the City of Rome for six years, and then there was a triumphal procession, and then that very -- very courageous general from the north of Italy was put to death. All of us who’ve read “Julius Caesar’s Gallic Wars” in Latin remember *Vercingetorix*, and now these days -- of course, very few people have done that these days, but I was growing up, practically every school boy who went to high school had to take at least two years of Latin, and the second year was always “Caesar’s Gallic Wars.” Well, that was one of the most famous of the triumphal processions; one of the most famous of the victories of Roman generals. But in the procession, would be the captives, and the captives were lead in triumph by the general. That is, they were his captives.

Now, that’s the figure that the Apostle Paul uses here, and he thinks of the Lord Jesus Christ as the great general, and he thinks of himself and of others who are engaged with him in his ministry, as being part of the train of captives who are captives, won in battle by the Lord Jesus Christ. So that’s what he means when he says, “Now thanks be unto God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place.” So he’s referring then, to the fact that he regards himself as a captive of the Lord Jesus Christ. He regards himself as being led by him in triumphal procession through the ancient world, he following in the train of the Lord Jesus Christ and always triumphing in him.

In the midst of the apostle’s experiences of course, as he looked about him, things were quite different. I remember reading somewhere of a sea captain, in which there was a picture of an experience that he had had. And in this picture of the sea captain, as he and his ship were making their way into the harbor, just behind him -- it was early morning -- just behind him, there were crags and cliffs on either side, and a very narrow channel. And the captain is looking back at what they have come through, and he says

something like, “You mean, you mean we came through that last night in that storm.” So it’s a kind of picture of -- of what has taken place apart from their knowledge. So the apostle speaks here of being always led along by the Lord Jesus Christ, and even though things are dark, nevertheless, he’s in control and they are his captives, or as we say, “Standeth God within the shadows, keeping watch above his own.” Now, Paul says that he always leads us in triumph “in Christ.” It is our position in Christ that guarantees our victory. It is not because of anything that we have in ourselves. It is because of our “relationship in him,” Paul says. Now, that I think is important.

There was an Indian convert at a prayer meeting in London many years ago who prayed, “O God, we come into Thy presence in the shoes of Christ.” Now, it was explained that Indian servants, when they entered their master’s room, they took off their shoes, but Indian sons kept their shoes on in the presence of their father. And so when he prayed, “O God, we come unto Thee in the shoes of Christ,” he was simply saying, “We come to Thee because we are in Christ as sons and as children.”

Now, when we think of the doctrines of the New Testament, and Particularly the Pauline doctrines, many of us think that perhaps the greatest thing that the apostle ever taught, was the doctrine of justification by faith. It is one of Paul’s great doctrines. It’s a doctrine that’s taught very clearly in the Epistle to the Romans. It’s taught very clearly in the Epistle to the Galatians. It’s referred to in 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, but it’s rather remarkable that aside from those epistles, and even in the Corinthian epistles, it doesn’t loom large. The doctrine of justification by faith is not large in the apostle’s thought. Others say the greatest doctrine Paul taught was our freedom in Christ, and that’s an important doctrine too. But as J. B. Lightfoot said many years ago, “For every time that the Apostle Paul speaks of being justified by faith on the principle of grace, he speaks of union with Christ ten times.” So it is obvious, if we just look at the occurrence of expressions that union with Christ has far more claim to be the dominant teaching of

the Apostle Paul than justification by faith, on the principle of grace. A great doctrine, of course.

Now, so when he says here, “He leads us in triumph in Christ,” he’s speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ as the federal head of the people of God. He is the one who is our representative. He’s the one who has gone to the cross as our representative. He has borne our judgment as our representative. He has been raised from the dead as our representative. He’s the right -- at the right hand of the Father as our representative.

We are in him, and so the Father sees us in Christ. And the acceptance that the Son has is the acceptance that we have because he acts for us. Some people get mad because the Bible says that, “We are condemned because we’re in Adam.” And they say, “Why should we be condemned for something that we did not do?” Now, they think it’s real great for themselves to be accepted for something they didn’t do. It’s perfectly all right to be accepted because of what Christ has done for us to be con -- but to be condemned for what Adam has done, that sounds very bad. But you see, this is the way God deals with humanity. And because he’s going to deal with us in grace and do for us through someone else, what we could not do ourselves, he has also determined that we should come into our condition by something that Adam has done.

And, in fact, I needn’t go into detail here, but it is possible to make a good case for the fact that that is not only a right thing, but it’s the best thing that God could have possibly done for humanity; to deal with two men, the first Adam and the last Adam. But we are in Christ, and being in him -- the people of God -- we have acceptance in him. We are as accepted as he is accepted because he has borne our judgment. There is no further legal ground upon which God can judge those who are represented by Jesus Christ, and he has come to save his people from their sins. Now, that’s enough to make someone say, “Hallelujah,” isn’t it? To know that I’m in Christ, and he has borne my judgment to the full, and therefore, even the Father in heaven cannot execute any other

judgment upon me. Well, that’s enough to make us truly joyous in Christ. So Paul says, “To God be thanks, who always leads us in triumph in Christ.” It’s in him.

Now, if he leads us in triumph in Christ, that means that he is a risen savior, not simply a dead savior. He’s a risen savior. And if he is a risen savior, that means he’s alive. Alive at this very moment. And if he is alive at this marry -- very moment, it means that he is not someone who is to be related to the first century, but he’s someone who is our contemporary. He is just as contemporary as 1981. So he has a -- has been raised from the dead. He’s alive. He is our contemporary, and therefore, he is able to confront us. And that is what he does. Confront us.

Just recently in going to the Near East and seeing again the -- the many churches of the Greek Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church, to me finally, I must confess, it became so depressing that when I got to Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity, I just did not go down to go in that church. I stood outside, and I think I had a Coca-Cola. I would not go down in that church because I was so depressed. Every time I went in these churches in which everything gave me the impression of death -- dead religion. Everything moved back nineteen hundred plus years back. All thought was of then, and the idea of a risen, living Savior, who was up there with me in the little square in front of the church, was something that was absolutely foreign to the religious people that would get out of buses and go into that church. The magnificent thing about Christianity is that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. He’s alive. He is our contemporary. He confronts us today, and more significantly than he did when he was here, for he confronts all of us at the same time, as the risen Spirit, the Son of God.

John Drinkwater wrote, “Shakespeare is dust and will not come to question from his Avon tomb. And Socrates and Shelley keep an Attic and Italian sleep. They see not. But O Christians, who throng Holdman and Fifth Avenue, may you not meet in spite of death, a traveler from Nazareth?” The answer, of course, is “yes.”

Now, another thing. Notice the apostle says, “Who always leadeth a -- leadeth us in triumph by Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place.” Notice the testimony to Christ, and it is “by us.” We should never lose the glory of the “by us.” “Makes manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place.”

Now, let's think again of that Roman triumphal process -- procession, because it was customary in the Roman triumphal procession for the priests to be a part of the procession, too. And do you know what they did in the procession? Well, they went along in the midst of the others who were part of it -- the soldiers, the captives -- and they had their incense, and they were burning the incense. And so the incense was the sweet smell of the Roman general, and of the victorious conflict that had taken place. And so characteristic of the Roman triumphal procession was the sweet smell of the smoke of the incense. Well, Paul says, “We are his captives, and there is the sweet savor of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is manifested by us.”

That, it seems to me, is what Paul is saying, is that the sweet savor comes through us, and I think is a magnificent expression of the fact that, they are representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he is seen in them.

But now we must go on. And notice verse 15 and verse 16 where he explains this thanksgiving. Verse 15 begins, “For -- or because -- because we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life.” We look at the Godward side first, “For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” Note the bold change of the metaphor. The captives themselves become the incense. We are the incense. We are the knowledge of Christ. Not only do we “give out knowledge concerning him,” Paul says, but as you look at us, you see the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a magnificent expression he's using here. He's saying in effect, that when you look at us, you see Christ.

There’s a passage in the Book of Acts that I think of in connection with this. It’s the time of the early church, and the Apostle Peter and others are seeking to give those early testimonies to the death, the burial, the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and this is the reaction of some. Luke says in Acts 4:13,

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marveled. And they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.”

So there was something about the ministry of Peter and those who were with him, that made those people who looked at them say, “Look, these men are uneducated.” That is, not that they were ignorant, but that they’ve not been to the schools, and nevertheless, they’re carrying on this ministry which obviously is remarkable ministry. And furthermore, they saw that, by the things that they were saying and doing, that they had been associated with the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, they were a sweet savor of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, that is what a good servant of the Lord -- that’s the kind of ministry he should have and the kind of influence he should have.

Now he says, “sweet savor of Christ,” and if you are a reader of the Bible, that expression “sweet savor” reminds you of a number of places in Scripture, particularly in the Book of Leviticus, where the offerings of -- that the children of Israel are to bring, are offerings that from which there comes a “sweet savor” toward the Lord, like the burnt offering. And then in the New Testament in passages like Philippians and also in Ephesians, we read the Lord -- of the Lord Jesus Christ as a “sweet savor.” And also as -- we read of certain activities of Christians as bringing a “sweet savor” to God. The sweet savor is a sacrificial metaphor, and so when he says here, “To the one we are a sweet savor -- we are a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish,” he’s saying that we are -- we are individuals who are like a sacrifice to God. The

reference I think, means that this kind of ministry that they are engaged in, is a ministry that costs something. When a person is a true minister of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is something that costs something.

One of the commentators has said this, “There may be a glamour about preaching. The fascination about gripping a congregation and all that sort of thing, which is not costly, but gratifying to the flesh. The snare of the limelight, the snare of publicity, the snare of that satisfaction, feeling power over other people, which has robbed preaching of that essential blood and passion and anguish. Paul was not a preacher of that kind. It’s all very well to talk about Paul as the great preacher and orator, and try to be another Paul along that line. But to be a Paul, is a desperately costly thing, and to minister Christ is a thing into which our very blood will be poured. Paul was that kind of preacher.” We do need incense bearers. We need those who are so associated with him that they are willing to carry on a ministry of self-sacrifice, one that may cost them something.

Looking at the manward side, it’s a very solemn thing. Notice that sixteenth verse. “To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life.” What does he mean, “To the one; to the other”? Well, in the preceding verse, he has said, “We are a sweet savor of Jesus Christ to God, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.”

Now, that’s a startling thing. You would think that perhaps he would say, “We are a sweet savor of Christ in those that are being saved, but in those that are perishing, we are a sense of discouragement to God, or a sense of unpleasantness.” But no, no. We are a sweet savor of Christ in those are being saved, and in those that are perishing.

Now, notice, if you ask, “What are these people?” He explains in the sixteenth verse that, each has tendencies before the coming of the odor of Jesus Christ to them. Verse 16 says, “To the one we are the savor of death unto death, and to the other the savor of life unto life.” What the apostle says, is that there are two kinds of people in this world. There are those who are of life, and there are those who are of death. And we’re

the savor of life unto life. We're the savor of death unto death. Does that seem as if it's very difficult language. Well, it is difficult language. It suggests that there are some people who are of death -- destined to die -- and there are some people who are of life and destined to live.

Well, Paul doesn't expatiate on the doctrine of divine election here, but it is obvious that that is what he's talking about. And he says, there are these two types.

Now, he's not the only one that does -- does this. The Lord Jesus Christ told the parable of the soil. He spoke about the seed that fell on the hard ground. He spoke about the seed that fell amidst the thorns, and he also spoke about good ground, and the seed falling upon the good ground, and bringing forth fruit; some thirtyfold, some sixtyfold, some a hundredfold.

So I ask you a question. What kind of ground are you? Are you good ground or rocky ground? Thorns? That's a question we all have to answer. That's the ultimate question. There's no way to give an explanation of that, that satisfying to the natural mind. The very fact that we are natural men means that we rebel against the truths of the word of God. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them. They're spiritually discerned.” That's why no man can ever explain the doctrine of divine sovereign election to an unsaved man. It's impossible. He cannot understand it. He cannot understand salvation. But that's what Paul is talking about when he says, “We are a sweet savor of Jesus Christ, in them that are saved and in them that are perishing. To the one we are the savor of death unto death, to the other the savor of life unto life.”

The same sun that beams down upon the butter melts it, but hardens the clay. The same sun that beams down upon a plant, in which the branch is set in the tree properly, and the tree in the ground properly, causes the tree to grow. But if the connection is not there, the same sun causes one branch to wither, it causes the other to be fruitful.

Some years ago in one of the houses that I had, we were planting some trees, and a couple of men drove by in a truck with two beautiful looking oak tree -- red oak trees. I said, “Where did you get those?” And they said, “Oh, we dug them up out of the ground.” And they had a ball of soil around them with burlap. And I said, “How much do you want for them?” You can tell how long this -- how long this was ago, because the trees were about twelve feet tall. They said, “Twenty-five dollars.” I probably should have suspected something then, but I didn’t. I said, “All right. I’ll let you plant them.” So they hastily planted them, and I didn’t watch them too carefully. But afterwards, when the sun came out, I noticed that my trees didn’t grow. And so finally, the trees died. The sun that beamed down on my trees didn’t do them any good at all. They just began to wither, and finally the leaves turned brown and fell off, and then I got rid of them. I dug them up, and they didn’t have any roots on them at all. They just put some dirt around them, and put some burlap there, and I was the latest sucker. And I’m sure they went over the hill smiling. My two oak trees.

Well, Paul says, “Who is sufficient for these things?” in verse 16. That’s kind of an -- an affirmation -- I mean, a kind of a -- of a interrogation on Paul’s part. “Who is sufficient for these things?” And I think that, what he intends to -- us to understand by what follows is “we are.” “Who is sufficient for these things?” because verse 17 begins, “For we are not as the many.” So I rather think, that what Paul means for us to understand here and, “Who is sufficient for these things?” In a moment, he will tell us that our sufficiency is of God in verse 5, but he means, because of the divine sufficiency, “We are not as the many who corrupt the word of God, but as of sincerity, as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” So we are sufficient in our representative.

Now, notice, we are not as the many. That puts the “true” in the minority. We are not as the many. The many, are the corrupters of the Word of God.

Now, what does he mean when he says, “We are not as the many who corrupt the Word of God”? Well, that word “corrupt” comes from a Greek word *compelas* which

meant a huck -- a huckster; and individual who's trying to sell you something. But we've just come from the east, and we heard a lecture incidentally, on Mohammedanism. And one of the teachers -- a Christian man -- said that, "In Mohammedanism, there are five points." Five points of Mohammedanism. Now, he said -- I think he really said, "There are five or six points." And he was giving it kind of off the cuff, so he gave the five points, and of course, we wondered what the sixth point was. Well, we found out what the sixth point was as we went out on the streets all over the east. They're always selling you little trinkets, and they always say, "One dollar. One dollar." One dollar. Everything is one dollar, and if something is not worth a dollar, "It's two for a dollar. It's ten for a dollar." It's always one dollar. That's the sixth point of Mohammedanism. One dollar, we decided. But they were hucksters. Hucksters.

Now, Paul says, "We are not as the many who are hucksters, corrupting the Word of God." There are people like that. This word, incidentally, was a word that was used of the adulteration of wine. An individual who took wine and poured water in it, in order to adulterate it and sell it for something that it was not. So a huckster of the word of God, is one who claims to be preaching the word of God, but does not really preach the word of God. He cuts corners. When he talks about the deity of Christ, he does not preach the deity of Christ. When he talks about the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, he does not proclaim the biblical doctrine of the sacrifice. When he talks about resurrection, he does not talk about the biblical doctrine. He uses terms, but he has adulterated the Christian message.

Paul says we are not like that. "We are not like the many who adulterate, or corrupt the word of God, but as of sincerity." That's the inward sense the apostle has as he preaches the word of God. "As of God." That's the true source. "In the sight of God - before God -- we speak in Christ." There is something that is always pleasing about the man who is devoted to Jesus Christ. Honest. Devoted to Jesus Christ.

John Brown was a man like that, and even David Hume, who had something of a faith in spite of his philosophy, but who didn't have the kind of faith that we are talking about, said of Havington, “That's the man for man for me. He speaks as if Jesus was at his elbow.” It's like Paul. So our duty then, to sum up, is to present the sweet savor of Jesus Christ.

James Denny said, “No man ought to preach, nor can a man truly preach, who cannot say great things about Jesus Christ.”

John Wesley said, “I came to town and offered them Jesus Christ.”

Seneca, the Roman philosopher said, “He who frequents the perfumery's shop and lingers even for a short time, will carry with him the scent of the place. And the individual who spends time with the Lord Jesus Christ will manifest the sweet savor of the Lord Jesus.”

Now, I close by just reading you a statement by Richard Baxter; a very wonderful statement I think. He said, “Were there but such clear and deep impressions upon our souls, of the glorious things that we daily preach. Oh, what a change it would make in our sermons and in our private course. I marvel how I can preach of them slightly and coldly. I seldom come out of the pulpit, but my conscience smiteth me, that I've been no more serious and fervent. How couldst thou speak of life and of death with such a heart?”

It's magnificent to know that we have a certain victory because of the activity of Jesus Christ in our behalf. He's always leading us about in triumph. The sun is always shining for the servants of Christ. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for this magnificent expression of what the service of Jesus Christ meant for the Apostle Paul. It is marvelous to reflect upon the fact that he has related us so to himself that we are a sweet savor of him, to those with whom we come in contact, to the lost and perishing, as well as to those who are on the way to

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salvation. O God, help us to be faithful. We pray that the sweet savor of Jesus Christ may be so manifest, that we may be useful to Thee.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.



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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Systematic Theology

TRANSCRIPT

“The Power of God, part I (Can God Do Everything?)”

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures. We thank Thee for the theology of the word of God, and we pray Lord that Thou wilt enable us to think the thoughts that the Holy Spirit would have us to think. And may we grow in the knowledge of Thee and may our knowledge that the spirit gives us produce righteousness in our lives. We know that the word of God is profitable for doctrine, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, for reproof, that the Man of God may be perfect, truly fitted unto every good work. And may, Lord, the Word fulfill its purpose in our lives tonight. We commit this time to Thee now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Tonight our subject is “The Power of God, *or* Can God Do Everything?” And for Scripture reading, turn with me to Genesis chapter 18, and let me read just two verses. These are verses that are set in the context of the visit to Abraham by the three men who turn out to be God and two angels. And it is the time that Abraham and Sarah are given the promise that it is Sarah who shall bear Abraham the son who is to be the seed. And in verse 13, we read, “And the Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying shall I indeed bear a child when I am so old?’ Is anything too difficult for the Lord at the appointed time I will return to you at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.”