



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

1 Corinthians 14:1-5

1 Corinthians

“Charismatic Confusion”

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you, Mark. We are continuing our studies in 1 Corinthians and we are beginning a new chapter, chapter 14, a very interesting chapter and an interesting portion of it. We’re going to look at the first five verses of it this morning. Paul has given a chapter on love and explains what love is, and he begins chapter 14 by telling us pursue love. Yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exultation and consolation. One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but one who prophesies edifies the church. I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy. And greater is one that prophesies that one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets so that the church may receive edify. May the Lord bless this reading of His Word. Let’s bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank You for this time together and this opportunity that we have on the first day of the week, on this Lord’s Day, to come together with Your people and open the scriptures and read the text and spend some time considering the meaning of it. We pray that You will bless us as we do that – as we consider the meaning of this text and how it relates to things today because this the text that is certainly very relevant for today. Every text of course is, but some are more obviously relevant than others and in this day of various opinions about this subject we pray that You would give us some illumination, some understanding, some perspective. So we commit our time to You and pray Your rich blessing upon us.

May the Spirit of God lead us and guide us in our thinking. Guide us in Your Word.

What a privilege it is to possess Your Word, the inherent Word of God, and we can study it and we can reflect deeply upon it. We confess that while we have opportunity to do that, we don't always do it. We should. We need to. And I think ultimately that's Paul's great lesson here, that we need to be edified through the intelligible, understandable revelation that you give us, and we have that available to us. We have 66 books of the Bible and it is a great privilege to have that. Thank you, Lord, for that and for this time where we can consider this portion of Scripture. So we pray Your blessing upon us. Guide in our thinking. Illuminate our minds and build us up in the faith. Conform us to the image of Jesus Christ. Make us more like Him.

Bless us spiritually, but Lord we have material needs as well. When we look at the list of prayer requests on the back of the bulletin we know that that's just a partial list. But we can see from that there are many needs in our congregation and if not here with friends, and there are others whose names aren't even listed that we know are going through great trials. Bless them and pray for the sick. We pray that you would give them healing. We pray that you would give them encouragement. A discouraging thing it is over time to endure sickness. It affects our minds. It affects us spiritually. We are so connected – the material and the immaterial part of our being, the physical and the spiritual, the emotional – that the sickness, the weakness that we have physically affects us spiritually. So Lord, I pray for those that are going through difficulties such as that that You would give them encouragement, that You would strengthen them. And those who are going through the trials of life – pressures at work, attentions within the home – we face all kinds of trials in our lives, but You know how to meet them perfectly and I pray that You do that. We speak of the Holy Spirit and His ministry of teaching us in this hour. He's with us always. He's the gift that You have given to us. He is the seal upon our heart and He is described as the comforter, the one who gives us encouragement and comfort at all times and certainly at times of trial. I pray that He would encourage those who are discouraged, and that all of us, we would be richly blessed by His ministry to us this morning.

Those of us who are not going through any trial of the kind that I've mentioned, give us appreciation and thankfulness for that and give us all great thankfulness for the things that we have in Christ. We have so much. We'll speak of some of that this morning. Bless us with the encouragement, the consolation that that should give us in the midst of the greatest trials of life. So Lord bless us now, build us

up in the faith and just be a very profitable and edifying time together this morning.

We pray in Christ’s name, Amen.

A couple of years ago we were invited to Baylor University to attend my nephew’s defense of his dissertation. He was getting a Ph.D. in chemistry. The event followed a format in which he would give a brief lecture on his subject and then take questions, so we went down to Waco. When we entered the lecture hall we were given a transcript of his talk. It had some arcane title; nothing that I was at all familiar with, but I thought I’m really going to try and follow this. I might learn something. I was lost from the first sentence. He may as well have lectured in Latin. I admired his erudition, but when we left the only thing I learned is what I already knew, and that is I’m not a chemist. Now that’s fine in a chemistry class, but not in church – yet it happens there. It did in Corinth. People were coming out of the meeting saying, ‘I didn’t understand a thing that guy said.’ And the reason was He was speaking Latin or Aramaic or some other language that was completely foreign to the congregation and no one was interpreting the message.

The Charismatics were running the meeting and speaking in tongues. Now when I say Charismatics, I mean the biblical Charismatics. The modern expression is from the Greek word for gift, charisma. Paul said, ‘Earnestly desire the greater gifts, the *charismata*.’ Corinth had a wealth of gifts and gifted people. They were the original Charismatics, but they were confused. They were not edifying the congregation with their gift for messages. The problem was not their content, not that they were speaking over people’s heads, the problem was the people weren’t getting content. It wasn’t being communicated. As a result the people were not built up in the faith. They came to church spiritually hungry and they left empty, something like those poorer people who came to the meeting of the Lord’s table, they got to the feast and left hungry because there was nothing left. These people came for some spiritual nourishment and they got nothing. They were evidently dazzled by the man who spoke, but completely unenlightened.

That’s the lesson of our text, and really of 1 Corinthians 14; the importance of edification, of instruction, of helping believers know more of God and become more like Christ. Chapters 12 through 14 are really about that. They are a unit. They are about the ministry of the church. In chapter 12 Paul explains that everyone has a necessary function in the church. Every one of us does. The church is like a body. There are no superfluous parts. Everyone is essential. In chapter 13 it explains that

love is the vital principal that animates and regulates every member of the body.

Without it we are nothing. Now chapter 14 explains that the edification of the church depends on emphasizing the gifts that will benefit all of the members and conducting the ministry in an orderly way. Intelligibility and order are the two issues that concern Paul in chapter 14 because without them, the church will not be built up, it will be torn down. Both were missing in Corinth. There was disorder in the church and confusion about the proper use of the gifts, especially the gift of tongues. Some had exaggerated its importance, so in the first five verses of the chapter Paul corrects that by explaining which gifts should be emphasized. He tells the Corinthians to seek prophecy over tongues, but what exactly is Paul talking about when he speaks of a tongue? What is this gift? It's important to know that in order to understand the problem and how it applies to us. There's a lot of division and confusion today over the gift of tongues – about the nature of it, about the use of it, about the importance of it – and the King James Version hasn't helped.

Now that's a very good version of the Bible, and I'm not criticizing the King James version, but here it translates this as unknown tongue probably without intending to do that, but suggesting that it was unknown to everyone in the congregation and many in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have explained their experience with tongues in that way. It's not known languages but spiritual languages, unintelligible speech, ecstatic speech produced by the Holy Spirit for private prayer and praise. That's the explanation that's given, but that's not Paul's explanation. Paul doesn't define it that way. In fact he doesn't give a definition. And the Corinthians had a common understanding of what it was. He didn't need to do that. He was writing a real letter to them and they all understood what he was talking about. He was going on there. They knew what he meant when he spoke of the tongue, so a definition wasn't necessary.

So we have to go outside of this passage to get a clear definition of tongues, and the place to do that – the place to begin – is in Acts chapter two and the Day of Pentecost where the phenomenon first occurred. That was the birthday of the church when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit. The signs of that phenomenon were amazing things; wind and fire and tongues. Luke writes that they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit was giving them utterance. It was giving them utterance. Jews from every nation, from all over the world, had gathered at Passover and they were there 50 days later at Pentecost. The temple was filled with all kinds of

Jewish people from different countries and they heard these people, the disciples and others, speaking their own language. It was clearly supernatural. It was clearly a miraculous thing, and the people there recognized that it was. They were, Luke tells us, astonished that simple, uneducated Galileans were speaking different languages. These weren’t the people who’d been to school. These weren’t sophisticated men. These were uneducated men who spoke eloquently in various languages. So they recognized that this was something special. This was a supernatural event.

They were not giving out mere sounds or ecstatic utterance, they spoke real languages foreign to the speaker but familiar to the hearer. This is the experience that defines the gift of tongues. It is speaking a foreign language which the speaker has long studied or learned. That’s why it’s a miraculous thing. The word for tongue in both Acts 2 and 1 Corinthians 14 is the same: *glossa*. It has only two meanings in the New Testament; the physical tongue and language, like French, German. Language is clearly the meaning in Acts 2 and the fact that it is not explained differently in any other passage where tongues is recorded indicates that the experience was the same. What took place in Jerusalem in Acts 2 took place in Corinth and is referred to in 1 Corinthians 14. There is nothing miraculous about unintelligible speech. It wasn’t unique at that time and it wasn’t Christian. Pagans practiced ecstatic speech in their religions long before the time of Christ. Pentecost was unique and miraculous. It was speaking foreign languages unknown to the speaker but known to the audience, and doing that denoted the enablement of the Holy Spirit. That was what occurred at Corinth. People had to give up speaking foreign languages – Latin, Greek, Aramaic; various dialects of the region – every human language. So regardless of how a person interprets the instruction that Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 14, the gift is the supernatural ability to speak a known language by a person who has not learned that language. If people today have that gift it is this gift, speaking a known human language; not uttering sounds and syllables that mimic language but are not language.

The people in Corinth, or rather the problem in Corinth was not that the people were speaking what some would describe as gibberish. The problem was they were speaking languages – real languages, known languages – without interpretation. The result was there was no understanding. The ministry was unintelligible. Revelation was not being received and people were not being edified. They were not learning. Gifted men were showing off. Maybe that’s an interpretation of the situation on my behalf, but that’s what it seems to be. They were demonstrating their miraculous gift

of tongues, and what an amazing gift that is – to be able to stand up and speak a foreign language. So they made use of it, but they weren't doing it for the good of the congregation because no one was being edified by it. They were misusing their gift. They were doing it, it would seem – it would seem – for personal distinction. I don't think that's a gratuitous suggestion because that's always the danger with a gift of whatever kind it may be; using an ability to sort of aggrandize oneself. A person can do that. I think that's a particular problem for a teacher. He or she can use the occasion to show off their education, their knowledge. They know something that others don't and they can share that with some bit of pride, but not do so out of love. That happens. That happens with the gift of teaching, for example, and that seems to have been the problem here with tongues. It certainly was a problem in Corinth. In fact, that was a fundamental problem in the church. The fundamental problem here really is not tongues, it was pride. You see that all through this book. It was a lack of love. Gifted men were not using their gifts for the common good. They were using it for something else and evidently it was for personal gratification – the aggrandizement, as I said.

So Paul begins his correction of them by telling the Corinthians to pursue love and we're doing that. So pursue love – he's just given them an extended description of love in chapter 13 so they now know what love is. It doesn't seek its own. It's not selfish, it's selfless. It seems the benefit of others. Paul called it earlier a more excellent way, and they were to follow that way. But not to that alone. He's not saying love is all you need or all you need is love. The ads, they said something else too. He says that they were also to desire earnestly spiritual gifts. The church cannot function without them. Spiritual gifts are the treasures Christ gave the church when He ascended into Heaven. That's what Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:8, 'When He ascended on high, let captive a host of captives and gave gifts to men,' and those gifts came with the gift of the Holy Spirit. When He poured out the Holy Spirit upon the church, the spirit came with spiritual gifts. Gifts are a blessing. They're not only a blessing, they are essential for a church. Love is not a substitute for the gifts, so that's not all we need. We need the gifts too. And yet the gifts can only be effective when they are used with love and guided by it. Now I've said this before and I'll just repeat it. A person can stand in a pulpit or in a classroom and teach without love and you'll benefit from it if he's teaching accurately or she's giving a solid lesson, but it won't benefit that individual. There's no benefit for that person, so we must be guide by

love. No one is made better by simply having a gift. A person can be a learned and effective teacher of God’s word but still impersonal and selfish. Love is the virtue or grace that transforms people. It gives life to our relationships and effectiveness to our work, so Paul begins with an emphasis on it. We need that. It is essential. He says pursue it and that means go after it with intense personal effort. That word pursue is also the word for persecute. So you have the same word in different contexts and the context will determine how it’s translated and what it means, but that’s the idea. It has this idea of intense personal effort, so that’s what he’s recommending here. This is an earnest, persistent pursuit not only to have a greater affection for people. I don’t want to rule that out, but it’s not just that and not even principally that idea of affection, but it’s the idea of a desire and an activity to help – to benefit them.

Paul’s made it pretty clear – very clear – in chapter 13 that love is not simply an affection it is an action. It is essentially action as he describes it, but we don’t want to limit it to action. It’s all of that, but certainly part of it as he’s explained love, is active. It’s to benefit others. Spiritual gifts are the channel for doing that the means for doing that. They are really the instruments of love, the means give to us for serving others and blessing them and building them up in the faith. So it’s important that love increases so that the gifts will be used selflessly and wisely and we can increase our love and possess more of it by pursuing it. Our growth and character depend on that personal effort. We can possess more love, we can’t possess more gifts by wanting them. That’s not Paul’s point. In fact he’s made this very clear in chapter 12 and verse 11 that the Spirit gives the gifts as He wills, not as we will or we desire. The Spirit sovereignly gives the gifts, not because someone deserves a particular gift or wants a particular gift, but because it’s His will to do it. He makes those decisions. But we can appraise the gifts highly and desire the benefit of their use in the meeting of the church. All of them are important and we are to seek their proper use and that’s what Paul wrote. He says, ‘Desire earnestly spiritual gifts.’ Desire earnestly all the spiritual gifts because they’re all essential but especially, he says, that you may prophesize because prophecy is intelligible. You don’t need someone to interpret the prophecy after it’s been given, it’s given in the language that everyone understands. It’s understandable. That’s what he explains in verses two and three: ‘For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men, but to God. For no one understands that in His Spirit he speaks mysteries. But one who prophesied speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.

Now that’s both the problem and the solution. If someone is speaking a foreign language at a meeting of the church without an interpreter, no one understands the message. I could stand up here and if I knew German or French – and I certainly don’t know French. If you were here Wednesday night you would have heard my mispronunciation of all of the French towns and places that I mentioned. But were I able to do that, you might think that sounds magnificent, but I don’t know anything he said. You won’t understand that message. It might be a great thing, and no doubt it would be a great thing. It would be a supernatural thing that we would all witness, but without an interpretation it is unintelligible and unhelpful. Paul calls it a mystery. No one knows the meaning. I understand the problem quite well. My wife is Dutch. Her native tongue is Dutch. So when my late mother-in-law would come by the house, as she often did, it was very natural for them to fall into speaking Dutch. Over the years I heard a lot of strange sounds; diphthongs and gutturals that we don’t have in English. I sat through many mysterious conversations and was asked, ‘Did that bother you?’ Not really. I just let them go on and talk and went on with my own thoughts. Occasionally I would pick up a word or two and get the gist of things, but usually I was as much in a fog listening to them as I was listening to a lecture on chemistry. I didn’t get it. And that’s fine at home, but this was happening in church. The Corinthians had an exaggerated importance in their minds of tongues, but got no benefit from them. They weren’t learning anything. The solution was to stop emphasizing tongues, stop putting such a focus on that and begin emphasizing prophecy. The prophet was a person who spoke God’s word. He was directly inspired by God to give revelation. Now there’s an example of that in Jeremiah 1 where the prophet receives his call from God. Jeremiah resisted it. He was too young to be a prophet. He didn’t know how to speak. But God said that he had consecrated Jeremiah for this ministry before he was born. In fact, even before he was conceived. In fact, he had consecrated him for this from all eternity. It was God’s will and it was going to happen and it did happen. So Jeremiah wrote, ‘Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.’ That’s a prophet. He spoke what God revealed to him and he always spoke truth. Whoever spoke falsely was not a genuine prophet and the penalty for that was very serious. Such a person was stoned; put to death.

True prophets never were in error. They revealed the Will of God and they also preached what they prophesied. They applied the prophecies. They applied the

revelation they were given to the conditions of the people. They urged repentance.

They gave encouragement to them. Peter did that on the Day of Pentecost at the end of his sermon. After he’s quoted the scriptures and he’s demonstrated the person they crucified shortly before – 50 days earlier – on Calvary was the Son of God and that evil thing that happened, he calls upon them to repent and some 3,000 of them did. Paul says that the prophet speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation, but all of that is based on the revelation that the prophet gave. He took the prophecy and he applied it. That’s not true of the man who speaks in a tongue. Paul says he edifies himself, but he doesn’t edify the church. The prophet does that. He edifies the church. Now it’s difficult to explain how a tongue would edify the person who speaks it or what that means, what Paul is saying there. One of the commentators who is a Charismatic man believes in the gifts and believes that tongues is extant, that it’s a gift for today. He even recognized the difficulty of what Paul meant there. If the message doesn’t edify the congregation because the congregation can’t understand the message, why would it edify the speaker who doesn’t understand it either? Well, one commentator explained the self-edification as the glow of the soul. I’m not sure what that means. I guess it makes the person feel good, but whatever it means it doesn’t fit the function of the gift that Paul gave in chapter 12 and verse seven, which is for the common good. God gave all of the gifts for the common good, not for the person himself or herself, but for the congregation. If you have a gift, it’s not for you it’s for us. So that doesn’t fit the common good. The spiritual gifts were given not, as I say, for personal edification but for common edification, for building up the church. In verse 26 Paul says, ‘Let all things be done for edification; for the edification of the assembly.’ Some have suggested that Paul is not actually commending self-edification, but denouncing it, that he’s using sarcasm here. Now sarcasm may be too harsh a word. It may be better to think of it as irony, that Paul is showing that tongues without interpretation misses the mark and hits the wrong target. He was saying something like if there’s any edification that comes from this, it’s only personal. It’s only the person that’s speaking that’s being edified, but even that person’s not being edified.

Perhaps he’s speaking in some way like that – irony or sarcasm, if you will. He uses that in other places. We’ve already seen that in 1 Corinthians 4 8:10. You may remember that the Corinthians were proud people. That was one of their failings. It’s true of all of us, of course, but this is what he’s dealing with. They had some

knowledge. They thought they had great wisdom. So Paul, in chapter four, compares himself and the apostles to the Corinthians and he said, ‘We are fools, but you are prudent.’ The Corinthians weren’t really prudent or wise and the apostles weren’t really fools, but it was a way of forcefully making the point that the Corinthians were behaving wrongly. We have the same kind of expression or communication. We may fail at something and someone may laugh at us, and we say, ‘You’re so smart, you do it.’ We don’t really mean ‘you’re really very smart, you should do it,’ it’s a way of kind of sarcastically making a point. And Paul did do that. He did that in that verse and he does it later in this chapter in verse 36. He does it in the book of Galatians. That’s a method Paul uses for making his point and I’m rather favorable myself of that explanation, but I have to say most commentators don’t hold that. They feel that Paul is speaking positively here, that he is saying that they do, in fact, edify themselves in some way. He doesn’t explain how they do it, but I supposed a teacher can say, ‘I’m edified by the gift that I use because I’m reminded of God’s words and sometimes as I teach I get an insight.’ And evangelist would say, ‘I feel edified by the things – using the gift that I’m using. And I see souls saved and I realize God’s used someone like me to do that. That’s edifying.’ So perhaps that’s the sense, but either way Paul is not commending that as the reason for the gift. If there’s edification, it’s only the one who’s using the gift that’s being edified and the whole congregation is not being edified. That defies the purpose and the reason for the gifts. He’s not commending that. He’s explaining that that’s a defect; that that is reason for not using the gifts improperly. In verse five he reduces the rank of tongues and he promotes prophecy and its importance. Now I wish that you all spoke in tongues, but even more that you would prophesy, and greater is the one who prophesies and the one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may receive edify.

It’s clear from this that Paul is not disparaging the gift of tongues, and again the biblical gift of tongues is speaking real languages not the modern experience of incoherent speech. He wishes they all could have the gift of languages, not thinking that they actually could. That’s not up to them or up to him, it’s up to the Holy Spirit, but he’s saying that in order to emphasize the value of the gift. It’s from God. It’s supernatural. It is good. And if God granted it to all of them, all would be happy. He’d be glad for them. They put a great deal of emphasis upon that. They were enamored of that gift, and he’s saying if you all have it and God gives it to all of you,

wonderful. It’s just a way of showing that Paul was not disparaging or vilifying the gift of tongues, but he wanted the Corinthians to have a right understanding of the gift and he was putting it in its right place. He was giving them some perspective – giving them the right value and criticizing the misuse of it. It’s not one of the greater gifts, and as long as it is used without interpretation it was not profitable for the church. It doesn’t communicate anything. Prophecy, on the other hand, does. It is understood. It is divine revelation that is received and perceived. That’s edifying and that is fundamental to spiritual growth. It builds up the body because it imparts truth that feeds the soul. Knowledge is never the final aim; glorifying God is. We do that through a life of obedience, through a personal relationship with Him in both our thoughts and our actions. But that is based on knowledge. It’s based on doctrine or theology. We can’t grow without that. We can’t know God without knowing about God. I can’t know you personally without knowing something about you. I can’t address you if I don’t know your name. That’s rather obvious and that’s true of the Lord too. We must know about Him to know Him personally. I need to know about His person, His character. We need to know about His will, what He would have us to do and who He is. It’s a daunting thing in some ways to know the will of God. We talked about that last week – to know what love is and what God would have us to do, that itself could be quite frustrating and discouraging. But when we know who God is, when we know His power and His faith in us and how He works within us, then we know that we can do these things through Him. So these are the things we need to know. We must have this in order to be built up. It is essential that we receive clear instruction. That’s the reason Paul told Timothy – and one of the last recorded statements that he made, Timothy preached the word. I find that very significant, that as Paul is facing death and this may be the last message that he can communicate to his child in the faith, Timothy, who he loved dearly and was passing on the baton to so to speak, what does he say at the end of his life? When you come to the end of your life, I think if you’re going to say something important, you’re going to say what’s really important. What he says to Timothy is, ‘Preach the Word.’ That means more than just impart information. In verse three Paul said that the prophet does three things. He speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. All three are based on revelation. All three are based on truth, on God’s Word. It’s through the knowledge of God that we can have consolation and give encouragement in times of sadness. We live in a broken world full of broken lives and broken hearts. The Bible

has the medicine to heal the soul and direct the life. Preaching and teaching should do that. It should never be over people’s heads, but it should not be so deluded that nothing is gained. We need more than pabulum. We need the strong meat of the Word. We need to know the great truth of God’s Word. We need a foundation for our lives, and that’s what the Word of God is. If we’re not around it in the Bible, if we exchange doctrine for experience and emotionalism, if we exchange light for heat, we won’t have a firm foundation and we will not stand when the storms of life come – and the storms of life always come. And what is going to ground a person in the midst of that is a knowledge of God. Doctrine is really practical. We need to know what we believe in order to stand firm in the faith. We need to understand the person and work of Christ. That changes us.

Some months ago I mentioned David Brainerd. I think many of you know who David Brainerd was anyway and his association with Jonathan Edwards, but he was a missionary to the American Indians in the mid-1700’s mainly in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, which is interesting. You read about that and you don’t think of Pennsylvania and New Jersey as wilderness, but at that time it was. There were just a few settlements of Europeans in those areas and mainly it was inhabited by Native Americans. This is where Brainerd, as a young man – a very sickly young man as well, a minister – this past year I read his diary and his journal and both were very enlightening. In his journal, he wrote of his ministry and the effects of it. He preached to these people – these were not educated people. He had to learn their language. Some of them had a knowledge of English, but mainly he had to learn their language and learn their dialects. He didn’t have the gift of tongues, obviously. It would have been convenient for him to have that, but he had to learn their languages. And so he would preach to them as best he could and then he would catechize them. He would teach them the Westminster Catechism. He taught them doctrine, and he expressed a concern about that. He expressed the concern that in doing that he would enlighten the head but not the heart. He wouldn’t affect the heart, he said. Now that’s a dichotomy that we often hear, and it’s not a biblical dichotomy because in the Bible the heart and the head are the same thing, but we understand what he means. He’d give them intellectual knowledge, but no affection for what they were learning and that was his concern. It’s a concern that many people have when they teach doctrine, and yet he found that that was not true. In fact, the opposite was true. They advanced in truth daily and it affected their lives in a very profound way. On one occasion he

wrote that he knew of no Christian assembly – not just among the Native Americans, but he knew of no Christian assembly where there seems to be so much of the presence of God where brotherly love so much prevails. That was the result of teaching them sound doctrine, and that’s as it should be. We need intelligible instruction, knowledge that feeds the soul and the exhortation and consolation that encourages us to live well. And we have much consolation in this Christian life. We are blessed people. There shouldn’t be any confusion about that. You need to know who you are in Christ and that message should be clear, that every believer in Jesus Christ is completely forgiven of all sin and has eternal life. It’s eternal. It’s forever. At the moment of faith you’re accepted by God and you can never be more accepted by Him that you are at the moment of faith, because at that moment we are completely accepted. We don’t need to climb some ladder to gain a little more acceptance and work harder and harder to gain God’s acceptance. We are fully and completely accepted as His child and His Son with all of the rights and the privileges of a child and a Son of God. We cannot be made more acceptable to him. We cannot be loved more by him than we are at the moment of faith. That’s an encouraging thing. And nothing can take us from that. Nothing can remove it. That’s an encouragement that we can have. That’s a consolation that we can have in the greatest trials and difficulties of life. Do you have that consolation, which is another way of asking have you believed in Jesus Christ because only the believer in Christ, those who are in Him, have such encouragement. If not then we invite you to believe in Him. It’s all one must do to obtain forgiveness and everlasting life. It’s put your faith in Him. Trust in Him. Christ is the eternal Son of God and became a man and died in the place of sinners. He bore the penalty of sin in their place and all who believe in Him at that very moment are free from that penalty and they are forever secure. That’s consolation. May God give you that encouragement and consolation.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that we, as believers in Jesus Christ, have a firm foundation – a foundation in Him, our Rock, and then Your Word, which is inherent. And we pray, Lord, that we become greater students of it and we conform more to the image of Your Son. We thank you for Him, for His death for us, and we serve Him and your people faithfully. We pray these things in Christ’s name, Amen.