



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Various

“William Ames and the Unanswered *Marrow of Theology*, Part II” TRANSCRIPT

[Introduction of Dr. Johnson] I want to say that I have thoroughly enjoyed his ministry to us these I think its four years now in a row. There are not too many people in this world that I have the affection for that I have for Dr. Johnson. I mean that with all of my heart. I heard him for several years, the tape ministry like most of you got acquainted with him, I'm sure, and I loved him before I ever met him. And what I loved about him was - well part of what I loved about him was his pure attention to the text. [Laughter] His exegetical method was a model, it was an immense help to me, there are a lot of people in this world who have been helped in that same way, learning to look at the text, learning to let it speak for itself. Many people, I meet them quite often, many people have come to understand the doctrines of grace because of Dr. Johnson's ministry.

I told him this morning at breakfast, I think one of the reasons God put him here on this earth is that he would give us an understanding of the atonement, and he has done a marvelous job of that for years, like he did this morning. And I appreciate that. Every year I ask him if he'll come back again next year and he breaks my heart every time. His answer is always the same, “Fred, I'd be glad to come back if I'm still alive.” [Laughter] I don't like to hear that. If I ever hear the news that he has gone, something in

me will die. I have thoroughly appreciated his ministry, we're glad to have him. Come preach for us again please.

[Johnson Lecture] Well thank you very much. I'm not really into this clapping.
[Laughter] I was in a meeting recently in Dallas in South Lake. It's a large church and a nice church. And the men who are carrying on the ministry there in the place of leadership are real good men. But every time anything is done there's clapping going on. I don't understand that. That's more different than Calvinistic text to understand
[Laughter], why we should clap. But anyway, I appreciate your feelings, I'm not yet into that. [Laughter]

Incidentally, Believers Chapel still has a lot of tapes. I'm no longer officially connected with the leadership of Believers Chapel but Martha and I attend. Now we'd like to say this, we started carrying on that ministry in about nineteen - say about 1965 or so. I was still at the Theological Seminary and a lot of these things that were going on in my mind are represented in the tapes. In other words, you probably can find a tape in which my interpretation is not what it would be today. Although I think you would also find many in which the opposite interpretation is found with reference to the atonement because I taught for 30 years at Dallas Seminary teaching most of the time as New Testament Professor but also then for some years as Professor of Systematic Theology. And so these questions concerning the atonement began to resonate in my mind and heart from the exegesis of the text, the Greek text we are talking about, not the English text. The Greek text. And finally over a period of time I was forced by my convictions in signing the doctrinal statement. You had to sign the doctrinal statement every year at Dallas Seminary. But you'd have to sign the doctrinal statement that you agreed with the doctrinal statement. And they would put, "With what provisions do you have disagreement." But it was pretty well known if anyone ever put down disagreement with regard to the atonement, that was the end. And we proved that that was the case.

[Laughter] And so I would like to say this: I think honestly that Dr. Walvord did not want me to leave the seminary. But they were put in position of having to do it because that's what they had been doing for years. As far as I know they still do it but I have no way of really knowing.

So in the tape ministry at Believers Chapel which began long before that, I left in 1977, in 1962 Believers Chapel began. So ten or fifteen years - well ten years at least of preaching, I was an Amyraldian. Now many of you know Amyraldism, the name is associated with Maurice Amyraut French theologian, Moses Amyraut. His Latin name was Amyraldus and that's why Amyraldism or Amyraldianism is the term that is used for four point Calvinism historically. In other words, all the points of Calvinism are genuinely believed except definite atonement. It has great appeal for a lot of people because how can you debate unconditional election with the Bible? If you just pay attention to the text that's simple. All the other parts of Calvinist as we know them, simple. But the intent of the atonement or definite atonement, particular redemption, this is something very difficult for a lot of people to believe. And so Amyraldism is an attempt to legitimately accept the four points of Calvinism but renege on the fifth point that Christ died for the world but unconditional election, total depravity, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints, Amyraldians accept thoroughly and earnestly.

Now if you just think for one moment, that is the most inconsistent theological system that you could have. For this reason, please remember it: the Father elects a particular people. The Spirit brings that particular people to the knowledge of our Lord as savior. But the savior dies for all. How inconsistent could you possibly be? There's a disagreement, a dissonance you might say, in the trinity itself, they're working at cross purposes. Now I wrestle with that a good bit because, you know, you have lots of texts that appear to teach an indefinite atonement or a general atonement. But it's not very happy to be in that position if you run into one of you fellows. [Laughter] Now at a theological seminary, of course, I could hold that and they would not know enough since

they were not taught these points to make it embarrassing for me. Except occasionally somebody would slip in [Laughter] who was a Calvinist consistently, Gary Long was one. And Gary and I engaged in a lot of discussions. And he was always embarrassing me [Laughter] because I had to rethink some of these things. So if you get the tapes from Believers Chapel you might find some of the ministry is from that background. But ever since the ministry began it did - we did embrace all of the points of sovereign grace as I understood them except the intent of the atonement. And then in the latter years from about 1976 or 1977 that began to be cleared up in the tape ministry as well.

Now today we want to in this hour pick up right where we were at chapter 5 of 2 Corinthians, verse 15. And I'd like to read verse 16 through verse 19,

“Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; and old things have passed away; behold, (notice that word ‘behold’. Look, look,) all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

These words that the apostle writes here in this great section on reconciliation - incidentally this is not Paul's only section. In Romans chapter 5 the apostle says some things that should be compared with the doctrine of reconciliation as set forth here, which in doctrinal content they underscore the apostle's concept of the ministry that God gave him. For example, worldly distinctions are no proper norm of Christian estimation of men and things. Verse 16 says, “Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.” God alone is savior, verse 18. “Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us

to himself.” Human redemption fulfills his eternal purposes. Verse 17, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Mine is a rebel, verse 18, “Now all things are of God who has reconciled us, (the world. He’s talking now, remember,) us to himself,” and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. What a challenge, all these rebels out there. The cross is absolutely necessary, verse 18, “Now all things are of God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ.” Verse 19, “That God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.”

Now that is, I think, exceedingly important because sometimes we hear the ministry of the word of God and there’s very little about the cross in it. And you wonder just place the cross has in the one proclaiming the message but it’s impossible to talk about Christianity as we know it without the cross. The apostle said, I determine not to know anything and then you say Jesus Christ and him crucified. In fact, with the Corinthians he only wanted to expound the cross to them because that’s the fundamental thing. The first thing that we should be talking about when we’re talking about people who are not yet in Christ.

Jesse Berkhower in his writings, there are many good things. He said with reference to this matter, “That if righteousness is by the law then Christ is guilty of, quote, ‘Throwing his life away.’” One of my teachers, my -- this is going to upset some people, particularly in this camp -- my beloved teacher, Lewis Sperry Chafer, now I’m going to tell you why he’s beloved to me. Dr. Chafer never had a theological class in his life. He became a Bible teacher after he had spent a good bit of time traveling around with evangelists, like Moody and others, he knew them all personally. He was a singer, his degree from college was in music. If you go back to some of the older hymn books you will find hymns written by L.S. Chafer and his wife, and she was a musician too. But this man listened to Moody and others and God had given him an interest in theology. He never was a great theologian but what he was great at was steering people to believe in

grace as he understood it. And it's remarkable when you think about a man who had a degree in music ultimately becomes the founder and president of a theological seminary with literally thousands of students in session, and scores of thousands all over this world. Many of them consist of Calvinists now.

We know where Dr. Chafer fell short, but he was a man of faith and that institution lived for the years of 1924 when it was founded until 1952 as an institution of faith. No appeals for funds were sent out. Think of that. Think of the theological seminaries today who pester you with appeal after appeal after appeal for funds. And churches and movements, well you cannot find - there may be one that slipped by when Dr. Chafer was out of town on meetings, but they never appealed for funds. They suffered; at times they were in debt. But nevertheless, Dr. Chafer was a man of faith. He was a George Mueller kind of man because he hoped that the seminary would be that kind of a seminary. The successor, a good man, changed things when he became his successor. And now you can get all the appeals for funds that you would like to have. [Laughter] Some of them very appealing. [Laughter] They are pretty, they're done in first class style, so if you like that kind of thing you can do it. I don't like it. Our church doesn't appeal for funds, I don't believe we should appeal for funds. I think that's the best test of all of your faith in Christ. You've got to work, you're preaching the word, you are going to look to the Lord for help and it's a good, it seems to me, I don't - there are others who don't understand what I understand, and I understand that, I don't get mad at that and people. And people that send me appeals I have some, many times, keep giving them money because they need it. But they don't know what I think. I know about money and the Lord's work. I just feel, deep down in my heart, if God is with you in what you're doing he will supply the needs that you or your work have. You may struggle, you may have to get down on your knees and pray a little bit and you may find it difficult, but there is a great satisfaction in seeing the Lord supply the needs. And Believers Chapel is an institution like that and still is like that. They do pass the plate

Sunday morning, that is the only thing they do. No I take that back, Martha is shaking her head, we don't pass the plate. We pass it Sunday night at the Lord's Supper meeting.

Thank you Martha.

So anyway, I mentioned Dr. Chafer because there are many things that Dr. Chafer said that were real good and one of the things he told us, and I remember him saying this statement in class, he said with reference to Galatians chapter 2, and verse 21, he said, “That if righteousness is to be found in the keeping of the Law of Moses, then the cross is the greatest blunder in the history of the universe.” This is the text in Galatians 2, and verse 21, I'm sure you know it, and with Dr. Chafer agreeing with Berkhower or Berkhower agreeing with Dr. Chafer, you have at least two theologians, two Calvinists, Dr. Chafer was a Presbyterian minister and considered himself a Calvinist, in verse 21 the apostle in Galatians 2 makes this statement, “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

So the cross is necessary, the cross touches the world in verse 19, for we read, “That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” And then, finally, the ministers of the gospel are under obligation to proclaim that message, for verse 19 says, “That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us, (themenos, the Greek work tithemi, themenos, has committed to us, 'has deposited with us,' you could render it,) the word of reconciliation.”

So this is a richly theological passage, isn't it, 2 Corinthians chapter 5. The key term of the apostle is reconciliation. A position of an attitude of amity from enmity toward God by the cross of Christ. Closely related to justification because not only here do we have it, verse 19, “That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them,” but also in Romans chapter 5, the same connection

between reconciliation and justification is found. So it's closely associated to it, with it, with one another.

Now, John Wesley wrote some great hymns. We all love them. I don't want to criticize the general hymns that Mr. Wesley and others wrote. He wrote one called *Arise My Soul, Arise* and it has this stanza, “My God is reconciled, his pardoning voice I hear, he owns me for his child, I can no longer fear, with confidence I know draw nigh, And, Father, Abba, Father, cry! And Father, Abba, Father, cry!” But that very first line is wrong. “My God is reconciled,” he needs no reconciliation. It is we who need reconciliation.

Now that's a debated point and there are some things that might be said otherwise, but now you have my opinion. It doesn't settle anything except perhaps Martha's viewpoint. So my God is reconciled, no. The reconciliation problem rests right here, to be reconciled to our heavenly Father who has elected a certain body of people. We can sing, sing it over and over again, “Christ receiveth sinful men, make the message clear and plain, Christ receiveth sinful men.”

Now Paul has spoken of compelling love, the love of Christ compels us, and of no longer living to self. Now the consequences that have issued from that and from identification with him in his cross work follow, verse 16 and verse 17, the consequences of identification with Jesus Christ. Verse 16, “Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone, (he loves 'therefore'.) Therefore, if anyone, is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

The word therefore, incidentally, is not a common word. As a matter of fact, it's a result conjunction, *hoste*, so then. But as you can see it's closely related to an “ara” or an “oun” which do mean therefore. So he talks about knowledge after the Spirit in verse 16, “Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now, henceforth, we know him no longer.”

There is no reference to pre-conversion knowledge of the Lord. What he's talking about is knowledge formed by external mistaken norms as a heretical, turbulent teacher. In other words, when he says, “We don't know people according to the flesh,” he's not talking about before his conversion, he's talking about what has happened now that he's come to understand the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now he knows him as the representative man. And now he knows him as the substitute. The great substitute. And so as a result of identification with him in his death, there is knowledge now after the Spirit instead of after the flesh. And further, there is a new creation. In verse 17, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

Philip Hughes has written a very good commentary on 2 Corinthians, and he says what he's talking about is a reborn micro chasm belonging to an eschatological micro chasm of the new heavens and the new earth. That's good seminary language. [Laughter] Now we are a reborn micro chasm belonging to the eschatological micro chasm of the new heavens and the new earth. What we are to be, we're part of now, so Professor Hughes, who has a good book, incidentally, has written it. The eternal purposes are fulfilled, this is a momentary act, necessary act, and has necessary results when we pass from one sphere to the other one. Now we have a new song to sing, a new home to look forward to, and all of the other things that flow when we believe in Christ. Dr. Chafer used to teach us thirty-three things happened when a person believed in Christ. And you can look in his theological books, his set, and there will be thirty-three things that happened when you believed in Jesus Christ. It may not have been thirty-three, it may have been only thirty-two or thirty-one, or twenty-nine, or thirty-four, or thirty-five. But there are quite a few things that did happen when you believed in Christ. And all the students at the seminary back in the old days had to learn those thirty-three things that happened when you believed in Christ. And I later found some flaws in it so I don't remember now. [Laughter] I passed them by. I could probably run up a nice little string

of things that happen when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are a new creation and that the apostle would certainly agree with. So, a new creation.

Mr. Spurgeon has - the man has begun a new life. A convert once said, “Even the world is altered, or else I am.” [Laughter] And we know, of course, actually what did happen. There is an old brethren Bible teacher, that is, of the Plymouth Brethren, W. T. P. Wolston, you can still get some of his books. He was a very good preacher of the gospel and was a very fruitful man. And he told the story of a doctor who had delivered many babies but was now dying. So he called for his pastor and told him of his burden and concern over his life. And the pastor assured him, so Mr. Wolston said, that there was nothing really to worry about. He’d lived a good life and so he didn’t have to worry. But he, to his pastor, said, “Didn’t Jesus speak about being born again? Didn’t he speak about a new birth?” “Well yes,” the pastor said, but he assured him that he was sure of heaven and by reason of his good life and so he was reported to have said to his pastor, “Pastor, I’ve delivered many babies thinking as I delivered them, this baby has a future but no past. That’s what I need.” That’s what we are provided with, a future with no past.

So, now there’s one other point I want you to know. Some of these little points the apostle suggests from his literature pertain to the church today. Here’s one: “Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature, (or creation,); old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Now I would suggest with other that when the apostle says, “Behold, all things have become new,” that that’s a kind of spontaneous jubilation which he inserts in his letter to the Corinthians. “Look! All things have become new.” Mr. Denny, who was a British theologian, has said, “That’s one throb of that glad surprise that awaits us.”

You know, you often go into churches and you will find churches sort of dead. Some mornings our church is kind of like that, it seems. But lots of churches you go in and they just seem to be a little dead. And so we have all kinds of suggestions today,

what we need is more music, we need more discussion and not so much preaching, we need discussion. We don't need entirely theology, give us a little psychology also, free of charge. [Laughter] We want those types of things that keep us interested.

Now we know, if you have any - if you've been in churches any length of time you know that that's no answer. If you want to go for philosophy and psychology and all of the kinds of music that we have today, pretty soon the poor word of God is shuttled aside and there's very little treatment, seriously, of the word that our Lord has given us. So I thought a little bit about this and do you know, I've noticed this: in a church where there are people who have been freshly brought into the family of God, there's a lot of joy. A lot of joy, a lot of life, a lot of newness. So I like to say, we don't need music, we don't need special interests in that type of thing, and we certainly don't need psychology. What we need is more preaching of the word of God and more conversions and the happiness that comes, the genuine happiness, the spontaneous jubilation the apostle notes here, that causes them to say, “Look! All things have become new.” This is really what our churches need. They need this. This produces what you think, perhaps, psychology and music would produce.

So, see right in all the midst of all this heavy theology, so we are told, it's not heavy to me, it's the greatest thing in the world, lifts a person up. Makes them feel marvelous to know the truth of God. Anyway, that's the answer, in one sense, maybe not the only answer, to the question of love in the church. Churches that are said to have no love, well one of the reasons is not much conversion that takes place. Love, that is, genuine, Christian love, makes a difference.

Now the apostle says in verse 18, “All things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” Well, the source of this great transformation is God. “Now all things are of God.” John Chrysostom has a statement that I think I would like to read it if I can find it, and I thought it was an excellent statement. I may have to

declare an intermission in order to find it [Laughter], but nevertheless, it's a great statement and I'm not going to be able to find it. Oh here it is.

[Hallelujah from audience]

[Johnson] Oh that doesn't deserve a hallelujah [Laughter] but at least an amen. “Nothing of ourselves,” says Chrysostom in a fine passage, “Nothing is of ourselves for remission of sins and adoption and unspeakable glory are given to us by him. But behold, a new soul, for it was cleansed, and also a new body and a new worship, and new promises, and covenant, and life, and table, and dress, and all things absolutely new. For instead of Jerusalem below, we have the mother city which is above, and instead of the material temple and instead of tables of stone, fleshy tables, instead of circumcision, baptism,” why do we have to ruin a great passage? [Laughter] You see, this is the kind of thing the church fathers corrupted the church with. But baptism is the means by which we receive eternal life, and the blessings of life. It's found in the Roman Catholic Church because when an infant is brought to the pastor and the water is sprinkled upon the infant, according to Rome, at that point righteousness is infused into the infant. Infundo is the Latin term that is used, infundo. This is the whole heart of ECT, incidentally. Can we unite with a group of people whose official doctrine that cannot be changed because it is infallible; the Pope has assured us of that, it's infallible. Can we unite with people who believe that baptism is the means by which we receive eternal life? We cannot, and hold true to the Scriptures of God.

You can see how it came into the early church. Chrysostom, a fine man, but there it is. Instead of circumcision, baptism. I didn't intend to stress this, but there it is. He goes on to say, “Instead of the manner, the Lord's body, instead of water from the rock, blood from the side, instead of Moses and Aaron's rod, the cross, instead of the Promised Land, the Kingdom of Heaven, instead of a thousand priests, one high priest, instead of a

lamb without understanding, a spiritual lamb. But all these things are of God, by Christ, and his free gift.” Many good things, John Chrysostom said.

Now we go on here, I have to get to verse 19. “That is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.” God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. That’s evident that the cross is the means by which this marvelous reconciliation takes place. If no wrath is born there, it was an exhibition of cruelty and injustice. But the wrath of God is born there, reconciling the world.

Now notice, reconciling the world. So in one sense the world is reconciled. In what sense? It has to be because this is - you couldn’t have a reconciliation that does not reconcile and world is the object of the verb. So I might look at this and I say, well I’m not the them of verse 19, the same as the ones receiving righteousness in verse 21, “Reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them.” In verse 21, “For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” So is not them, the them of verse 19, a reference to those who receive righteousness? Well yes, it is.

Now I want you to notice, do you believe that everybody is going to be saved? No. I don’t think there’s anybody like that who slipped in here. [Laughter] You know that there is a particular people for which our Lord has died, at least that’s your opinion. But it says, “Reconciling the world to himself.” Now furthermore, you’ll notice in verse 19 he says, “Reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them. So what kind of world is this? This is world - the world of people who have their sins not imputed to them. This is the world of believing people. So the world is not everybody without exception, but everyone without distinction; Jews and gentiles. It’s simple, it’s just as simple as it can be. Reconciling the world to them, not imputing their trespasses to them.

Now if you believe in universal salvation, you might find some reason in that text. At least you’d have one text that you could appeal to. You’d be wrong, of course, but you could appeal to it. It looks good on the spur of the moment. You see how

important it is, my Christian friends, to pay attention to the text? It's very important. In fact, if you can, have pure attention to the text. [Laughter] At any rate, so what happens in this reconciling action is the ensuring of the remission of sins of a particular body and it cannot have, as John Murray used to say, “Since this reconciling action ensures remission because offenses are not reckoned to them, it cannot have a broader reference than its unfailing issue.” And what is the unfailing issue? A limited body of believing people. So it cannot be more than that because the reconciling action is an operative action that succeeds in its operation. It does reconcile the world. But the world is not saved except in the sense all kinds of people in the world. The world, not simply gentiles. Jews and gentiles, not simply Jews, Jews and gentiles. That's the point of the apostle. It's obvious. Just look at the little clause, “Not reckoning their offenses or imputing their trespasses to them.” It's so simple if you just pay attention to the text. I shouldn't have taken that [indistinct] this morning. It's designed to take liquid out of you, possibly, I guess. I don't take it normally otherwise I'd have never taken it here if I knew what would happen. I'm enjoying this water. [Laughter] Sorry I can't offer you more. [Laughter]

So, what does world mean? Well, Charles Hodge says man, not reconciling man or mankind. That is, it's a class of people that he refers to. Toward which he's propitious. Augustine refers this to the elect. He was correct in that respect. Dr. Chafer used to like to say, “This is a text that says that all men are savable.” Well how do they get saved? Well, they're kind of left to themselves. Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield has a few things to say about that. No, it doesn't mean savable, the world is all savable. He's talking about a definite body as is evident. Some have suggested this is a cosmic act. That is, he's the last Adam addressing the work of the first. Well, in some sense that's true. But what it means exegetically and clearly from the text is, all mankind without distinction, not without exception. All mankind, Jews and gentiles. All mankind without distinction.

“William Ames and the Unanswered *Marrow of Theology*, part II” by S. Lewis Johnson
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That’s clear, my friends, because it says, “Not imputing their trespasses to them.” Unless you are a Universalist then we have other texts we have in the Scriptures for you. So the world. Now I know my time is up, I have so much more I could say to you but we won’t do that. Thank you John, I appreciate that.

[Comment from audience member] I think that means you’re not supposed to stop, you’re right on. [Laughter]

[Johnson] No, I’ll tell you what it means, is I have a further helper besides my wife [Laughter] who has been...

[Comment from audience member indistinct]

[Johnson] Well that’s mighty nice of you, I’m not sure I need all of that. I’m not going to go much longer. I want, however, before I close, to ask you to turn to Luke chapter 15. I’m really through, I’ve told you everything that I know, basically, [Laughter] about these texts. I only want to say this, that I struggled with this for a long time. As I mentioned to you, teaching New Testament exegesis for many years at Dallas, one thing that Dr. Chafer wondered - he didn’t know Greek. He knew a few Greek words. He would occasionally throw them into his message. Occasionally mispronounce them. I can remember he used to talk about *pleroma* in his messages. But he was so - he felt so disqualified for ministry by not knowing Greek that when he founded his seminary he determined that those men should know Greek and Hebrew. So they had double the Greek and Hebrew that most seminaries have. And today, maybe three times as much, except they too are beginning now to cut down on Greek. When I arrived you had to have a year of Greek before you could come in the seminary. Then in the seminary he thought three years at the seminary is not enough. So the seminary was four years.

Well my friends could have said, “Those fellows are so ignorant they need four, [Laughter] whereas the rest of us can get it in three.” I imagine that was said. But anyway, we had - we came in with Greek and we had to have four more years. Every man who graduated from Dallas Seminary, they had five years of Greek. He had three years of Hebrew, everyone. A lot of them had to drop out, they were not really qualified for that. They may have come out with some big deficiencies in theology but they came out with a lot of knowledge of Greek and Hebrew. And so constantly in the seminary in the department of New Testament we had courses teaching exegetically the Greek text of the various books of the Bible, 2 Corinthians was one. I devoted thirty lectures to 2 Corinthians when we taught that. And we went through the text. So I’m kind of familiar with some of those things, but all that time I was puzzling over definite atonement. It made me puzzle over it. I had to exegete these passages. And we had Calvinists slip in, I mean consistent Calvinists, slip into our student body and they would - we’d come to these passages and I would explain them. He’d say, “Dr. Johnson,” and then I would of course have to find out what this text really said because I couldn’t answer some of the problems that were offered to me. And this passage was one I was troubled with.

Thomas Goodwin once said, with reference to this text, that there were two men standing before God and these two men, Adam and Christ, had all men hanging at their girdle. In other words, God has dealt with two men, with Christ, with Adam. And so this text more on that point. The parable I want to conclude with is this, verse 11 through verse 32. Luke, giving the words of our Lord, says,

“Then He said: A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to the father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me. So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went

and joined himself to a certain citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to my Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to him, (he didn't even let him get the words out of his mouth,) but the father said to his servants, Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let's eat and be merry, (whoever heard that they stopped,) for this my son was dead and is alive again; and he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry, (I say, no one ever heard of them stopping.) Now his older son was in the field, (you know the story of the older son, I won't read it all, but at the end of his coming, that is verse 30 and 31,) But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him. And he said to him, Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.”

I've always felt that that's a beautiful illustration of the doctrine of reconciliation. The father is the important person in it. In verse 11 Jesus said, as he began to tell the story, a certain man had two sons.” He might demand anything as a condition for return, at least confession. Verses 18 and 19, “I will arise and go to my father and I will say to him,” and he's got his confession all made up, he doesn't even get to give his confession

to the father. The father in the dignity of compassion, verse 18 and verse 19, gathers his garments up and unashamedly ran. Smothering the confession of his son and rewards him as his heart desires. This is Jesus Christ's picture of God. This is his picture of the Lord God in heaven. He waits, he hopes, he sees, he runs, he kisses, and there is reconciliation and they begin to be merry and they've never stopped so far as we know. That's the world that the apostle is talking about when he talks about the reconciliation of the world. It's the world of his people who come ultimately to him.

Thank you for listening to an old man. It's been a pleasure to be here with you. I'm not sure I chose the right subject, but I'll tell you one thing, that's a good text. [Laughter] That is a good text. And I hope that in your conversations with others you might be able better to explain some of the passages that people think of as difficult but which, when one studies them and ponders them, become supports for the ministry of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ.

[Comment from the audience] Anyone have any questions you'd like to come to the microphone?

[Question from the audience] I'd like to prep my question with a couple of comments. Right at that time in 1977 I was at Lancaster Bible College and I well remember...

[Johnson] What college?

[Comment from the same audience member] Lancaster Bible College. A letter that you had written to one of your former students when we learned of your leaving and that time I was going through the same struggle. And I would like for a moment, and just so you understand that we are in agreement today on these things, but for the benefit of

everyone here and for myself I'd like to hear an answer from you to a question that I might have asked back then. So if I could just step back to pre-1977 and pretend I'm an Amyraldian once again, and in that same passage if I were an Amyraldian and an advocate for that at this point, I might say to you, we as Christians when we go to people from the word of God we say Jesus has accomplished a finished work, believe, and we command him from the word of God to believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we would describe his work using various words like propitiation, redemption, and reconciliation. But we don't go to people and command them to be redeemed. However, if we were to continue in this passage, having established that reconciliation is a finished work and that he actually really reconciled as a substitute, then why would we be going to men in the following verses with the word of reconciliation as ambassadors for Christ commanding them, “Be reconciled to God,” as if it were not done.

[Johnson] Well let me say this, that the message, “Be reconciled,” is the message that the man is to proclaim to people who are not reconciled. But what he is saying there is language that is addressed to believers already. But you are, as a preacher of the gospel, you stand behind the pulpit and you proclaim, “Be reconciled to God,” Paul is talking to Corinthians and he is treating them as reconciled. So if you are speaking to believers you can talk to them as reconciled. But if you're talking to unbelievers you cannot talk to them as reconciled.

I don't know whether that answers your question, that's all I can say. [Laughter]

[Comment from the same audience member] I'll be thinking on it. [Laughter]

[Question from the audience] In your coming to understand the truth of limited atonement, most of us struggled for a long time as you did. How do we help people? What's the thing that was the biggest stumbling block to you that you've struggled with

that obviously other people struggle with and how can we so present the truth of limited atonement that only God can open a man's heart but at least we can take the obstacle's out of the way and not put delivered obstacles in his way. So your own experience, what was the biggest struggle that you had, whether it was textual or theological or whatever?

[Johnson] Well the biblical struggle I had was the fact that I was teaching constantly the books of the New Testament and so I was facing all of the problem texts. The passages in 1 John, for example, 1 John, too, 1 and 2, every time I taught the course on the Epistles of John which came up every two years I knew I had to face that particular text. I was - I excelled in Arminian interpretations in the sense that until I began to see that they did not really hold water. So I would be - students would always ask when we'd come to that text - from the beginning I really fell into the Amyraldian camp because I did believe in unconditional election. I believed in irresistible grace. I believed in the perseverance of the saints, although I generally thought of it as eternal security. And I believed in total depravity. I was converted through Donald Grey Barnhouse who himself acknowledge he believed those and then used to preach on five points of Calvinism which he didn't fully understand. And so I just got used to those texts and as they would come up I would be prepared with an Arminian interpretation. I didn't know it as an Arminian interpretation. I know it simply as a way by which a Calvinist, four point Calvinist, could defeat those he wanted to overthrow all of the Calvinism that I had. So that was a constant problem.

And so through those years in the Epistle of the Romans, for example, I taught every year, that was a required course every year. 1 Corinthians was taught every year. The prison epistles, we taught every year. And Hebrews was taught every year. So every year we'd have these same questions from the students. “Dr. Johnson, what about verse 1 and 2, in 1 John, for example, of the various things.” So I just - I got very skilled in answering things that were really I found out later were problems I didn't answer. But if

you'd have asked me what is the best Arminian interpretation of the passage, I know that because I had to try to answer it.

So I think I had a kind of specialized background. I had to face things constantly from a position that was not really soundly based. That's why. I'm thankful for that, but I perspired a lot. [Laughter] But fortunately the students didn't really want to believe the other - we had a few. Like, as I said, Gary Long and some others came through who were Calvinists. They'd been trained. Usually in every entering class we would have maybe one or two who were convinced Calvinists. And so I was so close, we were friends, but we had these constant little battles going on all the time. Tried to keep them friendly. I learned a lot from them.

[Question from the audience] My question has to do with reconciliation. You said that God needed not be reconciled to man, but man need to be reconciled with God. If you could just expound on it. I've wrestled with this for a long time and I it had always seemed to me that a holy God, righteous in all his ways and perfect in every way, could never be reconciled to a sinner unless something was done. And so I always pictured it back and forth with God being reconciled with man and man being reconciled with God.

[Johnson] Well that's a very difficult question to answer because there are certain things that can be said for the other viewpoint. And you'll find it in most of the Christian theologies because they do differ over that point. Does God need to be as - is it necessary for God to be reconciled or is it man who must be reconciled? And I can only tell you my viewpoint. There are other things that could be said. On the spur of the moment I'd have to go back into my memory in teaching the doctrine I used to set forth the other side. But there are very fine Christian theologians who felt that there is a sense in which God must be reconciled. My feeling is that the cross of Jesus Christ is that which settles the question of God's demands as far as man is concerned. If you might say that

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the reconciliation that he had was satisfied by the blood of Christ on Calvary's cross and the message now is for man to be reconciled with reference to the message.

I would suggest that you look at some of the Christian theologies on that point because it's not an easy question on the spur of the moment. I'd have to go back and look at some things too...

[RECORIDNG ENDS ABRUPTLY]