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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Peter 3:9

"Openness Theology"

TRANSCRIPT

[Introduction of Dr. Johnson] Many of you know that I grew up in a pastor's home, and my dad was a Bible preacher. And I suppose that I never could learn more from anyone than I learned from. But outside of my father, Dr. S. Lewis Johnson is my first Bible teacher. I have learned more from this man than I think anyone living. I told him Sunday that I almost died from overexposure to S. Lewis Johnson tapes from Believers Chapel back twenty-some years ago when I was first introduced to him through the tape ministry of the chapel. And he was a tremendous help to me. In fact, I've confessed to the people at Word of Life that they heard Dr. Johnson preach many times before he was ever at our church in Pennsylvania. [Laughter] He just always had a tremendous influence on me, and I have always appreciated him for that.

Dr. Carson today on the way to the airport referred to Dr. Johnson as the conference patriarch. John Reisinger thought he was the patriarch. [Laughter] But he has been replaced. Dr. Johnson is a beloved friend of the conference. He has been with us now for several years running, and we hope it's many more years to come as well. Dr. Johnson will you come?

[Johnson lecture] Well that was a nice introduction. I hope the message is half as good.
[Laughter] I have been interested recently in some of the texts that the openness theology people are using and therefore have been giving myself to a study of some of them. Sometimes a restudy of them in the light of some of the things that they've been saying. And so it's natural to think about 2 Peter 3 and verse 9, because that is a big thing for them. So what I'm going to do, since I finished this paper, it hasn't been published. I know when I was in theological seminary I was never too excited about someone reading a paper. But nevertheless I submitted in order to graduate.

Now, you don't have the incentive of graduation, but I hope you will at least pay some attention to the fact that this is a paper that I have written and have written with a purpose. It will be published, but it touches on a text that's important, is one of their texts so to speak. And I think it needs a very good response on a fairly good level. Now some of you it may be a little difficult for you to follow everything that I'm saying, and if it is I want you just to sit back and relax and enjoy my Southern accent. [Laughter] And if you should happen to fall asleep, of course, that's profit in one way at least. But my topic is openness theology and 2 Peter 3:9. And I am going to read it. I hope you will be patient enough to let me do this, because I want to do it accurately.

"Within professing evangelicalism there has been occurring a significant discussion over what has been called 'Openness Theology,' and the discussion has been the catalyst for a large amount of division and denunciation on the part of the participants in the debate. The debate is a growing debate, and now involves many evangelical college and seminary faculties as well as many knowledgeable pastors and teachers in professing evangelical churches. Among the most active participants in the discussions and debates are Clark Pinnock, perhaps no surprise, Professor of Theology at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario; Richard Rice, Professor of Theology at La Sierra University in Riverside, California; John Sanders, Associate

Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Huntington College, Huntington, Indiana; William Hasker, Professor of Philosophy also at Huntington College, Huntington, Indiana; and David Basinger, Professor of Philosophy at Roberts Wesleyan College, Rochester, New York.

And now one of the major catalysts for the spreading of the issues raised by Openness Theology is the relatively recent book being pushed by the evangelical Baker Book House entitled, *God of the Possible* subtitled *A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. What is interesting about this too is the fact that Baker Publishing House is publishing it because Baker Publishing House was founded as a Publishing house to push reformed theology. So, it's a rather remarkable change for them. So far as I know they've not gone along this line, but they are going that way with a vengeance at the present time.

The theological ground of this theology is the centuries old theology of Jacobus Arminius, or Jakob Harmenszoon, the Dutch theologian we know as Arminius, educated at Leiden, Basil, Geneva, who has become regarded as the head of the form of theology that has most fiercely challenged Calvinism for the accolade for the type of theology most representative of Christian theology. Coupled with the aspects of Arminianism found in this new system is a clear borrowing from the ancient heresy of Socinianism, particularly with respect to the supposed limitation of God's omniscience. In fact the link with Socinianism is obvious in the language used to describe the limitation of God's knowledge.

Let me try to illustrate this. It's well known that the Socinians, contrary to the majority of the Arminians, denied that God foresees the future free actions of men or that he knows anything about them until they actually come to pass, except, "It may be in some special cases in which contrary to his usual practice he has foreordained the event and foresees it because he has foreordained it." As a little sneaking Calvinism gets into the language of the Arminian. "They admitted that God knows all things that are knowable, but denied that future contingent events including the future actions of responsible agents are knowable by even an infinite divine being.

Accordingly, as Cunningham says, “Upon this ground they allege that it is no derogation from the omniscience of God that he does not and cannot know what is not knowable.” They think that in this way by denying the divine foreknowledge of future contingencies, they most effectually overturn the Calvinistic doctrine of God’s foreordaining whatsoever comes to pass, while they at the same time concede to the Calvinists in opposition to the Arminian view that God’s certain foreknowledge of the actions of men lays an immovable foundation for the position that he has foreordained them.

The following paragraph from Boyd illustrates the link of Open Theism with the views of Socinus and Socinians. He writes, “If God does not foreknow future free actions, it's not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It's because there is, in this view, nothing definite for God to know!” His lack of definite knowledge of the future free actions limits him no more than does the fact say, “He does not know that there is a monkey sitting next to me right now.” As a matter of fact there is no monkey sitting next to me, so it’s hardly ascribing ignorance to God to insist he doesn't know one is there. In just the same way, one is not ascribing ignorance to God by insisting that he doesn't foreknow future free actions if indeed the free actions do not exist to be known until free agents create them.

The title of “Openness Theology” is the new window dressing to do what window dressing is supposed to do, create a deceptively attractive impression. It is simply the latest model of Arminian and its doctrine of free will coupled with Socinian ideas of God’s foreknowledge and with all the old errors hiding underneath its fresh shiny pleasant appearing hood, evoking telling memory of Israel’s encounter with the Gibeonites who sought to deceive Joshua and the Israelites into thinking they had come a long way to Joshua’s camp in Gilgal when in fact they lived figuratively speaking just over the nearby mountain.

The “Openness Theology” is not an entirely new theology. It contains much of historic Christianity, but unfortunately it has been amalgamated with error. It is, in effect, to use Joshua’s

word concerning the Gibeonites, a ruse. The Socinian errors concerning the knowledge of God being coupled with the Arminian theology of human free will and wrapped in old clothes with worn out and patched sandals offering us the dry and moldy food of a theology without a divine and omniscient and all knowing Savior, holding in his hands an accomplished substitutionary atonement for his body, the church of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this paper however is not to evaluate in a comprehensive way “Openness Theology” but to critique further the exegetical flaws of the position. In almost all of the literature written by its defenders, there are lists of biblical passages that are offered in defense of the theological claim that God “wants,” that’s in quotes, “wants” all people to be saved. The “want” is not usually defined, but the clear sense implied is that God, the God of Scripture and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is seeking the salvation of all individuals and not of his elect alone. According to this understanding he has not been successful to the present time. The position is manifestly that of Arminianism, or to put it in another way, “Openness Theology” is clearly another instance of an attack on the Calvinistic understanding of the biblical teaching of God’s sovereign grace in human salvation.

One of the passages considered crucial to the propagators of this form of theology is Peter’s statement in 2 Peter 3:9 where the apostle writes, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” Now I want to stop here and say one of the reasons that I’m trying to do this and I hope we can get through it is the fact that it seems to me that in both Calvinistic theology today as well as in Arminian theology, there is a diminishing of the skill of exegetical understanding and exposition of the word of God. And I think it’s something that we need to cultivate, all of us, particularly those of us who are trying to expound the word of God. So, that has been one of my aims also.

Our text says then, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” That sounds like good Arminian theology. What is striking is the fact that this text by the adherence of “Openness Theology,” this text is one of the texts of which they make the largest use. That’s why I’ve chosen it. For example, in Boyd’s book, *God of the Possible*, this text, 2 Peter 3:9, is cited in at least ten places in the one book. In the book entitled, edited by Clark Pinnock and titled, *The Grace of God the Will of Man*, accompanied with the publisher’s description of it, the case for Arminian, in the index of scriptural references there again ten references to 2 Peter 3:9. So, if we can eliminate 2 Peter 3:9 from the thinking of these men, we have made at least a little bit of progress, and of course, this will open the way for others. They think 2 Peter 3:9 is one of their great texts, obviously. If we can eliminate this from their armory, we are weakening them at least it seems to be so in my opinion. There is little doubt that the adherence of “Openness Theology” considers the text to be a significant one for their theological view point. I consider it to be one also, for it’s a text that demands some exegetical and theological analysis, and in the debate over “Openness Theology” one of the things missing is careful consideration of the scriptural texts touching the debate. If you read their books, you’ll find that that is true. Is “Openness Theology” exegetically defensible? This paper is an attempt simply to contribute to the discussion, and I am going to concentrate now on 2 Peter 3:9, the text that is so often appealed to by them.

So if you have your Bibles before you, I want to say now a few words about this particular passage. I’m outlining it by saying that verses 1 and 4 represent the claims of the scoffers and then verses 1 and 2 there is a call to remember the prophets and the apostles. So Peter at the beginning of the 3rd chapter turns his attention to another of what he has called “destructive heresies,” to be brought by the false teachers. In chapter 2 verse 1 he makes the point. His attention is still directed to the Libertines for it is the natural result of a walk after the

flesh to deny the second coming of Jesus Christ. The apostle therefore desires by his 2nd epistle to stimulate his beloved fellow believers to remember and reflect upon “The words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command of our Lord and Savior through your apostles.”

It is very evident from the following words of the chapter that Peter anticipates a considerable emphasis upon the preaching of future things, certainly enough to arouse the opposition of the scoffers for it is they who will be saying, where is the promise of his coming? “Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” It’s a precept for our times for today large segments Christendom constantly repeat, “Thy Kingdom come,” in the Lord’s Prayer, and that “He shall come to judge the quick and dead” of the apostle’s creed believe little of it. It may help to set out a brief survey of the apostle’s comments in chapter 3 that lead up the text under consideration. He acknowledges in verses 1 and 2 that his letters to his readers who are defined as “believing recipients of God’s electing grace,” by the term “beloved.”

Now that’s very important. You know in studying the Bible it is important to pay attention to the terms of the passage. Now just keep your eye on the term “beloved,” and if you will follow through and stay away during the lecture you will at the end of it be smarter than some of the “Openness” theologians as far as 2 Peter chapter 3 is concerned.

So I want to give you just a brief survey now of the verses that lead up to the text under consideration. In verses 3 and 4 he comments on the coming of the scoffers. The author considers it very important, in fact, one of the first things to keep in mind that in the future there shall come mockers walking with their mockery according to their own lusts and denying in direct contradiction of the prophets and the genuine apostles the second coming of the Lord, verses 3 and 4. Evidently as Nisbet suggests that they might sin more securely. You know there may be something to that. Men do deny the second coming of our Lord in Jesus Christ; perhaps

that Nisbet said that they might sin with more of a sense of security. That’s not beyond the possibility is it?

Reduced to a syllogism, the reasoning of the scoffers would be something like this: Their major premise: since the time of creation the course of nature has remained unchanged. Their minor premise would follow as this: the second coming’s events would change this. The conclusion, thus, would be: the second coming, therefore, cannot come and consequently such a hope is a false one. The scoffers really have two arguments: First, the believer cannot account for the elapsed time since the promise of the coming, and every day adds force to their view. They can wake up every morning and say to us, “He still hasn't come. He still hasn't come.” The apostle will answer this contention in verses 8 through 10. Second, the believer cannot account for the undisturbed creation. Peter will deal with this problem in verses 5 through 7. There is no valid doctrine of uniformity according to him. “It is not necessary,” Richard Bauckham comments at this point, “to seek the background of the scoffers’ ideas in the Aristotelian belief in the imperishability of the world, which was denied by Epicureans and Stoics. They are not influenced by cosmology as much as by a rationalistic skepticism about divine intervention in the world, to which the Epicurean denial of providence seems the closest pagan parallel.

Now secondly in Peter’s argument and my outline, “The Cause of the Error,” 2 Peter 3 verse 5 through verse 7. The first point that Peter makes is that these individuals neglect the flood, verses 5 and 6. The “but” of verse 5 is the NIV’s rendering of a Greek particle that means “for,” and I prefer that rendering here. One of the sad things about modern translations is that occasionally they do go astray at important points that are not recognizable by the average person because often they miss little things like the “for’s” and the “therefore’s” which the original text has, and after all, arguments are based upon the little “for’s” and “therefore’s.” In fact if you do not follow an author’s argument in a careful way. You will not understand really what he’s trying

to say. So, have another translation beside the NIV which will give you some of those connecting points.

Well, at any rate, the cause of their error starts with the neglect of the flood. The “but” of verse 5 is the NIV’s rendering of a Greek particle that means “for,” and I prefer that rendering here. The result is that the opening words of the verse are better rendered that “for this deliberately escapes them,” followed then by the remainder of the verse, “that long ago by God’s word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water.” Very simply stated, the apostle’s argument against the scoffers’ contention that the believers cannot account for the elapsed time since the promise of the coming of the Lord nor for the undisturbed creation is given in verses 5 through 10. His answer to the claim by the scoffers of an undisturbed creation since the promises is given in verses 5 through 7 specifically. The mockers’ doctrine of uniformity is erroneous. They have forgotten the flood. They’ve said all things continue as they have been, but they’ve forgotten the flood.

As for the second argument, that the believers cannot account for the elapsed time since the promise of a cataclysmic change in the natural order of things, the apostle points his readers to the prophecies of the destruction of the present heavens and earth by fire in the day of God, referred to in verse 10 through verse 13. Thus, not only has the past suffered change, but the present shall, too.

Bauckham comments at this point, Bauckham incidentally has written a very useful commentary on 2 Peter, among other books as well, it’s the epistle of 2 Peter, I maybe he concludes Jude, *Word Biblical Commentary 2 Peter and Jude* is the title, and Richard Bauckham is a believing man. Bauckham comments at this point, “The world which now permits human life to flourish is far from guaranteed against a destructive reversion to chaos. But in the biblical perspective, human history is not at the mercy of chance and meaningless catastrophe. The God who created the cosmos out of chaos is in sovereign control of the forces of destruction. The

threat is the threat of God’s moral judgment, and even that judgment is not an end in itself, but for the sake of a new world of righteousness which he will once again create out of chaos.”

With verse 8 and verse 9 you will notice I call this “The Call to the Readers.” Peter does address his readers. And he tells them first of all to remember a relationship, “But beloved do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” This is the second of his replies to the scoffers given in this verse. As Cranfield puts it, “The faithful, it is they who are addressed, are to remember God’s eternity and not try to calculate his times by human measurements.” It is a wise word for the faithful, the ones Peter calls “beloved,” today. Time with God is not the same as time with man. “God’s clock,” Robertson points out, “does not run by our timepieces. The scoffers scoff ignorantly.”

Now secondly in his call to the readers to remember a reason, verse 9. “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering toward us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” What a nice Arminian text that might seem to be to a careless reader of the Bible, and one thing, I’m sorry I have to say this, I just have to say it, Arminians are frequently careless readers. And this is one of their texts. So, to remember a reason. “The Lord is not late in fulfilling the promise, according to some people’s idea of lateness, but he is forbearing toward you, because it is not his will that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” That does sound like an Arminian text of universal salvation. The scholars who have accepted “Openness Theology” and who, therefore, are almost all Arminians, contend that 2 Peter 3:9 is a text that supports the universal extent of the atonement but deny that the atonement is universal in saving effect. They teach generally that our Lord intended to make salvation possible for all, but the saving effect is realized only when a condition is met, such as faith and/or obedience. Calvinists, on the other hand, contend that the atonement has been accomplished for a definite people for whom Christ died and to each of whom its benefits are applied in God’s due time. “This view,” Godfrey has stated, “emerged

clearly among the followers of Augustine as a consequence of his teaching on sovereign, particular grace in salvation.”

Incidentally recently I’ve been both re-reading and reading some of Augustine’s works, particularly directed toward the free will people who were so much on his mind, and I recommend if you possibly can to read as many of his things that have to do with Pelagianism as you can. They are very useful. You will understand him. The things that he is writing about are things that are easily understood by a Bible student.

Now the renderings of 9, which is our verse, include these, I’m going to give a series of renderings and I’ll tell you what they come from. The first one, ““The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” That’s the NIV. Again, notice it’s, “Not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

The second, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” That’s the King James Version. Three, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” American Standard Version; Fourth, “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance,” the New American Standard Bible; Five, “It is not that the Lord is slow in fulfilling his promise, as some suppose, but that he is very patient with you, because it is not his will for any to be lost, but for all to come to repentance,” New English Bible; Six, “The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance,” the Revised Standard Version.

Well, for our purposes there is little to be concerned about beyond the rendering of the last clause, almost uniformly rendered as that “all” should come to repentance. The NIV has “everyone” for the almost uniform “all” and the RSV refers to “reaching” (repentance). It seems clear that the Lord according to the apostle is intensely interested in the ones identified as “all” coming to, or reaching, a state, or condition, defined as repentance. “All” is a great word for the Arminians isn't it? They love those “alls.” Well I love those “alls” too. We just careful in defining them. There is, however, according to the translators’ renderings a slight difference in the intensity of the Lord’s interest. In three of the renderings above, the Lord does not “wish” (the NIV has “wanting”) anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. Now when I think of the Lord “wishing,” even that diminishes the authority and person of our great God in heaven, but I pass by that. In two of them, He is not willing for anyone to perish. In one He does not want anyone to perish. In other words He does not wish, want, or will that any perish, but that all, undefined at this point in the paper, come to repentance. So far, Arminians are looking fairly good. [Laughter]

What is involved in these statistics is ultimately a disagreement over the meaning of the Greek word *boulomai*. Now if you want to write that down you can spell it B-O-U-L-O-M-A-I, and quote it to one of your friends, and they’ll think maybe you got some knowledge of scholarship when you came to the conference this year. “Boulomai,” that is a Greek word that is usually considered a strong word meaning “to will,” or “to purpose,” especially when used of God, as it is in for example, Matthew 11:27; Luke 22:42; I Corinthians 12:11. The other common word meaning “to wish,” is the word *thelo*, t-h-e-l-o, or an older form of it *ethelo*, e-t-h-e-l-o, and that was usually considered the weaker word, but in the New Testament the distinction, so many of the New Testament scholars contend, the distinction common in classical Greek does not seem still to be observed. And, in fact, *boulomai* in the opinion of many scholars, does not have as strong a sense as it had in classical times.

Now I'm just going to express a bit of a disagreement there. The only reason I have for doing it is that I studied Greek. I had eight years of Latin. When I reached high school I was told in Charleston, South Carolina, if you're going to be a lawyer in this city you need Latin. So I started out. I had four years in high school, four years in college. When I got to college, fortunately, we had a good classical Greek teacher as well. He taught Latin too. And so I took three years of classical Greek there as well. So when I got to theological seminary I was already smart. [Laughter] The rest of the students had to take “baby Greek.” I know a few that didn't have to, but very few had the classical training that I had in the two languages. Now it was not because I particularly wanted it, to tell you the honest truth. I was playing golf seriously in those days, spending my afternoons on the golf course. I was playing in professional tournaments as well as amateur tournaments, and so it was very nice to be able to arrange my courses in such a way that I could get out to the golf course in the afternoon. And one of the reasons why I took one of these particular languages is that it fit my schedule, and I was able to do it on the Greek course, and I think the Lord must have smiled. [Laughter] He must have said, “He thinks he smart, but I'm really the one who is arranging things.” [Laughter] I wasn't converted then, but he had plans.

Well, as I say it's clear that the Lord according to the apostle is intensely interested in the ones identified by “all” as reaching this state or condition described, or defined, as repentance. What is involved in these statistics is ultimately a disagreement over the meaning of the Greek word “boulomai,” a Greek word that is usually considered a strong word meaning to will, or to purpose, especially when used of God, and passages as I mentioned you can look up include Matthew 11:27, I have others, but we don't have time for that. The other common word I mentioned was “thelo,” that's considered the weaker word. In fact today the distinction is questioned. In fact, “boulomai” in the opinion of many scholars, does not have as strong a sense as it had in classical times. I am not, however, totally convinced, and the word may still express

the divine will. We certainly know it expresses divine will here. So, we’ll leave it at that and say there may be a bit of weakening of the term, but nevertheless it generally falls into the ground of “to will,” or “to purpose.”

But let’s turn to the defining problem. Just what is meant by the apostle when he says in the verse, “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance?” There is a difference of opinion over the meaning of the “anyone,” and the “everyone” in the verse. And the solution of this problem throws light upon the theological position of the author, the Apostle Peter. Let’s consider the problem and the major solutions offered.

First, Arminians generally interpret “everyone” or “anyone” in the verse to be words that refer to all individuals without exception. But pay careful attention to the words of the text. Peter says the Lord, whose promise to return, either to execute judgment upon the world or to deliver his ancient people from the predicted time of Jacob’s trouble, is not slow in fulfilling his promises, or perhaps his specific promise to return, but is engaged in a different purpose in the present age. The scoffers may scoff, but the Lord has engaged in a different purpose. He is exercising longsuffering for his readers and others, because He is engaged in the accomplishment of the salvation of all the “beloved, all the beloved,” for whom He is so concerned.

Now, you know Bible students sometimes I get a little angry at it. At other times I have to smile, particularly when they’re on the other side of an exegetical problem. But just look at the text. What does verse 1 say? “Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle,” “Beloved.” Verse 8, “But beloved do not forget this one thing.” Verse 14, “Therefore beloved, looking forward to this things,” and finally in verse 17, “You therefore beloved since you know this beforehand.” Now there is no question but that the people to whom he is writing are regarded by him as loved of the Lord. “Beloved.” They are the “beloved.” Peter says the Lord, whose promise to return, either to execute judgment upon the world or to deliver his ancient people from

the predicted time of Jacob’s trouble, is not slow in fulfilling his promises, or perhaps his specific promise to return, but is engaged in a different purpose in the present age. The scoffers may scoff, but the Lord has engaged in a different purpose. He is exercising longsuffering for his readers and others, because He is engaged in the accomplishment of the salvation of all the “beloved.” That’s what he is concerned with. He’s concerned about them. And the “beloved,” of course, are the believers. It’s the believers he’s concerned about.

In verse 9, Peter says that the Lord is “patient with you,” or longsuffering toward you, as the original text has it. And he adds, “Not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” There are some things to discuss about this as well. But you’re probably caught the drift of things so far. In fact you may have caught my major drift.

It has been generally thought that *thelo*, meaning “to wish,” essentially means to wish and is the weaker of the two words. My classical Greek teachers used to say that. The other Greek word, *boulomai* is one that was said to be a bit stronger. It means “to will,” or “to purpose.” But unfortunately for doctrinal precision, the two verbs may have some overlap in meaning.

Accuracy in translation depends upon analysis of context, where there is often as everyone knows, interpretive conflict, *boulomai* is still regarded as the stronger word and, while some feel it may from time to time have the force of “thelo, to wish, I personally still think its most common sense is “to will,” or “to purpose.” Therefore, I would render verse 9’s clause where the word occurs as “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” rather than as the word is rendered in the NIV, “not wanting anyone to perish.”

Now that’s characteristic of the NIV translators. “Wanting” cannot compare with “willing” in English in the expression of a divine purpose, a divine intention to fulfill a goal, to complete a divinely designed task. In fact just the idea of saying, “God wants to do this,” there’s something that seems out of balance spiritually. Doesn’t it? Well it should I think. God doesn’t wish and will; he wants. He just wants. He can’t do. He cannot do what he wants to do. Well I

must say that’s a new God to me. [Laughter] It is difficult for a believer in a sovereign majestic deity to think of Him as “wanting” to accomplish a serious task, one that only a God can accomplish, with the implicit possibility that He may not be able to be successful. One is able to think of a child “wanting” an ice cream cone, but difficult to conceive of a mighty sovereign God “wanting” to accomplish something well within His power like saving souls. Peter’s verb, “boulomai” is better rendered by the verb “to will” than “to want,” and it is suitable to express a royal purpose and design, the purpose of a being who “works all things according to the counsel of His will,” Ephesians 1:11.

One of the New Testament scholars in his commentary has written, summing up the sense of the Greek verb “boulomai” here in this way. Similarly in 2 Peter 3:9 Shrenk says, “The word expresses the divine will to save.” That’s very interesting, coming from a liberal. A bit more about this later.

Now, for some important points. First, who is the “you” of verse 9, whom the Lord does not will to perish? The answer to the question is easy and clear. The “you” are identified four times. How many times do we need an identification? In verse 1, they are identified as “beloved.” In verse 8, they are identified as “beloved.” In verse 14, they are identified as “beloved” and verse 17, they are identified as “beloved.” Four times Peter calls them “beloved.”

Now, the term “beloved” in the Greek text is a verbal adjective, perhaps suggesting that the one to whom it applies is the object of love. He’s beloved. “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased,” so heaven has said. In this case derived by the early believers from their sense of being the objects of the Father’s love, just as He had used this term of His Son at His baptism and then reaffirmed it at the transfiguration, you remember, Matthew 3:17; 17:5. He does not will that His beloved ones perish. His beloved ones who belong to Him are related to Him as sons and daughters. There is no slackness, or hesitation, in him. He is simply

longsuffering toward his saints and diligent in gathering His sheep into the fold, unwilling to lose a one of them.

Second, we must identify the individuals referred to by the word “anyone” in verse 9. It clearly, as interpreters agree, does not refer to the same word in the original language, “tines,” used earlier in the verse but in a different case, which refers to those who have a certain understanding of slowness. The “any,” or “anyone,” of verse 9 is used in contrast to the “pantas,” or the “all,” translated by “everyone” in the verse, that is, everyone of the “you” mentioned earlier in the verse. Bauckham has it right, “tinas” “any” does not take up “tines” “some people,” but contrasts with “all.” God desires all, without exception, to repent and escape damnation. But “pantas” is clearly limited by the “humas,” “you.” In other words, when Peter writes, “He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance,” the “anyone” and the everyone,” or “all,” refer to those who belong to the “you,” that is, the believing body, the “beloved” ones. The apostle is not speaking of “all” generally, but of “all” particularly, “all” of the “beloved” ones.

Now you may have a difficult time getting this over with your Arminian friends, but that’s characteristic of Arminians isn’t it when it comes to talking about the sovereign grace of God. They’re great people, you know, just keep after them. Just keep after them. Keep after them. I was one once myself, I guess. Although I don’t remember when I was an Arminian, but I was an Amyraldian for a long time.

Now, we must have a brief further discussion of the words “not wanting,” the rendering of the Greek words, *me boulomenos*, *bouloma*, “not wanting.” Having been trained in classical Greek, and I referred to this earlier, I find it difficult to forget that this verb is a rather strong verb, and its common meaning was not “to wish” or “to want,” but “to will” or “to purpose.” In New Testament times, *thelo*, “to wish,” has almost crowded it out this strong word. However, the latter still has significant strength. According to Schrenk, now, he’s not a believing man, just a

scholar, “It is used of apostolic authority and, further, it is a term that emphasizes the apostolic authority. It may emphasize the will of God, and in Hebrews 6:17 it is used to expound press the eternal purpose of God. This raises questions about its rendering in 2 Peter 3:9 as “not wanting anyone to perish.” The verb rendering even suggesting that the sovereign God is not able to carry out His will. We talked about this earlier. I much prefer “not willing that any should perish,” as the KJV has it, or “it is not his will for any to be lost,” which is the translation of the New English Bible. The resultant meaning is that Peter’s statement is that God is not willing that any of the elect shall perish, noted above.

Now just a few final words that will help you with the theology of it. John Owen, isn't that a nice name? Doesn't that sound good? John Owen, [Laughter] one of my favorite theologians. John Owen, who has thought and written about the nature and intent of the atonement about as much as anyone, has said this about 2 Peter 3:9 in his 17th century English: “That indefinite and general expressions are to be interpreted in an answerable proportion to the things whereof they are affirmed, is a rule in the opening of the Scripture. See, then, of whom the apostle is here speaking. ‘The Lord,’ saith he, ‘is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish.’ Will not common sense teach us that us is to be repeated in both the following clauses, to make them up complete and full,--namely, ‘Not willing that any of us should perish;, but that all of us should come to repentance?’” That’s imminent good sense.

“Now, who are they, these of whom the apostle speaks, to whom he writes? Such as had received ‘great and precious promises,’ chapter 1 verse 4, whom he calls ‘beloved,’ chapter 3 verse 1, whom he opposeth to the ‘scoffers’ of the ‘last days,’ verse 3; to whom the Lord hath respect in the disposal of these days; who are said to be ‘elect.’ Now, truly, to argue that because God would have none of those to perish, but all of them to come to repentance, therefore he hath the same will and mind towards all and everyone in the world, even those to whom he never makes known his will, nor ever calls to repentance, if they never once hear of his way of

salvation, comes not much short of extreme madness and folly. Neither is it of any weight to the contrary that they were not all elect to whom Peter wrote: for in the judgment of charity he esteemed them so, desiring them ‘to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure,’ chapter 1 verse 10; even as he expressly calleth those to whom he wrote his former epistle, ‘elect,’ chapter 1:2, and a ‘chosen generation,’ as well as a ‘purchased people,’ chapter 2 verse. The text is clear, that it is all and only the elect whom he would not have to perish.” The Arminian use of the text is exegetically unsound.

Now we could change that to say, “The Openness Theologians use of the text is exegetically unsound.” Surely it is evident that when the apostle refers to his believers whom he calls “beloved,” four times in the chapter, I repeat it again verses 1, 8, 14, and 17, and adds other personal references to them, that it is the elect, not all persons without exception, that he believes that it is the Lord’s will that they not perish. The sense of the last clause of verse 9 is expressed by the well known, you know what my, I’m going to skip one word, the well known man, John Gill. Now I don’t want to be denominational, but I really wrote that well known Baptist. [Laughter] John Gill, as clearly and as pointedly as it can be, “But that all should come to repentance,” this is Gill, “But that all should come to repentance; not legal, but evangelical, without which all must perish; and which all God’s elect stand in need of, as well as others, being equally sinners; and which they cannot come to of themselves, and therefore he not only calls them to it, in his word, and by his spirit and grace, but bestows it upon them; he has exalted Christ at his own right hand, to give it to them; and repentance is a grant from him, a free gift of his grace; and the Spirit is sent down into their hearts to work it in them, to take away the stony heart, and give an heart of flesh; without which, whatever time and space may be given, or means afforded, even the most awful judgments, the greatest mercies, and the most powerful ministry, will be of no avail.”

William G.T. Shedd, well known theologian has this to say on the text, “In 2 Peter 3:9, ‘The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,’ the will is that of decree, and the reference is to believers only.” And so the Presbyterian Shedd says the Greek shows this. *Me boulomenos tinas apolesthai*, “Not purposing that any should perish,” the preceding clause, “Long suffering to us ward,” *eis humas* shows that *tinas* refers to God’s children. It is still so important to pay attention to context in exegesis and interpretation. How true that is. Almost all of our problems in biblical interpretation are not paying sufficient attention to the context. It might take you a day or two to figure out some contexts that are difficult, but keep working on context.

John Calvin in his comments on the clause, “Not wishing that any perish” says, “This is His wondrous love towards the human race, that He desires all men to be saved, and is prepared to bring even the perishing to safety. We must notice the order that God is prepared to receive all men into repentance, so that none may perish. These words indicate the means of obtaining salvation, and whoever of us seeks salvation must learn to follow in this way. It could be asked here, if God does not want any to perish, why do so many in fact perish? My reply is,” now this is still our friend, John Calvin, “My reply is that no mention is made here of the secret desire of God by which the wicked are doomed to their own ruin, but only of His loving-kindness as it is made known to us in the Gospel. There God stretches out His hand to all alike, but He only grasps those (in such a way as to lead to Himself) whom He has chosen before the foundation of the world.”

So, 2 Peter 3:9 that’s no problem. [Laughter] My friendly opponents the “Openness Theologians” I have one word for you. That’s not your text. That’s my text. [Laughter] 2 Peter 3:9 is my text. Find a better one for your position. [Laughter] You may quote it ten times if you like, but that doesn't help either if it’s not true to what the apostle is saying, or the author is saying. I’m surprised, of course, that Baker is publishing some of this literature because you may know that Baker Publishing House was begun by an individual who was a strong reformed man,

and in their so called constitution or whatever it is that they have that's like a constitution, they set forth the fact that they intend to publish reformed literature, but they obviously, since the death of the original man and his son has taken over, have changed positions.

Thank you for listening to a long paper, but you know professors like to read long papers. [Laughter] And this is so important for this issue. These people can cite it ten times, and there is no evidence of looking at the context carefully. So what does that say about their other use of Scripture? Well it makes it suspicious at best. Let's close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful indeed to Thee for the word of God given to us and we thank Thee Lord to for the way Thou hast taught each of us to carefully ponder the word of God and to read it under the instruction of the triune God. We pray Lord that the Holy Spirit may truly lead us as we read and ponder the word and guide us into the truth that most honors and glorifies the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. And we pray in his name. Amen.

[Conference Spokesman- Closing Comments] Sometimes you hear people say, “How do you Calvinists get around this verse?” I don't think he tried to get around it. Do you? I kind of think he steamrolled right over it. [Laughter] Sometimes people say, “That's a good Arminian verse.” There isn't an Arminian verse in the Bible [Laughter] from beginning to end. I remember the first conference we had where we had, I forget who the speaker was, but they took some of the great texts that are used against our position of limited atonement, and they exegeted them. And I remember sitting there and all of a sudden I started to smile, and I thought now here we are, and we did this tonight. We took one of the Rock of Gibraltar texts of the people who disagree with us. I dare you to find the John Rice conference that discusses Romans 9. [Laughter] When does the Arminian have a conference where he says, “Now fellows how do we deal with John chapter 10, 'I am the good shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]