



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Various Scripture Passages

"The New Testament's Final Words Concerning the Propitiation"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The subject for the Bible study is "The New Testament's Final Words Concerning the Propitiation." Propitiation, P-R-O-P-I-T-I-A-T--I-O-N, say that to any Baptists who are present. Well, it's a pleasure to be here again and have an opportunity to say a word or two to you. The subject is really the First Epistle of John, because looking at the last words of New Testament so to speak, and so we come to the Johannine literature, and now especially the Johannine Epistles. And now thinking about them I just thought that it might be interesting for us to think about what the last apostle, so far as we know, the last living apostle had upon his mind. It is not exactly what preachers today have on their minds, one notices that almost immediately, because the Apostle John is speaking about theological things. And even though is supposed to be the apostle easiest to understand with the smallest words and the down to earth style of a person who is able to communicate with the average person, he is at least on a par with the Apostle Paul for the depth of his theological thinking. And it's important for us particularly since this is the last of the apostles, so far as we know, to know what the early church was thinking about Christianity.

The first thing that strikes me is that they were thinking about things that the church of Jesus Christ is not thinking a whole lot about. For example, the question of theological things themselves is not upon the body of the preachers of the evangelical doctrine today. One only has to look around, listen to the preaching, and realize that it's not very theological. In fact, if you want something really theological you have to go to a Bible class. And that is one of the great failings of the Christian churches. It may be one of the failings of our own church in that we do not emphasize these things sufficiently, because that's what they were thinking about. The Apostle John has on his mind the propitiation.

Now, I don't want to be too flippant with you, and so I'm not going to spell it. But some of you can as we turn to the text see how it is spelled, for some of you I'm sure, I hope very few in this congregation would have to have it spelled for them. When I went to theological seminary this is one of the greatest of the doctrines that Dr. Chafer emphasized. The things that he said sooner or later always included a reference to the propitiation that our Lord had accomplished in his saving work. So I have that upon my mind, too, as I'm thinking about 1 John and about the last of the apostles and what he was thinking about when he wrote these epistles.

Someone has said, "The impression that one gets is that John had entered into the mind of Jesus more than any of the other disciples had." Now, of course we exclude Paul so we don't have to debate about Paul's knowledge as over against John's. But thinking about the other of the apostles, especially those that John was acquainted with and knew and associated with, the impression that one gets is probably that there had entered into the mind of John more concerning the theology of the Lord himself than in the minds of any of the other of the twelve.

Now, I want to read a couple of passages that have the word propitiation, so 1 John chapter 2, verse 2. We'll just notice then, and then we'll go on to chapter 4, verse 7 through verse 12. In verse 2 of chapter 2 the apostle writes, "And He Himself is the

propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." And then in chapter 4, verse 7 through verse 12 the apostle writes, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." So obviously it's clear that the apostle, when he talks about loving is not talking about love in the sense that we talk about love. "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

All mankind loves love epitomized the flabby, wimpy 20th century. Now we have the confused 21st century, seemingly following the same hopeless line, apparently suggested by Emerson's favorite line, "All mankind loves a lover." Love is important according to the New Testament, but what kind of love is the New Testament talking about? That's something else. When I think about some of these things I think about some of the men who have written things that have to do with love. George Vass a very well known Christian theologian of the last generation noted the demand that "God's love and nothing but his love be made the keynote of every message that Christianity had to bring to the world. The demand has not slackened," he said, "it has quickened. And the modern emphasis on the will and the emotions at the expense of the intellect has aided immeasurably this trend."

Now, if we look at the New Testament we'll see that the love of God has an extremely prominent place. All mankind loves a lover, so we are told. Love is important according to the New Testament, but what kind of love? Vass has a word; incidentally, he was a well known theologian of the last generation. George Vass wrote, "The love of God occupies a more prominent place than other divine attribute in present day Christian consciousness." Then he went on to say that "Whatever charges might be brought against the intellectualism of orthodoxy, when it reigned supreme, it could have least claimed to

be broad mined and well balanced in its appreciation of the infinite complexity and richness of the life of God. It may have seemed to lack sweetness, but it made better harmonies than the pop streams of love. And it certainly made a credible attempt to do justice to all of the aspects of biblical truth. It's a well known fact that all heresy begins with being a partial truth. With this many of us would agree most heartedly and therefore the excessive emphasis on love, that most appealing and meaningful attribute of God is cause for great concern."

One final sentence from Vas, almost prophetic in its fulfillment, it is sufficient to indicate the dangers our evangelical world face. The great Princeton biblical theologian warned, "There can be little doubt that in this manner the one sidedness and exclusiveness with which the love of God has been preached to the present generation is largely responsible for the universal weakening of the sense of sin and the consequent decline of interest in the doctrine of atonement and justification, which even in orthodox and evangelical circles, such as this particular circle of Christian people, we all see and deplore." Vas saw a generation ago what has happened to evangelicalism today. We should never be embarrassed about the preaching of the doctrines of the word of God. If we don't have the doctrines of the word of God we don't have Christianity. There is no point at all in speaking about the light, fluffy kinds of things that characterize the hope of the today.

So it's good for us to think about what would an apostle say to us if he were to rise up in our midst today and speak to us? Well one of the things he would talk about would be the propitiation. That's obvious. He speaks about it in this last epistle of the New Testament, last significant epistle of the New Testament. And it is something that all of us should pay careful attention to. Vas has some other things to say, but one of the things he said was "All heresy begins with being a partial truth." The emphasis, the loss of sense of sin in atonement teaching is characteristic of our day.

John's Epistle manifests the critically important features of the view of love that characterizes heaven. And he centers his view on the divine Sonship and Messianic mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the commentators who has distinguished himself as a student of the word of God was F.F. Bruce. Bruce wrote some things that had to do with the Apostle John and particularly the sense of John's understanding of the love of God. He says, "The love which the New Testament enjoins involves a consuming passion for the well being of others, and this love has its wellspring in God. Since love is of God, says John, let us love one another. The children of God must reproduce their Father's nature." We won't go into the different kinds of love that we find in the New Testament, but that is certainly true. And Vas also said, "All heresy begins with being a partial truth." That too is apropos for our day. The emphasis, the loss of the sense of sin and the atonement, and the teaching concerning it are things that we should be concerned about.

John's epistle, this epistle, the first of his three, manifests the critically important features of God's view of love. And he centers it in the divine Sonship and the Messianic mission of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not surprising then one of the leading commentators on the Epistle of John has entitled this, "God's Love and Our Love." And another one has said much the same thing. I want to just look at two or three places here in the opening chapters of 1 John thinking about the New Testament's final words. What the apostles who were left after the Lord, and most of the apostles were gone, spoke about, letting us know at least these are the things that we should be concerned about in the Christian church today. In verse 7 and verse 8 of 1 John 2 the apostle writes, "Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining."

What John talks about when he exhorts us to the love of God is self-giving, not the kind of acquisitive love that characterizes our day. I won't go into a discussion of the

Greek word agapeo. It's been done by a lot of people. It's not necessary. Just simply to say that the apostle's exhortation to love is of a deeper kind of love than we ordinarily think about. In verse 7, "Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning." The doctrine of love represents that which belongs to God himself. It's his own property. It's God's attribute. It can be communicated only by generation. It can be communicated only by generation. It can be had not as a creature, but only a Son. It's impossible for us to experience the love of God if we do not belong to the family of God. That's one thing that he makes plain. You must be born of God in order to have the love of God, or to be the kind of person who can come to understand and appreciate and enjoy the love of God. It's something that's so different from what the world speaks about when it speaks about love.

Love is God's own property. It's an attribute of him. It's part of his nature. It can be communicated only by generation. It can be had not as a creature, but only as a son. No one can have the love of God who does not have the nature of God. It goes with the divine nature. So I ask you just a simple little question at the beginning of our study, do you have the nature of God? Is that really part of your nature? If you do not have that, if you do not know what it is to be born again, the love of God will be strange to you. It cannot be your possession. But if you have that nature then you are a candidate for the love of God in the sense of which he is talking.

Now, there are different views about this love, and I won't say a whole lot about it. It is the very love with which the Father and Son love, and it implies, of course, the knowledge of God. If a person has the love of God, then he must have part of the nature of God. So only if a person has the nature of God, the new nature we call it, he is unable to understand and appreciate and practice the love of God. Faith in him is necessary. Can non-Christians love? Well of course they can love in the sense that the world uses

the term. But non-Christians cannot experience or understand, cannot proclaim, cannot live in the light of the truth of the word of God or similarly to it.

Well John then goes on to say some other things in verse 8. He says, I want to be sure I'm reading the material here correctly, in verse 8 the apostle says, "Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining." To love is to know, and vice versa. To love is the necessity of his nature. He cannot but love. You know in reality isn't that something that belongs to Christians, genuine Christians? There's no real need for us to tell a Christian to love, that's part of his nature, the genuine Christian. That is part of what it is to have a new life, to be born again. Now, I might tell you there are certain things that are preventing the full expression of the love of God, or I may think I see certain things. But if you have been born again, you have that nature. It belongs to you. I don't have to tell you to obtain. In fact, if it seems to be necessary to do that, it may be that you don't really have the nature. This is something that belongs to the person who has been born again. And if he has the new life, he has a new life in which one of the characteristic virtues and features of it is divine love. Every believer, every true believer has in the new nature divine love. Now, there are times in our lives when it appears very difficult to see, and there are times in which it is perhaps difficult for it to be expressed. But nevertheless that it true.

In verse 8 he says, "Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining." To love is then the necessity of our nature and we cannot but love. You cannot reverse this statement when he says here "The true light is already shining," or "Again, a new commandment I write to you" and so on. But nevertheless what he says is very plain, it seems to me.

There is another feature, I think, that we need to bear in mind. And that is that this is in one sense when the apostle writes in verse 8, "Again, a new commandment I

write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining," you know I may be giving you the wrong text. That's part of old age because I really am talking about chapter 4, verse 7 and 8. And in my notes I had that but I didn't pay attention to it. So turn over to chapter 4, verse 7 and 8 where the apostle writes, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." So this is the positive side, but the negative side in verse 8 is the apostle says, "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." To love it to know, to know is to love. To love is the necessity of his nature, he cannot but love.

Now, verse 8, the last part of it, "He who does not love, does not know God, for God is love," that's not a reversible statement. It's a descriptive statement not an inclusive one. All his activity is loving activity, and the latter part of verse 8 is a compressed statement of the gospel, "Does not know God, for God is love." And in this we have essentially the gospel. It's defined in verses 9 and 10, "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins." So this compresses statement of the gospel, "He who does not love does not know God, for God is love," incarnation, atonement give significance to his love.

There is a statement I wanted to refer to; a man by the name of Donald Burdick has written a book on the Epistles of John. I know Donald, and he has a comment here that I think fits what we're talking about. He said, "Nor is this to suggest that God is merely a sentimental, soft hearted, grandfatherly type who condones man's sin rather than punishing it. God is love is a compressed statement of the gospel as well imaginable. Yet it is no more reversible statement. We cannot say love is God and then still be speaking about the truth." One of the commentators that I appreciate, another man that I happen to have known, is F.F. Bruce. And Bruce has an interesting statement here when

he says, "God is love is as compressed a statement of the gospel as is well imaginable, yet it is no more a reversible statement than it's counterpart in 1 John 1:5, 'God is light.' Love is of God, love is divine, but one can no more say that love is God than one can say that light is God. God is love is an affirmation about God, while it is a compressed statement of the gospel. It is so in the sense which is spelled out in the following sentence that God sent his only Son into the world that we might live through him. It is this act of God that gives meaning to his love. Indeed it is this act that gives meaning to love absolutely."

Now the second thing I wanted you to note is verses 9 and 10 where the apostle writes these words, "He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him." This, it would seem to me, is climactic action, free uncaused spontaneous. One of the outstanding commentators of the last generation was James Denney, and Professor Denney had something to say about this that I think is very appropriate. He said that, speaking about the truths of the love of God he said, "So far from finding any kind of contrast between love and propitiation the apostle can convey no idea of love to anyone except by pointing to the propitiation. Love is what is manifested there, and he can give no account of the propitiation except by saying 'Behold what manner of love.' For him to say God is love is exactly the same as to say God has in his Son made atonement for the sin of the world. If the propitiatory death of Jesus is eliminated from the love of God it might be unfair to say that the love of God is robbed of all meaning. But it is certainly robbed of its apostolic meaning. It has no longer that meaning which goes deeper than sin, sorrow, and death, and which recreates life in the adoring joy, wonder, and purity of the first epistle of John, so verse 8.

Now, I'd like for you to notice versus 9 and 10 where the apostle writes these words, it's fun isn't it to listen to an old man? In chapter 4, verses 9 and 10 the apostle writes, "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we

loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins." We know what love is from the first epistle in chapter 3 and verse 16 but that is the human view, now the Father's view, verses 9 and 10. "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him." The manifestation in verse 9 of chapter 4, "In this the love of God was manifested," when the Lord Jesus Christ came this was the visible indication of our experience of the hidden love of God, a Messianic mission of the divine Son. Notice the things that he uses to describe him. He is the only begotten Son of God, only and well loved it could be rendered. He's the only begotten in the sense that he is the singular Son of God. To use another word, he is the beloved Son. That's the meaning of only begotten. He is the only and well loved Son of God. God sent him, the initiative lies with God the Father, the incarnation, the first step in the carrying out of the mission of the Son of God and initiator of all of the activity is the Father in heaven.

He also says in this verse, "He came into the world that we might live through him." In other words, the purpose of the coming of the Son of God is that a particular people might enter into spiritual life, real living in divine life and live through the one who comes, the one is carrying out the saving activity. In verse 10, in chapter 4 the apostle continues, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins." This is the manifestation. It's the visible indication of our experience of the hidden love of God, the Messianic mission of the divine Son. He is described here as the only begotten Son of God. Only begotten, what that means is the only Son and also something like the well loved Son of God.

Remember the expression beloved goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 22 and the account concerning Abraham. And God sent the Son, we read here. He loved God; he loved us, and so on. God sent his only begotten Son into the world, the initiative belongs with the Lord God. It is what we might call climactic action, free uncaused spontaneous from the standpoint of the Lord God in heaven.

But he goes on to say, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son." What this tells us, of course, is that we have a Savior who divinely preexisted. And then we have the word that is so significant evidently for them. "He sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." What does propitiation mean? This is one of the words that was so important to Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer; he loved to say that Jesus Christ provided a propitiation. Dr. Chafer was not a very well instructed theologian. What he learned he learned from reading the Bible and listening to other Bible teachers at Bible conferences. But there were certain things that he came to understand that stuck with him all through his life, and propitiation was one of them. That's a Greek term that means essentially satisfaction, and so when he says he was the propitiation for our sins, he's the one who through the shedding of his blood has made satisfaction for our sins. He has paid the price for a particular people. He has satisfied the claims of the Lord God in heaven with that. There is no contrast between love and propitiation, the love is seen in the propitiation. The satisfaction reveals the love of God. In fact, as John Orrin likes to say, "You're never nearer Christ than when you're lost in holy amazement at God's unspeakable love." And his unspeakable love is expressed in the provision of the propitiation.

The apostle also speaks about the obligation and issue of love in verse 11, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." What is true doctrinally should have its expression, "so" he says, "If God so loved the world." Grounded in the nature and origin of the saving work of Jesus Christ is the must of inward constraint, not external compulsion like wall, but internal compulsion, inward constraint, the kind of thing that the genuine believer feels. He feels something inward that says that he must follow the teaching of the word of God. He is not thinking about keeping a set of commandments. He is responding to what has been put within his heart by virtue of the new birth. In other words, it's something that is part of what it is to be a Christian. Anyone who is a Christian has an immediate, final, everlasting desire to please the Lord

God. It's part of the nature given to him. And so the idea of belaboring Christians with exhortations constantly is unnecessary. Talk about what Christ has done for them. Talk about the saving work of Jesus Christ; explain the atoning work that he accomplished on Calvary's cross. And you won't have to worry about motivation with Christians. With non-Christians, those who are not within the plans and purposes of the Lord God we cannot do anything about them. They belong to the Lord God's plans and purposes ultimately. It's not our duty to transform them. It's our duty to offer the gospel of the Lord Jesus which he has given to us and to count upon him and the Spirit of God to touch the lives of whom he has chosen for his names sake.

The apostle in verse 11 says, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." What is it grounded in? Well it's grounded in its nature and origin. In verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." So the obligation to respond is grounded in the origin and nature of the new birth; the must of inward constraint, not external compulsion. Communicative self sacrificing is something that the new birth brings, and the result is no man has seen God at any time. If we love one another God abides in us, and his love has been perfected in us, the issue of the divine love. The danger of an unseen object, to love with God's love is to love the seen and unloving. It leads to the experience of his abiding and love's completion.

Well let me sum what I was trying to say. We love them because it is the nature of God of whom we are born. Because he has loved us and because we then experience his abiding presence, this is the test of our love. We do not have to create love, that is a necessary and what shall I say, it is the necessary outpouring of the life that has been planted within by the new birth. In every season, not only at Christmas season, we as Christians are to love. But lets not forget that his love is a holy love, not shallow sentimentality; an atoning love, not only the love of the manger but the cross; and a saving love. True religion is found in faith and love, holy love. What I think is so

interesting about this is the apostles; the ones who were finally here on the earth at the end are talking about the things that today are not being talked about so much by our evangelical church. If you go in the evangelical church today one rarely hears a message on the saving ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ with any theological depth at all. But it's obvious from the simple things that we've read here tonight, that fundamental to the apostle's thinking is the saving ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. And if we come to understand that, if God has implanted that within our hearts, then we don't have to worry nearly so much about the products of the lives that have that fundamental life within them.

Thank you for listening to an old man. I hate to tell you, but you'll have to do it again next week. We'll see if we can't do a little better. I'm out of practice with this preaching stuff. But nevertheless I've enjoyed it. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee and thankful for the things that the apostle reminds us of. And it's helpful, Lord, to remember that this is the last of the apostles. These are the things of which he was thinking...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]