



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Colossians 1:21-23

"From Enmity to Amity"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our Scripture reading is found again in Colossians chapter 1. So if you have your New Testaments, turn to that epistle of Paul the apostle. And we're going to read, simply, three verses. I guess I should say only three verses because we won't read them simply. Colossians chapter 1 verse 21 through verse 23, and remember because it will be helpful in gaining an appreciation of the context to note that the apostle has just stated in verse 19, "For it pleased the Father that all saving fullness should dwell in him; and after peace had been made to reconcile all things to himself," and so verse 21 continues that and we read,

"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;"

Some very interesting things in this section, what is meant by reconciliation? What is the apostle's point in saying to believers who have the assurance of salvation and also the assurance that they will persevere in the faith, to write to them, "If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled"? How appropriate is an "if" when we have the sense of the security that we have in Christ? And how is it possible for the gospel, in Paul's day, to have been preached to every creature which is under heaven when patently, it would seem, the gospel had not been preached to everyone under heaven? In fact, the apostle expressed, not too long before this, the desire to go west, to Spain, and preach the gospel there. So these are interesting points and we hope to throw a little bit of light, not final light, on some of them in the message that follows.

May the Lord bless the reading of his inspired word. Let's bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Again, Father, we turn to Thee with thanksgiving and praise. This the Lord's day reminds us again, as we so often need to be reminded, of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, a living savior we have, and we are indeed grateful and thankful. We're thankful for all of the blessings of our everyday life. The blessing of the rain, the blessing of the seasons, the blessing of the provision that Thou doest make for all of us in a physical way and of course, most of all, Lord, we are thankful for the spiritual blessings that have come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. We remember the words that the apostle wrote to the Ephesians that we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ. And how marvelous it is to reflect upon the full provision that Thou has made for us, and we express to Thee our worship and our gratitude. We bring before the Lord petitions that we desire an answer from Thee with reference to them. We pray, Lord, Thy blessing upon this land, the president, the whole nation, especially those who have authority over us. We pray for them. We pray that the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ may continue to have free course in this land.

We pray for the entire church of Jesus Christ, especially. We pray, Lord, for each of the members of the church wherever they may be scattered over the face of this globe. Be with them today. Build them up in their faith and use them as fruitful testimonies to the Lord Jesus Christ and the saving grace found in him. We pray for Believers Chapel. We pray for other local testimonies where Christ's name is lifted up in this state, in this city. We ask, Lord, for our elders and deacons, we pray for the members and for our friends and visitors who are with us today and their families. We bring them before Thee. We pray, Lord that Thou will minister to them.

We thank Thee for the magnificent promises of the word of God in prayer. And we claim those promises, Lord, for these the objects of our petitions.

We pray for the ministry of the chapel, its outreach, particularly, its radio ministry over this land, and its tape ministries, the Bible classes and other forms of outreach. Bless them and make them fruitful, those ministries, we pray.

We pray for the sick and for the troubled and for the perplexed and for others who have special problems and special needs. Thou knowest, Lord, all of them. We lay them before Thee with anticipation looking, Lord, for the answer from Thee that will most minister to our special needs.

We give Thee thanks again for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May, as we sing in the hymn that follows we sing, as unto Thee. Bless the ministry of the word that follows today too. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Someone has said that the hymn writers, generally speaking, will get to heaven so as by fire. Speaking of the fact that so many of them write sentiments that strictly speaking are not really true to the theology of the word of God. Isaac Watts, Wesleys, and some others were of contrary status and generally wrote Scripture things. This particular hymn that we have just sung has a marvelous sentiment in the last line of the third stanza, "The voice that rolls the stars along speaks all the promises." And that's

really a marvelous doctrine to contemplate, that the promises of the word of God are spoken by our Creator and because of his great power as Creator and also as the one who is in charge of all divine providence, it's very, very comforting to realize that the promises of the word of God are promises that he stands behind. I like that stanza, and in singing it, we sing something that is really meaningful.

The subject for today is, "From Enmity to Amity." We have been studying in our last meetings together the opening verses of Paul's letter to the Colossians, and we have just finished, last Sunday, "The Great Christology," the term that has often been used to describe verse 15 through verse 20 of chapter 1 of the Epistle to the Colossians. We've tried to point out that it presents our Lord Jesus Christ as Lord in creation and redemption.

The key term, however, which the apostle uses in this particular chapter in this epistle to set out our Lord work of redemption, is the term reconciliation. You'll notice he has used it in verse 20, "By him to reconcile all things unto himself," and then again in verse – well I should have said verse 20 and then again in verse 22, I'm sorry, 21 – "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled." The meaning of the term reconciliation is a matter that has been debated among students of the Bible and particularly Christian theologians because, while they all admit its importance, they have been indifferent camps in interpreting its significance. Almost all who study the term reconcile realize that it means to bring from a position an attitude of enmity to a position and attitude of amity, or friendship. That is, those who were enemies are made friends in the Doctrine of Reconciliation. Debate has often centered around, however, the objects of reconciliation. Is the object of the work of reconciliation man only or is the object of the work of reconciliation man and God?

When I went through theological seminary, the man who taught me theology, whom I regarded extremely highly, and still do, a true man of God, Dr. Chafer liked to say that the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ gathered around three great soteriological truths: the doctrine of propitiation, the doctrine of reconciliation, and the

doctrine of redemption. And in order to set this out so students could remember it, he set it out in this way, he spoke of the fact that the doctrine of propitiation was God ward in its significant. That is, it is God who is propitiated. The doctrine of reconciliation, however, is man ward in its emphasis and stress. In fact, Dr. Chafer said that it was only man ward. That is, man is the object of divine reconciliation. God does not need to be reconciled. And then finally, redemption was sin ward in its emphasis, directed toward sin. And so if we could think of propitiation, reconciliation and redemption in that way, God ward, man ward, sin ward, then, we would have an effective summary of the finished work of Christ.

Well like most students I learned that, and if questions were asked on the exam, that's too long ago for me to remember specifically, I probably said back to Dr. Chafer what he had told us in class. Sometime afterwards I made a little study of the term redemption in a little more detail and discovered that redemption was not simply sin ward in its emphasis, that it also was man ward. And then over the years I've had a chance to reflect a great deal on the doctrine of reconciliation and I must say I do, in slight measure at least, disagree with my revered teacher. I think that, while the emphasis of reconciliation is primarily man ward in the Bible that it is also proper to say that God too maybe reconciled. Therefore, a hymn of Charles Wesley, "Arise My Soul, Arise" which for a long time I did not sing, so far as one line is concerned. I think I can hesitantly sing it now. It's the stanza that goes, "My God is reconciled his pardoning voice I hear, he owns me for his child I can no longer fear."

In article two of the thirty-nine articles of religion of the church of England, there in a very excellent statement, concerning the Lord Jesus Christ, reference is made to the fact that the eternal Son, the word of the Father, very God and very man was crucified, and then these words follow, "To reconcile his father to us." Now I think that that is a fair statement, but I would like to make only one change which is not very significant. I would like to say to reconcile his God to us for the simple reason that reconciliation is

judicial, not paternal in its significant. So we will take the position that it is not simply man that is reconciled, though that's the emphasis of the New Testament, we may also say God is reconciled in this sense, that he is propitiated by the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ and thus reconciles, on that basis, man. Whether we agree or disagree on this, I think relatively minor point, we all can, I think, appreciate the importance of the doctrine of reconciliation, and we can sing together these marvelous little lines which we often sing in our meetings, "Sing it ore and ore again, Christ receiveth sinful men, make the message clear and plain, Christ receiveth sinful men."

Well let's try to clarify some of these questions to which I referred, not just then, but also in the Scripture reading. And we look first at verse 21 in which the apostle sets for the past pagan condition of the Colossians. You'll notice in the Pauline epistles that Paul often turns to the past and reminds them of what they were in order to contrast that with what they now are. So against the black back drop of what they were, the apostle sets out the bright present and future that believers possess. He says in verse 21, "And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled," and those opening two words, which are also emphatic in the original text, point out Paul's movement from exposition to application. He has been expounding the Great Christology, but one might ask Paul, "How does that apply to us?" And so the apostle, characteristic of him, makes his application now. It's true that all things have been reconciled unto himself, whether they be things on earth or things in heaven, and further, "You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked words, yet now hath he reconciled."

Notice the description that is given of the Colossians when they were in their pagan condition. He says of them that they were, "Sometimes alienated." Now one might ask the question, "What does the apostle mean by that because he doesn't explain it?" He says simply that they were "alienated." "Alienated" from what?" one might say. I'm sure that if the apostle were in a situation where questions could be asked, he would have

received that question. Paul, alienated from what? Now unfortunately, for a direct answer in this context, the apostle does not really explain that from which they were alienated. But as you well know another prison epistle, the Epistle to the Ephesians, was written at approximately the same general time, and in that epistle, the apostle does talk about alienation, and he does speak about that from which they were alienated. And the text that expounds this and clarifies is Ephesians chapter 2 in verse 11 and 12. If you have your New Testaments turn there, and I will read beginning with verse 11, and notice verse 12 because here the apostle sets out the things from which the Colossians in their pagan condition were alienated.

"Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."

That is that from which the Colossians were alienated. First of all they were alienated from Christ, and secondly, they were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel. I think today in our day one might say, "Is that alienation?" Well, it was alienation in that day because remember the Lord Jesus said, "Salvation is from Israel." In other words, they were the covenant people. They also had the Divine Revelation, and Abraham and his seed were the means by which God was speaking to the nations of ancient times. And if one were not of that particular nation, then he lost a tremendous advantage. In fact, Paul writing to the Romans says that even in this particular time, Israel has an advantage, and the advantage is the fact that they were the recipients of the promises and the covenants. So he says you were without Christ. You were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, the arena in which salvation took place and was developed

and carried out, and strangers from the covenants of promise. That, of course, was the Abrahamic, the Davidic, and the new covenants which set out the means by which men were to be saved through Abram's seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, and they, the Colossians Gentiles, were strangers from the covenants of promise.

Further, he says, because of that, you had no hope and you were without God in the world. Well I'm sure as the apostle expounded these things to the Colossians and, perhaps, through his intermediary Epaphras, they had come to appreciate what they were before and what they are now in the light of that. So this estrangement is mentioned in order to heighten the wonder of God's mighty action in salvation, for those who are far off have now been brought nigh in Christ. And they are no longer without Christ. They are no longer without God. They are no longer without the covenants of promise. As a matter of fact, they are no longer without the commonwealth of Israel in the sense that they have been grafted into the olive tree and partake of the fat root of the olive tree, and thus form part of the people of God. So the apostle lays stress upon that fact. And you know it's a very helpful thing for all of us, at any point in our Christian life, to take a look at what we were and say, that's what we were. That should create a sense of gratitude and thanksgiving constantly in the Christian life. Every Christian, all of us, should always be characterized by thankfulness and gratitude because of what has happened to us.

So Paul says, "And you who were once alienated," and now he spells out some of the results of that, "enemies in your mind by wicked works." Now here is a case where the term enemy, undoubtedly, is active in its force. In other words, it means hostility rather than the objects of divine wrath, though that was true. Here the stress rests upon their hostility. Men are hostile to God for one reason. He demands of them a perfect obedience. And the fact that he demands of us a perfect obedience to the law of God produces hostility because deep down within us we know that we cannot do that which he demands of us. "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy soul and thy neighbor as thy self." That is the demand of God. Well

even if we were to say, "Well from now on I'm going to do it." And if, by some miracle, impossible of course, you were able to do it, you would still have to be responsible for your past. And so the very fact that we are faced with an impossible demand is one of the reasons why men are hostile to God. And they show their hostility in their works. We are rebels naturally as a result of the fall in the Garden of Eden, so, enemies in your mind, active, hostile to God.

Now I think that there is more than simply this attitude of hostility here because the apostle is talking about a position also. Their position is of those who are excluded from the divine favor. To put it very simply, they are without God. What a terrible thing it is to be without God. What a terrible thing it is, in 1986, to be without God. And what a terrible thing it might be for you to be in Believers Chapel, here between 11:00 and 12:00, and be without God. Without hope, strangers to the covenants of promise, no assurance of everlasting life, and no assurance of a Father in heaven who loves and cares, for that assurance can only come through a relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ. May I ask you a personal question, right at this point? What is your relationship to the Lord? Do you have the sense of the assurance of a relationship to him? Can you say, "I know that my sins have been forgiven by the blood of the cross?"

Well the apostle, having pointed to their past pagan condition, in verse 22 speaks of their present Christian condition and what a difference. After saying that they have been reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, which we will say something about in just a moment, he says, "To present you holy and unblamable and unproveable in his sight." Students of the Epistle to the Colossians have debated the reference of that last part of verse 22, "To present you holy and unblamable and unproveable in his sight." And have wondered if it had to do with justification or sanctification, but that's a rather esoteric point, and we won't labor the question a bit. Notice simply this, that the work of reconciliation has as its purpose that we be presented before the Lord God, "Holy and unblamable and unproveable in his sight." What a marvelous status we have that

is, that by virtue of what Christ has done, we shall, one day, be presented before the Lord God, holy, though we are unholy, unblamable, though we are certainly blamable, and unproveable, although we could be accused by anyone who knew us or knew our hearts in the sight of the holy God who demands the infinite perfection of a perfect righteousness. What a marvelous thing that is. And how, if we're going to be thankful and thankful constantly, that should be one of the things that should put a smile on our hearts.

Now that raises the question of reconciliation. The apostle has turned from a rather grim picture, and the turning point is reconciliation. They were, at one time, at enmity with God, but now they are friends of God by divine intervention. And I want to say just a few words now about reconciliation as a doctrine. If someone were to say to you, "What does the doctrine of reconciliation teach?" What would you think? What would you say? Suppose you had some paper passed out to you and you were asked right now, this morning, to write down a definition of the doctrine of reconciliation. What would you put down? Most of us, I think, would probably say something about how when two people get into an argument or a fight and then, ultimately, settle the issues between them, they are reconciled. That's the way in which we usually speak of reconciliation. But in the Scripture this is a very important doctrine, and it speaks in more detail to the spiritual condition lying back of it. The term to reconcile is a term that is related to a Greek word that simply means "to make other."

Now I don't want to build a doctrine on a root of a word because that's false philologically and false hermeneutically. This word means "to make other." It means simply "to change." And there are some different forms that are used, all related to that simple idea of "to change," some being intensive and some not. It is rather striking in the New Testament that the verb to reconcile is never used to denote mutual reconciliation after mutual hostility, the verb. So when the verb is used, almost always, it is used of one way reconciliation. That of which Dr. Chafer was talking, man ward. Men are reconciled.

But the issue is not quite as simple as that because the term enemy is used to describe individuals in their relationship to God. And in some of the contexts where the term reconcile is used the term enemy is used too. And in those passages sometimes the term enemy is not active, but passive in its significance.

In Romans chapter 5 and verse 10, for example, the apostle makes reference to this. Turn back again to that passage and simply read verse 10, "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." But now you might think that this means when we were hostile to God, and of course, that idea would be included, but look at the preceding verse. He has said, "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." So "Saved from wrath," is surely saved from the divine wrath, and therefore the enemies of verse 10 is likely to be enemies of God. So it's proper to speak of reconciliation as not simply man ward, but also in certain contexts involving God. In what sense does it involve God? Well I just offer this as a suggestion. I think it's because of the propitiation, in other words, it is propitiation in which the Lord Jesus by his death on the cross satisfies the righteousness and holiness and justice of God that enables him to reconcile hostile men to himself through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

So how would we define reconciliation? Well I would define it this way. In my classes this answer would get an A+. Reconciliation is the finished work of God bringing men from the position and attitude of enmity to the position of attitude and amity by the work of the cross. That's very simple, I think, the finished work of God, bringing men from the position and attitude of enmity to the position of attitude and amity by the cross. The key passages stress man as the object of the work in the New Testament because, regardless of one's opinion concerning the objects of the work, all agree, that God is the author and initiator of reconciliation. Men do not begin it. God begins it. The means of reconciliation is very plainly stated to be the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, or, as Paul

puts it here in verse 20 of Colossians 1, "And having made peace through the blood of his cross." So it's by virtue of the death on the ground of that that the Lord God is able to reconcile sinners to himself.

If we were to be asked what is the extent of reconciliation, that is are all reconciled or are only some? Well there is a passage that answers that question, I think, quite plainly. It's 2 Corinthians chapter 5, if you'd like to turn there. I think you'll understand a little better what I will be saying. 2 Corinthians chapter 5 and verse 14 and following, I'll just read through and make a few comments. Paul is, remember, explaining his ministry. He's justifying it. He's trying to tell the Corinthians what he tries to do in his preaching and in the work that he is doing, and in verse 14, the apostle states, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all died." Now my text has, "Then were all dead." But the way I have rendered it is the way in which the Greek text puts it, probably if you have a modern version, that change has already been made.

Notice the statement, "If one died for all, then all died." Now that answers an interesting question right there. We won't labor the point. Many of you in Believers Chapel know my position. You know the position that we generally teach here, and so it's not necessary to do it, but I simply want you to notice that you can say with reference to this verse, Christ died for those who died when Christ died. You put it that way and that simply. Christ died for those who died when Christ died. That's precisely what he says, "If one died for all, then all died." So Christ died for those who died when Christ died. Isn't that simply? That's very simple. That's very logical. That's very clear. The only thing difficult about it is there are so many voices that want to tell us, "That's not true. It's not true," but the text says plainly Christ died for those who died when Christ died. And he goes on to say that "He died for all." That is, all who died when Christ died, "That they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." In other words, all who died with Christ when he

died are those who live and so it's quite plain that Paul uses the term all here in the sense of all who died when Christ died. Those all live. He goes on to say,

"Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God,"

See that lays stress upon the fact that all of the reconciling work is traceable to the Lord God. Salvation is ultimately of God. So all things are of God and among the things that are of God is the doctrine of reconciliation, or the fact of it, "Who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." Now you'll notice in this verb here the apostle has made man the object of the reconciling work. God has reconciled us to himself by virtue of what Christ did which is, ultimately, of course, his work, because it is he who sent the Son.

Now he continues, "Hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation." Well what is that? "To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself." Now one might think, immediately, "Well doesn't that disagree with what is stated above? Christ died for those who died when Christ died, but here it says that he reconciles the world unto himself? We've said so much about this, I don't want to labor the point at all, but all you have to do is to take your concordance, look up the term world and pretty soon you'll find that that term is used in a number of different ways in the New Testament. Now of course, if world meant everybody in the world then the doctrine that this would seem to teach would be Universalism. He reconciled the world to himself. Notice reconciling the world to himself.

And incidentally, there is no such word as conditional or possible or potential in the text at all. That may be inserted, but that is an insertion that is not in the text. The

text says he reconciled the world to himself. But we're not Universalists because we know there are so many passages in the New Testament that teach that eternal judgment is a biblical doctrine. So, not everyone is going to be saved. So we must brush that doctrine aside because it's denied by so many other plain texts. But what then does this mean, reconciling the world to himself? Well, it cannot mean potential or possible because the very next clause says, "Not imputing their trespasses unto them," so obviously the world is a group of people who don't have their trespasses imputed to them. They are individuals who have the forgiveness of their trespasses. So world, here, refers to believing people.

But how can we talk about the world as a reference to believing people? Well put yourself in the place of the Jew, now the apostle of the Gentiles, a member of the commonwealth of Israel, one who possesses the covenantal promises, who thought of the Gentiles as people who didn't have those promises, were not of the commonwealth of Israel, without God, without hope in the world, now he has come to see that God has called him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. You can see how in his thinking, as in New Testament thinking of John and Paul and others, the term world came to mean, not simply Israel, but the nations, not simply the nation, but the nations. In other words, the gospel has gone out to the world, to Jews and Gentiles. That's what Paul is referring to when he says,

"To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," (Jews and Gentiles,) "Not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then," (he says,) "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

So the extent of the reconciliation touches all of the people of God. And the results, well the apostle tells us here that reconciliation, a doctrine that touches not simply people, but it touches the whole of the creation. Notice again verse 20, "To reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." Isn't that striking? Everything, ultimately, reconciled to God through the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. We often think of just people being reconciled. Paul thinks cosmically, the whole world, the whole world is out of proper adjustment since the fall in the God. There are, in heaven, beings that are fallen beings, who are enemies of God and hostile to him, Satan and the evil angels, the demons. All of these intelligences in this universe, as well as the physical universe itself, are touched by the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary's cross. What a cosmic event the cross really was, touching not simply men, not simply the creation about us, but all of the intelligences of the universe. So reconciliation then refers, ultimately, to the bringing into proper harmony all of God's creation.

Now if you say what about those evil angels and what about Satan? We're not suggesting that they are going to be ultimately saved. There are a lot of people who have a soft spot in their hearts for the devil. Did you know that? They seem to think that it's terrible that he's going to be lost for eternity. We're not talking about that. We're talking with reference to him and his evil angels that there will be compulsive submission of the cosmos in God's final arrangement of things through the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross. And that will be seen to be proper adjustment and reconciliation in those days.

Well now how do we get this reconciliation? Fortunately the Bible tells us, very directly and plainly, in Romans chapter 5 and verse 11. Now just read the verse. Well while you're finding it, if you're looking it up, I'll read verse 10 again.

"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only so, but

we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the reconciliation."

So reconciliation then, as we have said, is a finished work of God, bringing men from a position and an attitude of enmity to God to an attitude and position of amity by virtue of the cross, and this position is received from God. It's a gift. It's something God gives us apart from human works. Now that's reconciliation.

Paul, in the final verse, verse 23, speaks of the abiding condition of those who are reconciled, or of reconciliation. This is bit of a puzzling text. In Believers Chapel we talk very strongly about the perseverance of the saints and occasionally, the term "security of the believer" will come out. And then we will also occasionally say, "Once saved, always saved," and things like that. Well then how can you harmonize, "Once saved, always saved," the security of the believer with the apostolic language? The apostolic language contains "ifs." "If you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel," that seems to say that there is a definite conditional possession of eternal life. Is not the whole program in jeopardy? Suppose our faith fails, doesn't this suggest that it might fail? "If you continue in the faith grounded and settled," why are these "ifs" in the Bible? If we were allowed to rewrite the Bible, I think, the majority of Christians would eliminate the "ifs" if they have grown up in an environment in which they were taught the perseverance of the saints, or the security of the believer. They don't really like to look at these passages. They rather think there must be some esoteric explanation that eliminates the "ifs." But they are in the Bible. They are there.

So we must deal with them. They are there. Why are they there? Well one thing that comes immediately to mind is this. They are there because there are people gathered in a company like this and who also meet with saints everywhere who are mere professors of the faith, and not really possessors of a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. That's one of the simple facts of Christian experience. There are many

people who, even over years, make a profession of faith but who fall away, who evidence they were not really true believers. So, the question of a man's profession, and the reality of it, is raised by these "ifs." And they serve a very good purpose. Those who make a profession of faith and if their lives do not conform to that standard of Christian life that is set in the New Testament, not a sinless life, but the standard of life set in the New Testament, we have no reason to encourage them by saying to them, "You are a Christian." We cannot pass judgment upon them. We don't know what their condition is because we are human beings. But we have the word of God, and we can say, by the word of God, we have no reason to encourage you that as long as you live in manifest disagreement with the teaching of the word of God you are one of the family of the faithful. So that's one purpose that "ifs" would serve.

And then I think also, with reference to the saints, it helps them to remember that God's warnings and admonitions are often means for the preservation of us by causing us to be more diligent in our Christian activity. We say to our children, "Do not step off of this building." If they were walking by on a parapet of a building, -- why they would be doing that I haven't the slightest idea, but some parents are just that ignorant of what children are liable to do, that they will let them do it, they will let them walk on a parapet -- they'll say, "Don't ever jump off of that you will be killed," but at the same time the parent is grasping that child to be sure that it does not happen. We teach our children things not to do, but at the same time we are as careful as we possibly can to keep them from doing it even if they wanted to. So these "ifs" in the word of God serve a purpose.

As far as the assurance of the believer of eternal life is concerned, that to my mind is the best way to talk about security. It's the doctrine of eternal life. Mr. Spurgeon was right when he said, "I believe not so much in the perseverance of the saints as in the perseverance of the Savior." And so we believe that, because the Lord Jesus perseveres in securing and maintaining in a saved condition the saints for whom he died, we can be confident that if we have truly believed in him and possess eternal life, we shall one day

be in his presence. Some men still object to the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, but if true saints, by their confession, will persevere then it's equally true that the saints must persevere. So we can say the saints must persevere because they will persevere. So we are confident that having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall persevere because he perseveres. And these "ifs" are tests for professors and they also remind us that we need to constantly look at our own lives and see if it's really true that we do have eternal life.

Now Paul says this gospel's preached to all creatures, every creature, he said. Is he talking by hyperbolae? Some commentators have suggested that, perhaps. Is he speaking of every individual? It's very difficult to justify that because the apostle himself seems to suggest, in other places, that there are unreached lands. Is he speaking as one very recent commentator on the Greek text has suggested of the major cities and major towns and in that sense speaking broadly that the gospel has been preached to every creature under heaven, or is he simply saying that the gospel is a catholic gospel, it is gone out to Jews as well as Gentiles and in that sense it has been preached to every creature under heaven among men? That's not an easy text to explain. Maybe you can shed some light on it for me. But I rather think that of those explanations that one is the more likely. He's talking about the universal world to which the gospel has been sent through the message of the gospel to the Gentiles.

Well one of the best ways to see the doctrine of reconciliation is to see it in our Lord's "Parable of the Prodigal's Son." Now, I'm going to, because of time, only two or three minutes left, just simply summarize that parable for you because I'm sure it's well known to practically all of you who are here. You know the story. The Lord Jesus begins after there had been some question about the fact that he was "drawing near to publicans and sinners to hear him. The Pharisees and scribes had murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners, and eateth with them." Think of that, "Sinners and eateth with them." It would be like a Texan sitting down with an Oklahoman, or something like that,

I presume. But anyway, he "receives sinners and eateth with them," so, the Lord Jesus tells three parables in order to elucidate this question.

And premier one is, "The Parable of the Prodigal's Son." Campbell Morgan said, "No, this is not the way to call this, to title this, parable, "The Parable of the Prodigal's Son." It should be called, "The Parable of the Father's Heart," because the important person is not the son but the father. Well if you will look at the way our Lord begins verse 11 of Luke chapter 15, when he begins this parable, he does say, "A certain man had two sons." So the person who is prominent in the expression of the parable itself is the father. "A certain man had two sons."

Well you know the story of the prodigal who went off, finally, into the far places with his inheritance, wasted it all, and there stooped as low as a man could possibly stoop in those days, "Filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him." And, reflecting upon his condition, finally, "He came to himself." And he reflected upon his life before hand with his father. "How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" And then he made his determination, I think by the spirit of God, of course, theologically. He said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And so he arose, and came." He came to himself first.

And then he came home. And as he came home, the Lord, as he tells the parable, says that the father saw him coming and, "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off," the father, who evidently had longed to see the figure of the son coming up that pathway or road to his house, saw him, recognized him, gathered up his garments in the dignity of a great compassion. -- By the way have you ever seen an old man run? Well I guess I ought to go out and run for you [laughter] out in the parking lot, but an old man does not run with a great deal of dignity. You look at the old men who are jogging around Dallas and you'll see that. But if you put long flowing garments

on them, and watch an old man run. Then of course the kids all smile and laugh because they do run awkwardly.

But this man, this old man, gathered up his garments in the dignity of the great compassion, unashamedly ran out toward his son, flung his arms around him, and kissed him tenderly. That's the force of the Greek word there, I think, kissed him tenderly and then most of all he smothered his confession. The boy started out with his confession and he said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." And now getting ready to say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants," the father smothers the confession because at least, you know you might have thought he could be sorry, or at least ought to make his confession. Should not the father have required the confession? Well he smothers it in this great love and says, "Bring forth, to his servants, the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And the text says, "And they began to be merry." And it never says they stopped.

This is Jesus Christ's picture of God. This is his parable. This is the way he describes the Lord God, a God who waits for men to come, a God who hopes, a God who longs, a God who sees, a God who runs, a God who kisses, in fact, as Nehemiah says, "A God ready to pardon." This is the God of all grace who sits in heaven and is the Creator and controller, the providential provider of all of the creatures upon this earth. And through the gospel messages, sends out a gospel message to all men everywhere to repent and turn to him and receive as a free gift eternal life. And so as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, I beseech you. Come to Christ, believe in him, and receive the reconciliation which is provided for lost sinners. If God has brought you to the place where you recognize that you are lost, dead, in trespasses and sins, then you're a fitting candidate for the reconciliation which God provides. Come from your position of enmity and hostility into the relationship of amity and friendship with the Lord God and receive

the blessings of eternal life and all of the other blessings that go with it. Come to Christ. Trust in him. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these magnificent words, and you, hath ye now reconciled. How marvelous to be in the position of amity, friendship with the Lord God. We are grateful for grace manifested to us. And, Lord, if there should be someone in this audience who, like the prodigal, is in the far country, oh by Thy grace enable them to come to themselves, and come to Thee, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ in reality unto eternal life. Go with us now as we part. For Jesus' sake. Amen.