



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Various

“John Bunyan Lecture V”

TRANSCRIPT

[Introduction of Dr. Johnson] Dr. Johnson, please come back. I want to say that I have thoroughly enjoyed his ministry to us these I think it's four years now in a row. I certainly hope he'll be back with us next year. There are not too many people in this world that I have the affection for that I have for Dr. Johnson. And I mean that with all of my heart. I heard him for several years with a tape ministry, like most of you got acquainted with him, I'm sure. And I loved him before I ever met him. And what I loved about him was, well part of what I loved about him, was his pure attention to the text [Laughter]. His exegetical method was a model. It was an immense help to me. There are a lot of people in this world who have been helped in that same way, learning to look at the text, learning to let it speak for itself. Many people, I meet them quite often, many people have come to understand the doctrines of grace because of Dr. Johnson's ministry. I told him this morning at breakfast that I think one of the reasons God put him here on this earth is that he would give us an understanding of the atonement. And he has done a marvelous job of that for years, like he did this morning. And I appreciate that. Every year I ask him if he'll come back again next year, and he breaks my heart every time. His answer is always the same, "Fred, I'd be glad to come back if I'm still alive." And I don't like to hear that.

If I ever hear the news that he has gone, something in me will die. I have thoroughly appreciated his ministry. We're glad to have him. Come teach for us again.

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

Incidentally, Believers Chapel still has a lot of the tapes. They're available free of charge. We always from the beginning, I'm no longer officially connected with the leadership of Believers Chapel, but Martha and I attend the meetings, and the tape ministry is still going on, and they are free of charge. If you just write down and write for a catalog, they'll send you a catalog, and you can order anything you want on it.

Now, I would like to say this, that we started carrying on that ministry in about nineteen, let's see, about 1965 or so. I was still at the theological seminary. And a lot of these things that were going on in my mind are represented in the tapes. In other words, you probably can find a tape in which my interpretation is not what it would be today. Although I think you will also find many in which the opposite interpretation is found with reference to the atonement. Because I taught for thirty years at Dallas Seminary, teaching most of the time as New Testament professor but also then for some years as professor of systematic theology, and so these questions concerning the atonement began to resonate in my mind and heart from the exegesis of the text, the Greek text we're talking about, not the English text, the Greek text. And finally, over a period of time, I was forced by my convictions in signing the doctrinal statement.

You had to sign the doctrinal statement every year at Dallas Seminary. As far as I know, they still do, but I'm not now acquainted with the details. But you'd have to sign the doctrinal statement that you agreed with the doctrinal statement. And they would put "With what provisions do you have disagreement," but it was pretty well known if anyone ever put down disagreement with regard to the atonement, that was the end. And we proved that that was the case. [Laughter] And so I would like to say this: I think honestly that Dr. Walvoord did not want me to leave the seminary, but they were put in the position of having to do it because that's what they had been doing for years. As far as I know, they still do it, but I have no way of really knowing.

So, in the tape ministry at Believers Chapel, which began long before that (I left in 1977. In 1962, Believers Chapel began), so ten or fifteen years, well ten years at least of preaching, I was an Amyraldian. Now many of you know, Amyraldism, you know that the name is associated with Moise Amyraut, a French theologian, Moses Amyraut. His Latin name was Amyraldus and that's why Amyraldism or Amyraldianism is the term that is used for four-point Calvinism historically.

In other words, all of the points of Calvinism are genuinely believed except definite atonement. It has great appeal for a lot of people because how can you debate unconditional election with the Bible? If you just pay attention to the text, that's simple. And the other parts of Calvinism as we know them, simple. But the intent of the atonement or definite atonement, particular redemption, this is something very difficult for a lot of people to believe. And so, Amyraldism is an attempt to legitimately accept the four points of Calvinism but renege on the fifth point, that Christ died for the world. But unconditional election, total depravity, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints, Amyraldians accept thoroughly and earnestly.

Now if you just think for one moment, that is the most inconsistent theological system that you could have, for this reason, please remember it: The Father elects a particular people, the

Spirit brings that particular people to the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, but the Savior dies for all. How inconsistent could you possibly be? There is a disagreement, a dissonance you might say, in the Trinity itself. They're working at cross purposes.

Now, I wrestled with that a good bit because, you know, you have lots of texts that appear to teach an indefinite atonement or general atonement, but it's not very happy to be in that position if you run into one of your fellows. Now at a theological seminary, of course, I could hold that. And they would not know enough, since they were not taught these points, to make it embarrassing for me, except occasionally somebody would slip in. There was a Calvinist consistently. Gary Long was one. And Gary and I engaged in a lot of discussions. And he was always embarrassing to me because I had to rethink some of these things.

So if you get the tapes from Believers Chapel, you might find some of the ministry is from that background. But ever since the ministry began, we did embrace all of the points of sovereign grace as I understood them except the intent of the atonement. And then, in the latter years, from about 1976 or 7, that began to be cleared up in the tape ministry as well.

But you're welcome to write them: 6420 Churchill Way, Dallas 75230. And the tapes are free of charge. Ask for a catalog, and they'll send you a catalog. And you may find some things in there that you can use in your teaching or preaching ministry.

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

"Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; and old things have passed away; behold (Notice that word "behold." Look, look.), all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God

was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

These words that the apostle writes here in this great section on reconciliation (Incidentally, this is not Paul's only section. In Romans chapter 5, the apostle says some things that should be compared with the doctrine of reconciliation as set forth here.), rich in doctrinal content, they underscore the apostle's concept of the ministry that God gave him.

For example, worldly distinctions are no proper norm of Christian estimation of men and things. Verse 16 says, "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh."

God alone is Savior, verse 18, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself."

Human redemption fulfills his eternal purposes, verse 17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Man is a rebel, verse 18, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us (the world, he's talking about remember) us to Himself." "And has given us the ministry of reconciliation." What a challenge, all these rebels out there.

The cross is absolutely necessary, verse 18, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ." Verse 19, "That God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."

Now that is, I think, exceedingly important because sometimes we hear the ministry of the word of God, and there is very little about the cross in it. And you wonder just what place the cross has in the one proclaiming the message. But it's impossible to talk about Christianity as we know it without the cross. The apostle said, "I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified." In fact, with the Corinthians, he only wanted to expound the

cross to them because that's the fundamental thing, the first thing, that we should be talking about when we're talking about people who are not yet in Christ.

G. C. Berkouwer, in whose writings there are many good things, has said with reference to this matter that if righteousness is by the law, then Christ is guilty of "throwing his life away."

Now, one of my teachers, my (this is going to upset some people, particularly in this camp) my beloved teacher, Lewis Sperry Chafer. Now I want to tell you why he's beloved to me. Dr. Chafer never had a theological class in his life. He became a Bible teacher after he had spent a good bit of time traveling around with evangelists, like Moody and others. He knew them all personally. He was a singer. His degree from college was in music. If you go back to some of the older hymnbooks, you'll find hymns written by L. S. Chafer and his wife, and she was a musician, too. But this man listened to Moody and others, and God had given him an interest in theology.

He never was a great theologian. But what he was great at was stirring people to believe in grace as he understood it. And it's remarkable when you think about a man who had a degree in music ultimately becomes the founder and president of a theological seminary with literally thousands of students in session and scores of thousands all over this world, many of them consistent Calvinists now. They know where Dr. Chafer fell short. But he was a man of faith.

And that institution lived for the years 1924 when it was founded until 1952 as an institution of faith. No appeals for funds were sent out. Think of that. Think of the theological seminaries today who pester you with appeal after appeal after appeal for funds. And churches and movements. Well you cannot find, there may be one that slipped by when Dr. Chafer was out of town on meetings, but they never appealed for funds. They suffered. At times, they were in debt. But nevertheless, Dr. Chafer was a man of faith. He was a George Mueller kind of man because he hoped that the seminary would be that kind of a seminary.

The successor, a good man, changed things when he became his successor. And now you can get all of the appeals for funds that you would like to have. Some of them very appealing. [Laughter] They're pretty. They're done in first class style, so if you like that kind of thing, you can do it. I don't like it.

Our church doesn't appeal for funds. I don't believe we should appeal for funds. I think that's the best test of all of your faith in Christ. You've got to work. You're preaching the Word. You're going to look to the Lord for help, and it's good, it seems to me. There are others who don't understand what I understand, and I understand that. I don't get mad at that. And people that send me appeals, I many times keep giving them money, because they need it. But they don't know what I think I know about money and the Lord's work. I just feel deep down in my heart, if God is with you in what you're doing, he will supply the needs that you or your work has. You may struggle. You may have to get down on your knees and pray a little bit. And you may find it difficult, but there's a great satisfaction in seeing the Lord supply the needs.

And Believers Chapel is an institution like that, and still is like that. They do pass the plate Sunday morning. That's the only thing they do. No, I take that back. Martha's shaking her head. We don't pass the plate. We pass it Sunday night at the Lord's Supper meeting. Thank you, Martha.

So, anyway, I mention Dr. Chafer because there're many things that Dr. Chafer said that were real good. And one of the things he told us, and I remember him saying this statement in class, he said with reference to Galatians chapter 2 and verse 21, he said that "If righteousness is to be found in the keeping of the Law of Moses, then the cross is the greatest blunder in the history of the universe." This is the text in Galatians 2 and verse 21. I'm sure you know it. And with Dr. Chafer agreeing with Berkouwer, or Berkouwer agreeing with Dr. Chafer, you have at least two theologians, two Calvinists. Dr. Chafer was a Presbyterian minister and considered himself a Calvinist.

In verse 21 the apostle in Galatians 2 makes this statement, "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." So, the cross is necessary. The cross touches the world in verse 19, for we read that "That is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

And then finally, the ministers of the gospel are under obligation to proclaim that message, for verse 19 says that, "That is God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us (theminos, the Greek word tithēmi, theminos has committed to us, has deposited with us, you could render it) the word of reconciliation." So, this is a richly theological passage, isn't it? 2 Corinthians chapter 5.

The key term of the apostle is reconciliation: A position of an attitude of amity from enmity toward God by the cross of Christ. Closely related to justification because not only here do we have it, verse 19, "That is God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them," but also in Romans chapter 5, the same connection between reconciliation and justification is found. So, it's closely associated to it, with it, with one another.

Now, John Wesley wrote some great hymns. We all love them. I don't want to criticize in general the hymns that Mr. Wesley and others wrote. He wrote one called "Arise, My Soul, Arise". And it has this stanza: My God is reconcile His pardoning voice I hear; He owns me for His child; I can no longer fear With confidence I now draw nigh, And "Father, Abba, Father," cry, And "Father, Abba, Father," cry.

But that very first line is wrong: My God is reconciled. He needs no reconciliation. It is we who need reconciliation. Now that's a debated point. And there are some things that might be said otherwise, but now you have my opinion. It doesn't settle anything except perhaps Martha's viewpoint. So, My God is reconciled – No. The reconciliation problem rests right here, to be reconciled to our heavenly Father who has elected a certain body of people. Oh we can sing, Sing

it o'er and o'er again; Christ receiveth sinful men; Make the message clear and plain: Christ receiveth sinful men.

Now Paul has spoken of compelling love, the love of Christ compels us, and of no longer living to self. Now, the consequences that have issued from that and from identification with him in his cross work follow. Verse 16 and verse 17, the consequences of identification with Jesus Christ. Verse 16, "Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone." He loves therefore. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; all things have become new." The word "therefore" incidentally is not a common word. As a matter of fact, it's a result conjunction, *hōste*, so then. But as you can see, it's closely related to an "ara" or an "oun" which do mean therefore.

So, he talks about knowledge after the Spirit in verse 16, "Therefore, from now on, we regard no man according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we henceforth we know Him no longer." There's no reference to a pre-conversion knowledge of the Lord. What he's talking about is knowledge formed by external mistaken norms as heretical, as a heretical turbulent teacher. In other words, when he says we don't know people according to the flesh, he's not talking about before his conversion. He's talking about what has happened now that he's come to understand the gospel message of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now he knows him as the representative man. Now he knows him as the substitute, the great substitute. And so as a result of identification with him in his death, there is knowledge now after the Spirit instead of after the flesh.

And further, there is a new creation. In verse 17, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Philip Hughes has written a very good commentary on 2 Corinthians, and he says, "What he's talking about is a reborn microcosm belonging to an eschatological microcosm of the new

heavens and the new earth." That's good seminary language. Now we are a reborn microcosm belonging to the eschatological microcosm of the new heavens and the new earth. What we are to be, we're a part of now, so Professor Hughes, who has a good book, incidentally, has written. The eternal purposes are fulfilled. This is a momentary act, a necessary act, and has necessary results when we pass from one sphere to the other. Now we have a new song to sing, a new home to look forward to and all of the other things that flow when we believe in Christ.

Dr. Chafer used to teach us thirty-three things happen when a person believed in Christ. And you can look in his theological books, his set, and there will be thirty-three things that happen when you believed in Jesus Christ. It may not have been thirty-three, it may have been only thirty-two or thirty-one or twenty-nine or maybe thirty-four or five, but there are quite a few things that did happen when you believed in Christ. And all the students at the seminary back in the old days had to learn those thirty-three things that happen when you believed in Christ. And I later found some flaws in it, so I don't remember now. I have passed them by. I could probably have run up a nice little string of things that happen when you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are a new creation. And that the apostle would certainly agree with. So, a new creation.

Mr. Spurgeon has "The man has begun a new life." A convert once said, "Either the world is altered or else I am." And we know, of course, actually, what did happen.

There was an old Brethren Bible teacher, that is, of the Plymouth Brethren, W. T. P. Wolston. You can still get some of his books. He was a very good preacher of the gospel and was a very fruitful man. And he has told the story of a doctor who had delivered many babies but was now dying. So he called for his pastor and told him of his burden and concern over his life. And the pastor assured him, so Mr. Wolston said, that there was nothing really to worry about. He had lived a good life and so he didn't have to worry. But he, to his pastor said, "But didn't Jesus speak about being born again? Didn't he speak about a new birth?" "Well, yes," the pastor said, but he assured him that he was sure of heaven by reason of his good life. And so he is

reported to have said to his pastor, "Pastor, I've delivered many babies thinking as I delivered them this baby has a future but no past. That's what I need." That's what we are provided with: A future with no past.

So, now there's one other point I want you to know. Some of these little points the apostle suggests from his literature pertain to the church today. Here's one: "Therefore, if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature (or creation); old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Now I would suggest with others that when the apostle says "Behold, all things have become new," that that's a kind of spontaneous jubilation which he inserts in his letter to the Corinthians. Look, all things have become new. Mr. Denney, who was a British theologian has said, "That's one throb of that glad surprise that awaits us."

You know, you often go into churches and you'll find churches that are sort of dead. Some mornings our church is kind of like that, it seems. But lots of churches you go in and they just seem to be a little dead. And so we have all kinds of suggestions today. What we need is more music. We need more discussion and not so much preaching. We need discussion. We don't need entirely theology, give us a little psychology also, free of charge. We want those types of things that keep us interested.

Now we know, if you have any, if you've been in churches any length of time, you know that that's no answer. If you want to go for philosophy and psychology and all of the kinds of music that we have today, pretty soon, the poor word of God is shunted aside, and there is very little treatment seriously of the word that our Lord has given us. So, I have thought a little bit about this and do you know? I've noticed this. In a church where there are people who've been freshly brought into the family of God, there's a lot of joy, a lot of joy. A lot of life. A lot of newness.

So I like to say we don't need music. We don't need special interests in that type of thing. And we certainly don't need psychology. What we need is more preaching of the word of God and more conversions and the happiness that comes, the genuine happiness, the spontaneous jubilation, the apostle notes here, that causes him to say, "Look, all things have become new." This is really what our churches need. They need this. This produces what you think perhaps psychology and music would produce. So, see, right in the midst of all this heavy theology, so we're told. It's not heavy to me; it's the greatest thing in the world. It lifts a person up. It makes him feel marvelous to know the truth of God. Anyway, that's the answer in one sense, maybe not the only answer, to the question of love in the church. Churches that are said to have no love, well, one of the reasons is is not much conversion that takes place. Love, that is, genuine Christian love, make a difference.

Now the apostle says in verse 18, "All things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." Well, the source of this great transformation is God. "Now all things are of God."

John Chrysostom has a statement that I think I would like to read it if I can find it. And I thought it was an excellent statement. I may have to declare an intermission in order to find it, but nevertheless, it's a great statement and I'm not going to be able to find it. Oh, here it is.

[Response from audience member] Hallelujah.

[Johnson] Why, it doesn't deserve a hallelujah, but at least an amen.

"Nothing of ourselves," says Chrysostom in a fine passage, "Nothing is of ourselves; for remission of sins and adoption and unspeakable glory are given to us by him. But behold a new soul, for it was cleansed, and also a new body, and a new worship, and new promises and

covenant and life and table and dress, and all things absolutely new. For instead of Jerusalem below, we have the mother city which is above and instead of a material temple, instead of tables of stone, fleshy tables; instead of circumcision, baptism."

Why do we have to ruin a great passage? [Laughter] You see, this is the kind of thing that some of the church fathers corrupted the church with: That baptism is the means by which we receive eternal life and the blessings of life. It's found in the Roman Catholic Church because when an infant is brought to the pastor and the water is sprinkled upon the infant, according to Rome, at that point, righteousness is infused into the infant. Infundo is the Latin term that is used. Infundo is poured in.

This is the whole heart of ECT incidentally. Can we unite with a group of people whose official doctrine that cannot be changed because it is infallible, the Pope has assured of that, it's infallible, can we unite with people who believe that baptism is the means by which we receive eternal life? We cannot and hold true to the Scriptures of God. You can see how it came into the early church.

Chrysostom is a fine man, but there it is, "Instead of circumcision, baptism." I didn't intend to stress this, but there it is. He goes on to say, "Instead of the manna, the Lord's body; instead of water from the rock, blood from the side; instead of Moses' and Aaron's rod, the cross; instead of the promised land, the kingdom of heaven, instead of a thousand priests, one High Priest; instead of a lamb without understanding, a spiritual lamb...But all these things are of God by Christ and His free gift." Many good things, John Chrysostom said.

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

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

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

Now if you believe in universal salvation, you might find some reason in that text, at least you'd have one text that you could appeal to. You'd be wrong, of course, but you might appeal to it. It looks good on the spur of the moment. You see how important it is, my Christian friends, to pay attention to the text. It's very important. In fact, if you can, have pure attention to the text. But at any rate.

So what happens in this reconciling action is the insuring of the remission of sins of a particular body. And it cannot have, as John Murray used to say, "Since this reconciling action insures remission, because the offenses are not reckoned to them, it cannot have a broader reference than its unfailing issue." And what is the unfailing issue? A limited body of believing

people. So it cannot be more than that, because the reconciling action is an operative action that succeeds in its operation.

It does reconcile the world, but the world is not saved, except in the sense all kinds of people in the world, the world, not simply Gentiles. Jews and Gentiles, not simply Jews. Jews and Gentiles. That's the point of the apostle. It's obvious. Just look at the little clause, not reckoning their offenses or "imputing their trespasses to them." It's so simple if you just pay attention to the text.

(I shouldn't have taken that Claritin D this morning. It's designed to take liquid out of you possibly, yes. I don't take it normally. Otherwise, I'd have never taken it here if I knew what would happen. I'm enjoying this water. Sorry, I can't offer you more.)

So what does world mean? Well, Charles Hodge says, "Man not reconciling man or mankind," that is, it's a class of people that he refers to and toward which he is propitious. Augustine refers this to the elect. He was correct in that respect. Dr. Chafer used to like to say, "This is a text that says that all men are savable." Well, how do they get saved? Well, they're kind of left to themselves. Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield has a few things to say about that. No, it doesn't mean savable. The world is all savable. He's talking about a definite body as is evident.

Some have suggested this is a cosmic act, that is, he's the last Adam redressing the work of the first. Well, in some sense that's true. But what it means exegetically and clearly from the text is all mankind without distinction, not without exception. All mankind, Jews and Gentiles. All mankind without distinction. That's clear, my friends, because it says "not imputing their trespasses to them." Unless you're a universalist, then we have other texts we have in the Scriptures for you. So the world.

Now, I know my time is up. I have so much more I could say to you. But we won't do that. Thank you, John, I appreciate that.

[Response from an audience member] I think that means that you're not supposed to stop.

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

[Response from an audience member indistinct]

[Johnson] Well, that's mighty nice of you. I'm not sure I need all of that.

I'm not going to go much longer. I want, however, before I close to ask you to turn to Luke chapter 15. I'm really through. I've told you everything that I know, basically, about these texts. I only want to say this, that I struggled with this for a long time.

As I mentioned to you, teaching New Testament exegesis for many years at Dallas, one thing that Dr. Chafer wanted. He didn't know Greek. He knew a few Greek words. He would occasionally throw them in to his message. Occasionally mispronounce them. I can remember he used to talk about pleroma in his messages, but he was so, he felt so disqualified for ministry by not knowing Greek that when he founded his seminary, he determined that those men should know Greek and Hebrew. So, they had double the Greek and Hebrew that most seminaries have. And today, maybe three times as much, except they, too, are beginning now to come down on Greek.

When I arrived, you had to have a year of Greek before you could come in the seminary. Then, in the seminary, he thought three years of seminary is not enough. So, the seminary was four years. Some of our friends could have said, Well, those fellows are so ignorant, they need four. Whereas the rest of us can get it in three. I imagine that was said. But anyway, we had, we

came in with Greek, and we had to have four more years. Every man who graduated from Dallas Seminary had five years of Greek. He had three years of Hebrew, every one. A lot of them had to drop out. They were not really qualified for that. They may have come out with some big deficiencies in theology, but they came out with a lot of knowledge of Greek and Hebrew.

And so constantly in the seminary, in the department of New Testament, we had courses teaching exegetically the Greek text of the various books of the Bible. 2 Corinthians was one. I devoted thirty lectures to 2 Corinthians when we taught that. And we went through the text. So, I'm kind of familiar with some of those things. But all of that time, I was puzzling over definite atonement. It made me puzzle over it. I had to exegete these passages.

And we had Calvinists slip in. I mean consistent Calvinists slip into our student body, and they would, we'd come to these passages and I would explain it. And he'd say, Dr. Johnson. And then I would, of course, have to find out what this text really said, because I couldn't answer some of the problems that were offered to me. And this passage was one that I was troubled with.

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

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

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

I've always felt that that's a beautiful illustration of the doctrine of reconciliation. The father is the important person in it. In verse 11, Jesus said as he began to tell the story, "A certain man had two sons."

He might demand anything as a condition for return, at least confession. Verses 18 and 19, "I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him," and he's got his confession all made up. He doesn't even get to give his confession to the father. The father, in the dignity of

compassion, verse 18 and verse 19, gathers his garments up and unashamedly ran, smothering the confession of his son and rewards him as his heart desires.

This is Jesus Christ's picture of God. This is his picture of the Lord God in heaven. He waits, he hopes, he sees, he runs, he kisses, and there is reconciliation. And they begin to be merry, and they've never stopped, so far as we know. That's the world that the apostle is talking about when he talks about the reconciliation of the world. It's the world of his people who come ultimately to him.

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

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege that we have of pondering the great truths of the word of God such as reconciliation. How could we ever give Thee thanks, Lord, for the way in which Thou hast been waiting for the sons of God, the elect, to come home. We thank Thee that Thou hast brought us home. And for those, Lord, who have not yet come, make us effective servants in the preaching of the word by which they too may enter into this inestimable forgiveness which we have. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Comment from the audience] Dr. Johnson, you may want to stay up here. I think some may have some questions. Anyone have any questions you'd like to come to the microphone? Yeah, they're coming up, so you're not done yet.

[Question from audience member] I'd like to preface my question with a couple of comments. Right at that time in 1977, I was at Lancaster Bible College, and I well remember what happened. (What college?) Lancaster Bible College. A letter that you had written to one of your former students when we learned of your leaving, and at that time I was going through the same struggle. And I would like for a moment, and just so you understand that we are in agreement today on these things, but for the benefit of everyone here and for myself, I'd like to hear an answer from you to a question that I might have asked back then. So if I could just step back to pre-1977 and pretend I'm an Amyraldian once again. And in that same passage, if I were an Amyraldian and was an advocate for that at this point, I might say to you: We, as Christians, when we go to people from the word of God, we say Jesus has accomplished a finished work. Believe, and we command them from the word of God to believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we would describe his work using various words like propitiation, redemption and reconciliation. But we don't go to people and command them to be redeemed. However, if we were to continue in this passage, having established that reconciliation is a finished work and that he actually really reconciled as a substitute, then why would we be going to men in the following verses with the word of reconciliation as ambassadors for Christ commanding them: Be ye reconciled to God, as if it were not done?

[Johnson] Well, let me say this, that the message "Be ye reconciled" is the message that the man is to proclaim to people who are not reconciled. But what he is saying there is language that is addressed to believers already. But you are, as a preacher of the gospel, you spend behind the pulpit and you proclaim, "Be reconciled to God." Paul is talking to Corinthians, and he is treating them as reconciled. So, if you are speaking to believers, you can talk to them as reconciled. But if you're talking to unbelievers, you cannot talk to them as reconciled. I don't know whether that answers the question. That's all I can say though.

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

[Question from audience member] Actually, I think my question might be related to that, but we can talk about it. But my question has to do, how we regard the penal obligations of the reprobate. If, I take it from the reading of the text, that we can't say to the reprobate that you're to live for Christ who died for you. I know we don't know who the reprobate are when we are preaching to them. But how would you regard the penal obligations of the reprobate? They're not obligated to live for the Christ who died for them. They're obligated in Adam, but besides their obligations, their penal obligations in Adam, would you say that when they appear before Christ to be judged, what is the standard, what is the penal obligation for the reprobate.?

[Johnson] Well, his obligation is to believe the message of a God who is willing to reconcile sinners.

[Question from audience member] In your coming to understand the truth of a limited atonement, most of us struggled for a long time, as you did, how do we help people? What's the thing that was the biggest stumbling block to you that you struggled with that obviously other people struggle with? And how can we so present the truth of limited atonement that only, we know only God can open a man's heart, but at least we can take the obstacles out of the way and not put deliberate obstacles in his way. So, in your own experience, what was the biggest struggle that you had, whether it was textual or theological or whatever?

[Johnson] Well, the biggest struggle I had was the fact that I was teaching constantly the books of the New Testament, and so, I was facing all of the problem texts. The passages in 1

John, for example, 1 John 2:1 and 2, every time I taught the course on the Epistles of John, which it came on every two years, would come up. I knew I had to face that particular text. I was, I excelled in Arminian interpretations, in the sense that until I began to see that they did not really hold water. So, I would be, the students would always ask when we come to that text.

From the beginning, I was, really fell in the Amyraldian camp, because I did believe in unconditional election. I believed in irresistible grace. I believed in the perseverance of the saints, although I generally thought of it as eternal security. And I believed in total depravity. I was converted through Donald Grey Barnhouse who himself acknowledged he believed those, and then used to preach on five points of Calvinism, but which he didn't fully understand. And so, I just got used to those texts. And as they would come up, I would be prepared with an Arminian interpretation. I didn't know it as an Arminian interpretation. I knew it simply as a way by which a Calvinist, a four-point Calvinist, could defeat those who wanted to overthrow all of my, all of the Calvinism that I had. So that was a constant problem.

And so, through those years in the Epistle to the Romans, the Epistle to the Romans, for example, I taught every year. That was a required course every year. First Corinthians was taught every year. The prison epistles, we taught every year. And Hebrews was taught every year. So, every year we would have these same questions from the students. Dr. Johnson, what about verse 1 and 2 in 1 John, for example, of the various things. So, I just, I got very skilled in answering things that were really, I found out later, were problems I didn't answer. But if you had asked me: What is the best Arminian interpretation of the passage? I knew that, because I had to try to answer it.

So, I think I had a special, I had a kind of a specialized background. I had to face things constantly from a position that was not really soundly based. That's why. I'm thankful for that, but I perspired a lot. [Laughter] But fortunately, the students didn't really want to believe the other. We had a few, like as I said, Gary Long and some others came through who were

Calvinists. They had been trained. Usually in every entering class, we would have maybe one or two who were convinced Calvinists. And so, I was so close, we were friends, but we had these constant little battles going on all the time. I tried to keep them friendly. I learned a lot from them.

[Question from audience member] You mentioned the baptism of Calvin in passing. Would you say that the baptism of Calvin is essentially the same or relatively somewhat like that of Roman Catholicism?

[Johnson] I don't know that I'm qualified enough to answer that particular question. As Calvin's statement in Acts 16:31 would indicate to me that he did not accept baptismal regeneration. He said in Acts 16, you remember, when the question of the Philippian jailer is "What must I do to be saved?", he said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved," Acts 16:31. And at that point, John Calvin has what I would consider a very telling statement, for him and for me too, which incidentally I discovered long, I don't know, maybe ten or fifteen years ago, long after I had been teaching. But on Acts 16:30 and 31, on "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shall be saved, you and your household," Calvin says, "Short and meager in appearance, but it is ample." Ample, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and Thou shall be saved." So that faith in response to the gospel message is ample for him. So I think that would suggest that he clearly would never have accepted, except in maybe his earlier days before he himself was converted, the Roman Catholic interpretation of it.

I don't know, does that answer your question?

[Comment from the same audience member] Well, somewhat, somewhat.

[Johnson] What is the other what?

[Comment from the same audience member] What about the idea of infused grace or receiving some grace in the baptism?

[Johnson] He did not accept that. How can you accept that?

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

[Johnson] Well, that's a very difficult question to answer because there are certain things that can be said for the other viewpoint. And you'll find it in most of the Christian theologies because they do differ over that point. Does God need to be, is it necessary for God to be reconciled or is it man who must be reconciled? And I can only tell you my viewpoint. There are other things that could be said. On the spur of the moment, I'd have to go back into my memory when in teaching the doctrine I used to set forth the other side. There are very fine Christian theologians who've felt that there is a sense in which God must be reconciled. My feeling is that the cross of Jesus Christ is that which settles the question of God's demands as far as man is concerned if you might say the reconciliation that he had was satisfied by the blood of Christ on Calvary's cross. And the message now is for man to be reconciled with reference to the message. I would suggest that you look at some of the Christian theologies on that point because that is not

an easy question to answer on the spur of the moment. I'd have to go back and look at some things, too.

[Comment from the same audience member] Along those lines, would it be maybe good to say with regard to propitiation, God is propitiated and because he's propitiated, therefore, man is reconciled, and look at it, propitiation – God-ward, reconciliation – man-ward?

[Johnson] I wouldn't say that, David, because I think reconciliation stands by itself. It is true what you've said, of course, that the blood of Christ is a propitiating necessity for the Lord God in heaven, because he must be propitiated. There must be the satisfaction of his divine justice claims against man. So, I never have, I've thought of those as separate doctrines, myself.

[Comment from the same audience member] That was a followup. I'll get to my question. Just pick it up there. With regard to verse 19 of 2 Corinthians 5, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself," it seems an excellent parallel text to that is Romans 11:15 when Paul speaks of Israel and says, "If the casting away of them has been the reconciling of the world." And obviously, he's not arguing for universal atonement. He's arguing for the same thing you've pointed out in this text, that this is without distinction as to kind. And then, too, "Not imputing their iniquities," when Paul talks about the blessedness of the justified man in Romans 4, he quotes Psalm 32 and "the man whose trespasses are not imputed" is the man whose blessed and saved. And that in itself, again, seems to argue against any kind of hypothetical or universalistic aspect there.

Going to chapter 5, verse 14 and 15, when Paul says "If One died for all, then all died," in the Greek text, the definite article appears before all, [indistinct]. And then with the "He died for all that they which live," we have [indistinct] the definite article again. Would you attach any

significance to that in that it does argue for a restrictive or more particular focus still with regard to definite atonement?

[Johnson] I really haven't thought of it, but I would think it's the all that he's referring to in the context that he's talking about, and that's why he would use the article.

[Comment from the same audience member] That's what it seems, "If One died for all," then the all for whom he died and who've died in him died. And it seems that even highlights the particularity.

[Johnson] Yeah, I think so, too. Yeah, well, thank you very much. It's a good comment.

[Question from audience member] Just with the ongoing debate of the free offer of the gospel, could you make comment on your concepts about that?

[Johnson] I'm not sure I'm even qualified. I've just spent my life giving a free offer of the gospel.

[Comment from the same audience member] Yeah, I agree. But there's so many that, you know, they kind of, they talk about the hyper-Calvinist thing, and you can get the primitive Baptist, and let it go. It's, I believe, you know, when you're going out, and I believe in everything that you've said, that when you do, you don't know who you're talking to. And it's a free offer, but those that are enabled by the Spirit of God to respond, will respond.

[Johnson] Well, I, of course, take that position. You'll find in all of the preaching that I do, I have. I do have one hyper-Calvinist friend in Augusta, Georgia, and he's listened to our tapes. And he likes the tapes, but he doesn't like the general offer, so he occasionally will come over to Dallas, or he'll call me on the phone, and we have a little conversation. And he accepts me as one of the family of the faithful, and I'm thankful for that. But, through my life I have spent a lot of time studying things that are not useful to me now. I spent a lot of time on this question because everything depended on it in my family and the ministry that I was having. And though I lost the case, I guess you'd say, in the sense that I lost my position as professor of systematic theology, because I had moved from New Testament professor to that, to my stubbornness in accepting that viewpoint, now I thank God for it. I thank God it freed me from having to deal with things that were disappointing to me, to see a lot of young men who didn't have an opportunity to be more exposed to consistent Calvinism. So, another question?