



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Various

John Bunyan Conference, Lecture XIV

TRANSCRIPT

[Introduction of Dr. Johnson] Dr. Johnson is going to bring a message on Romans 5, covenantal representation. We have a loose rule, not the laws of the Medes and the Persians, that we don't invite people back more than two years in a row. And of course, we've already done that with a couple of times. And we think it might be a good idea if we would just give him a standing invitation to be here every year that he can be here. How many think that's a good idea? [Applause] That's an official invitation.

[Johnson] The reason that I wanted to say a word to you about covenantal representation is found in something that I have been reading and it is in effect that covenantal representation is something of which we ought to be embarrassed rather than enlightened. In fact, surprisingly in some recent writing by evangelicals on Romans chapter 5 and the subject of representation was involved but not specifically. In one case it was specifically but the author, an evangelical scholar, made the statement that the arrangement that the apostle sets forth in Romans chapter 5 of covenantal representation is questionable on grounds of fairness. In fact after discussing one of the other

evangelicals the author stated that, "Still the question of whether this is fair has not been answered."

Now, I'm not sure I can answer all that's involved in that question, because there may be something that I don't really realize is behind it. But if the individual is an evangelical and believes in divine election, it seems to me the question of fairness is implicit in the doctrine of election, much less representation. So it surprised that I would read in an evangelical commentary of significantly a very good commentary, one from which I would learn a great deal I'm sure when I finished it. But it's surprising that someone would say "Is covenantal representation fair?" So this afternoon I'm going to try as best I can to say a few words about Romans chapter 5 and specifically verse 12 through verse 19 with that in the background, thinking about the question of whether covenantal representation is something that we should be happy about rather than disturbed about. Now, of course we might say as evangelicals, "If it's in the Bible we're happy about it." We may not understand, however, but we are willing to say, "I'll go out on the limb and if it's in the Bible, it's fair. It must be." But we have evangelicals who are raising this question, and so that interested me so much that I thought I would like ponder again Romans chapter 5 verse 12 through verse 19 and ask myself the question again, "Is this fair?"

Now, I want to warn you ahead of time that what I'm going to say is that it's not only fair, but it is the most magnificent arrangement that we could possibly invent or describe. In fact, only God could. So I'm disturbed by the idea of something that seems to me so marvelous, covenantal representation, that Christ should represent me, if there is a question about that I'm so surprised that I must say something about it. I must rethink this and think is it really fair? Is it wonderful? That's what I really think that it is.

Now Romans 5: 12-19, I'm sure that most of you are familiar with this particular passage, and so I'd like to read it now and think about what I've just mentioned as the

topic, "Redemption by Covenantal Representation." The apostle writes in verse 12 of Romans 5,

"Therefore just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned: for until the Law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no Law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who have not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense, for if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded too many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgments which came from one offense resulted in condemnation. But the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by one man's offense, (Are you getting confused?) If by the one man's offense death reined through the one, much more those who received the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness. (What a marvelous bestowment, the gift of righteousness) will reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. Therefore as through one man's offense judgment came to all men resulting in condemnation, even so, through one man's righteous act the free gift came to all men resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners. So also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous."

In my opinion this is a very neglected subject among evangelicals. I think in studying Romans we come to chapter 5 and when we read these verses which the apostle has written, that I have just read, we tend to read through them without thinking through them in the way in which we do other passages of the Bible. But it undergirds the entire story of human redemption. You can refer to it as covenantal representation, which I have, or simply representation. We know what representation is, we have a President in

Washington. He represents you. [Laughter] We have senators in the states in which we dwell, and they represent us. And we have Congressmen and Congresswomen and they represent us, so we know something about representation in that sense.

But when we come to the Bible and we read a little bit in the Bible we discover very soon that we also have representation in the Bible. In fact, one man so represented us that he brought every one of us into sin and condemnation and to this present day every little infant born suffers from the representation of Adam, who represented us all in the Garden of Eden. So representation is something that we have, we cannot avoid it. Jim Packer says somewhere in one of his writings that it's "the story of the whole Bible," representation. Well in one sense, it is. Much of natural man's enmity centers here, from the days of Ishmael, Esau, Balak to the apostles. In Acts 17 there are some things that are related to that that are stated there. And ultimately representation is involved in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ and the penal satisfaction which he rendered by substitution on Calvary's cross; substituting for a certain group of people. Now, here in this audience most of us, if not all of us, would say yes, "He's our representative. He's the one we want. We consider it the greatest blessing of life itself to know that Jesus Christ is our representative and has born our judgment." And not only that, but is our representative at the present moment at the right hand of the throne of God ever living to make intercession for us. So it's a marvelous blessing to have a representative. As a matter of fact I think I already know that this arrangement is more than fair, as far as I'm concerned, couldn't be better. So I'm astonished that evangelicals, leading evangelicals should ask the question "Is it fair?" Is election fair? Well, we'll drop that, but go on.

I want to say a few words now about this critical passage, Romans 5:12-19. The connection you'll notice in verse 12 is found in the very first word, "Therefore," for this reason; actually the "therefore" in my opinion is not a real good translation of this. The tendency of some of the exegetical interpreters of the present day is in my opinion to be a little loose with the text. I doubt that the expression that is found in Romans chapter 5

and verse 12, which is the Greek expression *dia touta* as I remember, can be rendered really by "Therefore." You know, it's a funny thing, it's not found in Acts chapter 5, verse 12. [Laughter] So the apostle writes, *dia touta*, literally and better "on account of this." Therefore, therefore is not in my opinion the correct rendering on account of this. The apostle goes on to speak.

Anyway, much of man's natural enmity centers here from the days of Ishmael, Esau, Balak all the way to the apostles. And what we're dealing with is penal satisfaction by a substitute. Now, the connection "for this cause," that is, "for this cause sense we have salvation by one man," this likeness exists between Christ and Adam. The master thought of the apostle here is the unity of the many in the one, sin, condemnation, death, find their resolution, find their origin in Adam. Righteousness, justification, and life are found in the last Adam. The second man, but the last Adam. So there is solidarity here, but it's contrastive solidarity; Adam on one hand then the last Adam on the other.

In verse 12 what the apostle states is that all die because all sin. In verse 13 through verse 17 he says all die because one sinned. Isn't that striking? All die because all sin. All die because one sinned. The only way in which you can have that is to have the solidarity of representation. He is our representative. Adam was our representative, we fell in him; so solidarity, the solidarity of representation. Verse 12, "All die because all sin," verse 13 through verse 17, "All die because one sinned." You can see there is a covenantal relationship here just by noticing that. It's the solidarity of representation and covenantal representation.

Now, this representation is expressed in imputation. Notice, "For this cause," oh I better turn to Romans 5 and verse 12, "For this cause as through one man sin entered into the world and through sin death, even so unto all men death passed," really something like "came through," "passed because all have sinned." So solidarity, it's contrastive solidarity; all die because one sinned, and so on.

Now, the representation is expressed in imputation too. He says in verse 12, "because all sinned." And then in verse 18 and verse 19 we read, "Consequently then as through one trespass unto all men, unto condemnation there came the gift. So also through one righteous act unto all men it came unto justification of life, for as through the disobedience of the one man, the many were constituted sinners, so also through the obedience of the one, the many shall be constituted righteous." So we are treated as having failed in Adam, who was our representative, and we are now treated as conquering through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The instrumentality of the reception of the righteousness he describes for us in verse 17 as being faith. "For if by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one much more, the ones receiving the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness shall reign in life through the one Jesus Christ." Now faith is not specifically expressed there, but that is the idea, I think, of the expression. So we have then this representation that raises the question of is it something that we should be interested in.

Now, I'd like to move now to the biblical illustrations of the principle, because the principle of representation pervades the word of God. We have specific examples of the principle in the case of Esau's act, God's dealings with Moab and Amman, God's dealings with Cora. And it's remarkable how much representation there is found in the word of God. And so we do have a great deal of that. And we have, of course, an expression in the New Testament that is the most significant one for us, and that is the expression "in Christ." We are all thankful for that are we not? [Amen] We are thankful for the fact that we are represented in him. We turn to passages like Ephesians chapter 1 verse 4, verse 9, verse 10 through verse 13 and so on and read about what it means to be in Christ.

That expression "in Christ" occurs about 164, 165 times in the New Testament, but not only 164 times in the New Testament do we find in Christ, but we have all of the "by" expressions, like in him, in whom, etcetera. And there are about 200 of them. So we have well over 300 expressions of the idea of union with Christ as our covenantal head.

The origin of it is John chapter 14 and verse 20 most likely where the apostle John writes giving part of our Lord's upper room discourse and our Lord is speaking, "At that day you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you." That's the covenantal relationship. That's the relationship of union. We have it expressed in other passages, for example in Acts chapter 9, verse 4 in a passage no doubt many of you have thought about at one time or another in your study of the Bible. Then Saul still breathing out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord went to the high priest and asked for letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus so that if he found any who were of the way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. And then he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?" Well he wasn't persecuting that heavenly person, so Saul thought what he found out, that there was a union between those who were the objects of his persecution and this one who speaks from heaven.

The corporate union signified by that expression is fundamental to the understanding of the New Testament. What it is really is the Damascus Road experience put to doctrine in him, in whom, union with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It's the language of an element, the language of air. It's the language of water. It's the language of earth. It's the language of fire. I'm not sure I can illustrate that any better than Arthur T. Pierson's words, but I may not even have them in my, yes I do, so I'll read what Mr. Pierson has to say about this. Incidentally, Arthur T. Pierson was one of the great preachers of an earlier part of the 19th and early 20th century. I have enjoyed all of us Pierson's writings. They are unusual. He was a good friend, incidentally, of Spurgeon's and frequently preached for him and was a Presbyterian minister. It seems strange doesn't it? But nevertheless there was a union between the two of appreciation for each other.

But this is what Mr. Pierson says in a book called *Knowing the Scriptures*. By the way it's something that you would enjoy reading if you haven't read it. It almost seems like a paradox, for how can anything be at once in and out? Contained and containing. His parable is the explanation. Botanically it is true, for the vine and the branch grow into each other, their fibers interpenetrating and interlocking. Such language suggests an element like air, fir, water, earth, of all which it is true that they are in what is in them as the fire is in the iron when the iron is in the fire." I'm not sure I can pronounce iron, I'm a Southerner. [Laughter] That's difficult to pronounce in a way that you will understand it. "The order here is fixed, for he must be in us that we may be in him, as the iron must first be in the fire if the fire is to be in the iron, or the bird in the air, if the air is to be in the bird." Those are interesting little figures of what it means to be in our Lord. But it certainly suggests a rather close relationship. And that's the kind of relationship that we have with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, so union with him. The language of an element, air, water, earth, fire; we're talking about representation.

Now, having said that, and I'm already to my third point, this is going to be bad. But I want to now say something about the justification of this principle. The great objection is that this is manifestly unjust. Charles Hodge has something to say about it in the second volume of his theology, and since I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit, I think I'd like to read just a little bit of what Hodge has to say about this if I can find it in a hurry. On page 204, Charles Hodge has this to say about this matter. He's talking about the argument concerning the imputation of Adam's sin and how that's been the doctrine of the church universal for all ages. "It was the doctrine of the Jews, derived from the plain teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures. It was and is the doctrine of the Greek, Latin, Lutheran, and Reformed churches. Its denial is a novelty. It is only since the rise of Arminianism that any considerable body of Christians have ventured to set themselves in opposition to a doctrine so clearly taught in the Bible, and sustained by so many facts of history and experience. The points of diversity in reference to this subject do not relate to

the fact that Adam's sin is imputed to his posterity, but either to the grounds of that imputation or to its consequences."

And in the end of the paragraph he says, "But in all this diversity it was universally admitted, first, that certain evils are inflicted upon all mankind on account of Adam's sin; and, secondly, that those evils are penal. Men were universally, so far as the Church was concerned, held to bear in a greater or less degree the punishment of the sin of their first parent." So the illustrations then of the principle begin essentially with the relationship that we all have to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Romans 5:12-19 then, the connection again, "For this cause since we have salvation by one man, this likeness exists." A master thought then, the unity of the many in the one, solidarity, representation expressed in imputation. We are treated as having failed in Adam. We are treated as conquering in our Lord Jesus Christ. The instrumentality, as I mentioned, is faith.

Now, the principle, when we say that this principle pervades the words we are talking about not simply in Christ but all the different ways by which it's expressed in the New Testament. [Pause in recording] Sometime you take a look at what some of the Christian theologies like Hodge's have to say about that, because it's wide ranging, it's not something that's just here or there a couple of places. But now, what about the speculative justification of the principle, is it really, manifestly unjust, as our interpreters who are writing the book of Romans would say, "Is it fair?" Is it really fair? Again, that's so surprising to me that an evangelical who believes in the doctrine of election would raise the question of fairness, because if there's anything that seems unfair it's that God's love should center upon, well in this crowd largely I'm sure, you and me. Are we willing to say that that is not a special kind of love? Isn't that a special kind of relationship? It seems to me that it is. Now, of course if you think that the reason that you are one of his elect is because of what you have done to cement that relationship, then of course you might raise the question of fairness.

If you are not one of that group and you think that it's something that you do or anyone does that makes this relationship a relationship forever, and there's something you have done, then you would raise that question. And so, excuse me, but I feel a little concerned about some of my brethren that deep down within there might be some lingering idea that there is something for which I am responsible in this relationship that makes this relationship that I have to the Lord the work of the Lord and the work of little me. Am I so far out in the woods? I don't think so. Maybe I am. Some of you will straighten me out. But it seems that we shouldn't raise the question of fairness. Otherwise we have all sorts of difficulties in the word of God.

Now, I want to suggest to you why this particular relationship may be justified. This may be a little difficult to do. So first of all, let me consider some questions related to just briefly, the simple empirical support, Adam's sin does issue in man's death. We don't forget that. And there are things like the national debt for which we are responsible and various other things in human life will pass by that. But I want to think now just now for a moment about the speculative support to buttress the idea that representation is something that we should be extremely happy about. What are the alternatives? Number one, let's suppose option one the Lord had was that Adam should be left under the natural relationship and law of retributive justice forever. In other words, the safety of those in relationship with the Lord should be forever contingent. That would be most discouraging, forever contingent, forever the possibility of losing the relationship that we have. Forever contingent is our safety in relationship with the Lord God.

The universal ruin from finite man, the infinite variety of the trials to which we may be exposed. What would be the result of this option if the Lord had left us under the natural relationship and law of retributive justice forever? Well I dare say we wouldn't be having any conference like this. That would be one thing that wouldn't be there. As a matter of fact what would happen in my opinion that ultimately God would be left alone on his planet, with his planet if that was the option.

Well suppose that we have another option. Suppose we take the option of Adam being left under a limited probation, say seventy years, if he succeeds he received eternal life. Well, this is the Pelagian scheme right there. Live for seventy years without sin, without displeasing the Lord. Then we are given eternal life. But even the Pelagian admit that they all fall by evil examples. If representative guilt is irresponsible, is not representative salvation too?

Well there is another option, suppose Adam is left under federal probation for a limited time. The creation itself, the race united by blood, not a collection of individuals simply belonging to the same class but the Adam the root since he's the head; always some natural ties in such relations; parent, child, king, subject, etcetera. Most favorable conditions, Adam a mature man, no bad example, noblest motives, positive, magnify God's goodness; negative, all dependant on him. If successful, no complaints of hardness; difference of the result doesn't modify the principle. Sinning in another can be redeemed by another, thus representation clearly in that arrangement would be a provision of grace.

There's another option, Adam created conformed to God in holiness, no problem of evil. We know this wasn't done. We know from the word of God that was not. Why? Well for so it seemed good to the Lord God in heaven. Now as I look at this and someone says to me, "Is it fair?" Well I want to say to me that this is the most wonderful arrangement into which I could ever find myself forever." [Amen] The arrangement of union with Christ by means of the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ is beyond my fullest understanding, of course, but it's beyond my understanding to appreciate how marvelous it is to be in Christ forever; couldn't be anything better. So I must say again I'm puzzled by many of my compatriots in the family of God and even in the teaching fraternity who ask the question "Is it fair?" It's the way in which God in his marvelous grace hath dealt with us. Maybe by human standards we would say it's unfair, but it's

something that we rejoice in. And so consequently I don't have any difficulty with it. It's a provision of grace that I appreciate.

So Adam was created conformed to God in holiness. As a result of the sin of Adam we know what it means to be justified by the grace of God. And we know that this is pleasing to the Lord God in heaven; so divine revelation in Scripture presents a God who in infinite wisdom created a scheme to glorify the Son giving him an elect people. In marvelous grace and love we have fallen in a representative. Adam stood for us. We fell in him. This was God's determination. This was his arrangement that we should stand in the first man, in Adam, the last Adam as a matter of fact, the only one. And we fell in him. Having fallen in a representative, suppose we had not fallen in a representative, suppose we just fell as individuals what kind of hope might we expect? But suppose we fall in a representative, perhaps as is the case, there may be another representative for us in whom we may find the blessing of the eternal God for eternal ages. That, of course, is what the Lord has done. Adam is the first man. Adam's the first representative, the last Adam is a representative and he's the last Adam, the last representative. That's it, so sinning in another we may be redeemed by another. And I think that representation is clearly a provision of sovereign grace; so fairness that doesn't enter into the question at all if we're talking about this arrangement.

So I have to conclude as I think about this, that divine revelation in Scripture presents a God who in infinite wisdom created a scheme to glorify the Son, giving him an elect people in marvelous grace and love. As I mentioned, we fell in Adam; we rise in Adam the last. We fell by no fault of our own, by Adam's, we weren't even here. We prove, of course, by our appearance later on what we would have done, but we fell by no fault of our own, we rise by no merit of our own. Oh such wisdom and grace as is found in the redemptive program of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Texans know this; I don't know it even though I live in Texas. When a father strikes oil, the children get rich. [Laughter] We have hit a gusher in Jesus Christ. [Amen]

[Applause] Marvelous representation, I don't know of any more wonderful doctrine than representation by Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. The last Adam is the one I want for my representative. You know I'm just, I told Martha before I came over here, I said, "I don't know what I'm going to do this afternoon." I had about eight or nine messages that have to do with this subject. I said, "I just don't know. This is going to be pretty bad Martha." [Laughter] And it's been pretty bad [Laughter] I have to admit it. But I want to suggest to you that Believers Chapel still has a lot of the tape and a lot of the written ministry which I accompanied the tapes with. And one of the bulletins that you might be interested is one called "The Imputation of Adam's Sin" it's in the Romans series. And you're free to write the chapel and they're all free. We never did charge for anything and don't every charge for anything. And I think you'll find that a good bit of what I've said to you here is said a little bit better in this four or five page written paper. "The Imputation of Adam's Sin," Romans 5:12, its lesson sixteen in the Romans series in Believers Chapel.

Now, I'm going to say that that's the end of what I want to say to you, and if any of you would like to ask some questions, you feel free to come up and ask them.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] No I haven't run across that to be frank with you. As far as I know the people that I'm thrown in touch with are people who believe the doctrine of election, but not necessarily Calvinistic election in the clearest sense, but they do believe in election. And I don't know anyone who wants to modify that. They live that idea, but perhaps they've never considered what it really means as over against other principles that might raise the question of is it a matter of grace, is it fair? It's a funny thing. I don't think I've ever had anyone come to me and say, and maybe I have in the past. I spent the earlier part of my life not only teaching in theological seminaries almost forty years. But I carried

on a home Bible class ministry most of the time. So all of the time we had home Bible classes and then I would open it up at the end of the class almost always for questions. And I never had anyone ask me the question "Is election fair?" Or is representative fair either? It's rather striking.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Yes I think the Bible teaches that we are guilty of that sin. I don't know of any individual who was without sin until he personally committed a sin. We are born under the judgment of the fall of Adam.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Well now if it's just simply that we had a representative and the angels didn't have a representative, then I would have to say yes as far as I know that's it. We do have angels that fell, and so far as I know there is no arrangement for a redemption of them, which would seem to suggest that there is nothing that corresponds to the arrangement made for us. So yes, I'm glad I'm a member of the human race and not a member of the angelic body. It raises the question also about what would happen if an angel sinned now, and I don't know the answer to that question. I'm old enough to know that maybe I'll get an answer soon. [Laughter]

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Come up and say that again.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] As far as I know, I don't know any such arrangement for them by way of redemption. Anybody else?

[Closing comments from Conference Spokesman] Thank you Dr. Johnson [Applause]. He said that was his pick of eight or nine sermons. Maybe next year he can give us another one of those eight or nine. It's rich. Thank you very much...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]