



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

"Inconsistencies in Modified Calvinism, Part II"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] One of his adversaries, Pierre du Moulin singled out earlier one of the difficulties the orthodox would have with Amyrault. He replied to Amyrault's thesis that "For one to say God sent his Son to die for all men without exception on the condition of faith, then the condition was an impossibility for men." Incidentally, acknowledged by Amyrault, not putting words in his mouth, was to represent God more unworthily than to say he sent Christ to die only for the elect. And so the battle was joined.

Now, a few words about the theology. In preparation for the remaining lectures in the series, I want to set out the important features of Amyrault's theology serving a more complete discussion of them for the next lecture, which will discuss the theology and some of the things that in my mind arise from it. In the first place, one of his students contends that like Calvin Amyrault follows basically a posteriori methodology coupled with inductive reasoning. We'll talk about that later on in our series. Of course, it should be remembered that at the time of Amyrault, Calvin did not possess in the eyes of the orthodox normative values. Today Calvin has normative value among Reform people. In many places if you can cite Calvin, well that settles lots of arguments. But at this time Calvin himself was not regarded as having normative value. That's something the orthodox should remember today.

Bud Armstrong, as is popular in Calvin studies today, makes much over the fact that in Calvin's last edition to *The Institutes* the discussion of election was removed from the doctrine of God and placed at the end of Book Three. That change has been thought to have great significance. But in my mind and in the mind of others, it cannot bear the burden of the theological weight that has been placed upon it. Where Calvin discussed the doctrine of divine election and predestination has very little ultimately to do with what he said regarding it. Whether he discussed it there or here doesn't really make a whole lot of difference if you will think about it for a bit. But most people don't think about it too much. Whether predestination is made a part of the doctrine of God, the a priori order, or is treated at the beginning or in the middle of the doctrine of salvation, the a posteriori order doesn't necessarily imply an essential difference in the principle.

Bavinck comments to that effect and adds, "Nevertheless it's a significant fact that the a priori order is usually by the Reformed theologians. While Lutherans, Arminians, Roman Catholics," that's a fellowship that I don't really want to be in myself, I prefer the first, but at any rate, "most of the more recent dogmaticians have gradually begun to adopt the a posteriori order. The reason for this difference Bavinck says, "Is not that the Reformed in a speculative manner derive predestination from an a priori philosophical deterministic conception of the deity," which is what they like to say. "By the opposite adhere to God's revelation in Christ as deposited in Scripture. For even the most strenuous Calvinist, whatever he teaches is the doctrine of God or God's counsel, intends to present nothing else but the doctrine of Scripture. But the real reason for this difference is the fact that for the Reformed the doctrine of predestination has not merely an anthropological and soteriological, but especially a theological significance. God's glory, not man's salvation is considered the chief purpose of predestination. Also the synthetic, a priori order is rooted in a deeply religious motive. Hence, the assertion that this order of treatment presupposes a nominalistic conception of the Deity and that it offers a dry and lifeless dogma lacks every ground.

The doctrine of predestination can be treated in a dry and abstract manner in the middle as well as at the beginning of dogmatics. To be sure, a true and saving faith is the prerequisite for the confession of the doctrine of election, but this is also required with respect to all other doctrines, e.g., the doctrine of God, the trinity, man. If this consideration is allowed to decide the issue, very dogma would have to follow the doctrine of salvation. But in dogmatics we do not discuss the truth as it subjectively enters the consciousness of the believer but as God has objectively revealed it in his Word. The synthetic method alone is able to do justice to the glorification of God, as a religious interest," in other words, to stir our hearts to respond to Christian doctrine, to theology.

Anybody who has ever thought about theology for a while and has allowed it to warm his heart knows precisely what he's talking about. It's theology, the true theology that warms a man's heart not the frivolous kinds of things that we do when we sit on a rock and think and meditate. Incidentally, this is the way that Paul developed this doctrine. You read Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 3 through verse 11, how does he develop this? Talking about experience? No, he starts, "Just as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world." And then glorifies the sovereign grace of God as a result of it, "his good pleasure." The same thing in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verse 3 or 13 through verse 17 the same kind of thing. That was number one, in the first place.

In the second place, I don't want to get too excited here. What's our time? I forgot about the time. In the second place and more significantly Amyraut taught a two fold will of God flowing from a two fold mercy of God, a conditional universal will of God, and an absolute particular will. You can recognize Cameron's teaching. According to the conditional will God appointed or predestinated, is Roger Nicole's word, "all human beings to salvation providing they repent and believe. He sent his Son to die for the sins of all mankind." He uses the expression *également à toutes*, equally for all. Later on in one of his latest writings he drops out that "equally for all" but that's what he said and

others said too; equally for all, equally for the elect, for all non-elect, all the same to accomplish his purpose.

"However, since man is unable to believe of himself," and Amyraut did believe this Calvinistic doctrine, that's why he can stand within the Calvinistic family, "he did believe in salvation through Christ. He believed in human inability also. We could not of ourselves to believe in God. It was necessary because of this for God to have a second will to bestow efficacious grace to his elect alone to bring them to faith in salvation. The latter will is thus an absolute particular will of a limited character touching only the elect. So he believes in the unconditional, unlimited will of God for all men in the provision of atonement, but in a limited application of the atonement. The conditional universal will is his antecedent will, while the latter is his consequent will. Incidentally, these are terms that are found in Aquinas, the Roman Catholic theologian, as well as in some of the Lutherans of the 17th century. And statements severely criticized by the orthodox Calvinist theologians, Amyraut consistently affirmed that," now this is an interesting statement for him to make, "sin caused God as it were to adopt new counsels."

That may give you some idea of how we have a universal will and then a particular will. Sin caused him to adopt new counsels. Since by his own admission God's universal will that all mankind be saved if they believed could never take place, God being frustrated in his intention, and since only the second will pertaining to the elect alone, a limited will, could and must come to fruition in the salvation of the elect, it's understandable that Amyraut's view, the view of historic Four Point Calvinism, was given the name," as I've said twice before hypothetical universalism.

In the third place, Amyraut and his theology juxtaposed the two wills of God, the antecedent and the consequent side by side, revealed in secret. The one will that man be saved if he believe, the other that efficacious grace be granted to the elect alone. More will be said about this later in the morning. But can it be said that God wills those to be

saved whom he does not will to be called to faith in salvation by his word, means which are absolutely necessary to salvation?

In the fourth place, Amyrault taught a rather unique doctrine of the covenants, which he learned from John Cameron. I think we can pass that by with just reading the statements. There are three covenants, the natural covenant contracted in the Garden of Eden between God and Adam, the legal covenant contracted by God with Israel at the giving of the law, and the covenant of grace set forth in the gospel between God and the elect. The three covenants are viewed as three steps in God's historical unfolding of salvation, *theologie des kunstgeschichte* or "theology of the history of salvation" as Eurigan Moatman [phonetic] in his dissertation on Amyrault has designated.

Now, you can see that that kind of idea, if you're sitting in a theological classroom and you hear a lot about *kunstgeschichte* or the history of salvation, or even if you know something about the flow of divine revelation in the word of God. Then you can understand the appeal of that. We are studying theology now as the theologians have spun it out of their minds philosophically, but we are reading the Bible and getting our theology from it in the flow of Scripture. There's nothing wrong with doing that. When we read the Bible and the flow of the unfolding of the word of God we have to pay attention to the statements of the word of God which say, "This has been devised in eternity," and what we see in the flow of history is the unfolding of the eternal decisions of the triune God. In connection with the covenant of grace, Amyrault taught that the Father creates, the Son impetrates; a good old theological word designed to confuse the simple. Impetrates means to acquire or accomplish the satisfaction. The Father creates; the Son acquires the satisfaction, and the Spirit elects, in effect. This analysis differs, of course, from that of Calvin.

Many of Amyrault's admirers like to say he's just following Calvin. But Calvin didn't know that. There is a real problem in the contention that the Spirit elects and applies the redemption to the elect. In other words, Christ's impetration or acquisition of

salvation remains in suspense until the condition of faith occurs. Thus, and this seems to be contrary to the whole of the New Testament teaching, no one can be saved simply by Christ's sacrifice. That is a second saving instrumentality. For the cross does not procure both salvation and its application as the orthodox affirm.

When I went through theological seminary I had a theological professor who in his writings made that specific. I often wondered where he got that, but where he got it is ultimately from Amyraut. He never cites Amyraut. As far as I know Dr. Chafer never mentioned the term Amyraut in his theology. But he got it second hand. He got it from Ralph Wardlaw who was an Amyradlian. And in Wardlaw's analysis, the structure of his theology, there it was, and that's where Chafer got it. And he talks about faith as a second saving instrumentality. Faith is the instrumentality by which we receive, but it's something given by God and determined by God as part of what Christ accomplished when he died on the cross. Well, we'll talk about that, I don't want to get too far ahead of myself.

Romans 8:32 cannot be squared with this analysis. And we'll say more about that. Nor can substitution, which is effectual in New Testament teaching, be harmonized with Amyraut's position. Faith, it is claimed, effectuates the atonement.

In the fifth place, Amyraut's definition of faith may be questioned. He takes it to include notitia and [indistinct] but almost never refer to its aspect of fiducia or trust. And faith, Amyraut even by his supporters appears to be a simple and rational apprehension. I think incidentally in the lordship controversy that there are some within this controversy who also appear to regard faith as something like a simple, rational apprehension. And the ideas that have truly lied behind faith according to the scriptural teaching are sometimes missing.

In the sixth place, one of the troubling aspects of Amyraut as a theologian is his claim that logical consistency was something that one should not strive for. In fact, in connection with his doctrine of the two will, so obviously inconsistent to the orthodox, he

stated that he would not "undertake to resolve the opposition of these two wills of God." The orthodox found it impossible to understand his violation of logic. Amyrault claimed to follow Calvin, but the orthodox Calvin did not have normative value at that time. They revered and respected the one thousand year tradition from the time of Augustine to Calvin, to which the proponents of Amyraldianism have not paid proper regard.

And a final page, Amyrault was a prolific writer, and this is the rebuttal of reformed orthodoxy to him. He published at least ninety titles of works, and if separately printed his thesis amounted to a hundred and fifty-two theses. Now mind you, they're not little theses like what I'm doing here. He wrote that Spanheim, when he had controversy with him and with Andre Rivet they wrote books nine hundred pages long. They got into this question of controversy. [Laughter] And the publishers must have made a fortune for their day, if you could get one of them to write. He was the object of strenuous opposition from outstanding Reform scholars such as Pierre du Moulin of Sedan, Andre Rivet of the Netherlands, and Clevische Von Heim of Geneva at Leiden. At the national synod of Alencon he was mildly censured over the use of such expressions as conditional decrees, Christ died equally for all, *également pour toutes*, and God's vehement desire of things that do not come to pass. But he was not charged with heresy. At the National of Loudun both Amyrault and Jean Daille were acknowledged to be orthodox. In Switzerland in 1655 a statement of faith was drawn up to which subscription was required by ministers in many areas, the statement known as the formula consensus helvetica was designed to rebut the Saumurian theology. But Saumur's influence had spread far beyond Switzerland due to the flight of French Protestants from France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

Well, I've gone a pretty good while. That's 18 pages, I think of notes. My last lecture had twenty-seven pages. So Gary, I'll try to do better. I inserted a lot of things in there, because I didn't want them to go to sleep like I did this afternoon reading my own notes. [Laughter] So do you have any questions? I'll go ahead and try to answer them.

Now, one thing you'll have to do, you're dealing with an old man failing in bodily power. Mental acumens as sharp as ever, you understand [Laughter], but I just can't remember words every now and then. But you have to talk out, because Martha's been trying to get me to get a hearing aid, and I'm resisting. And so speak out, so I can tell her afterwards I heard every word [Laughter] I don't need a hearing aid. All right.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] The question is, is it possible for me to mention some historical facts that might bring the historical side of the controversy up to the present day. I don't think I can really do that, because the nature of the controversy is not the nature of the controversy over Calvinism today. Very few people actually, even among people who are at least knowledgeable of the existence of Amyraldianism. Very few people today seek to debate Amyraldianism. The issue today is largely an issue between those who hold to historic orthodox Calvinism and those who fundamentally are simply objecting to definite atonement or particular redemption or limited atonement as they like to say. And so it's no longer a debate over Amyrault and the orthodox. Because most people don't know what Amyrault's theology was. That is the special form that it took. That's all that I can say about that. Maybe if you've got some more, you can talk to me afterwards and I'll be glad to try to answer it.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] The distinction between freedom and free will is the point of the question. Free will is the teaching that we of ourselves naturally have the freedom to make decisions negatively or positively toward God of ourselves. Freedom or I prefer the term free agency simply because that's the way that the debate has been framed by those

who believe in sovereign grace. Free agency is simply the teaching that the decisions that we do come to are our free decisions that we make of ourselves. And so every one has free agency, but no one has free will, because our will is in bondage to sin. But the decisions we make are our own decisions, and that's essentially the distinction that Reform theologians have made. And I would suggest for further reading and for clarification, no doubt, that you read Berkoff, Hodge, who have discussed these questions in the form of even, as I remember Hodge has a lengthy section on free agency in which he develops the idea as over against the doctrine of free will. Does that help? Mind you it's a problem. It's a problem worth theological discussion. Yes, Keith.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] The question is, did Amyraut's theology come about by a desire to have better relations with the Roman Catholics? Yes it does, so far as we can tell. It was an attempt to smooth over, make a bit more harmonious the doctrine of sovereign grace, that God according to his sovereign good pleasure chooses and passes by others. And that's a harsh doctrine to Roman Catholics. And incidentally, it also probably is related to some extent to what arose in Arminianism because there was some of the same kind of desire there. So yes, it's true. Almost all students of Amyraut make that point.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Well if you say logically, in the first place let me say this. It's very hard to find a true Four Point Calvinist, very hard. For example, it frequently is said, well I'm going to use Dallas Seminary. I love Dallas Seminary because of course it's the school that I went to and the school that I taught in. It's very frequently said they're Four Point Calvinist. They're not Four Point Calvinist. But there are some Four Point Calvinist there,

I believe, and there may be some closet Five Point Calvinist [Laughter]. We're happy to see more, if they would just come out and speak, there may be [inaudible]. But Tommy, I don't think there are many of those, but if there is one yes, I think he's a Calvinist for this reason, that he does believe in the inability of man. He believes in unconditional election. He believes in efficacious grace. He believes in the perseverance of the saints. He believes that salvation is of the Lord in his own specific way. There is some inconsistency there, and that's what John Gerstner is upsets over.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Yes, I will say I absolutely agree with you. Just don't tell Dr. Harrison I said that. [Laughter] He'll be writing a book against me next. [Laughter]

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Well I haven't read every page in it. Did he mention my name?

[Comment from the audience]

[Johnson] Oh really? But did he mention my name? I didn't see that? What did he say? [Laughter] Did he say I was handsome?

[Comment from the audience]

[Johnson] I brought the book down with me, because I've been reading it, but I haven't run across my name yet. The price of it's gone up. Well, I would just Tommy that I think it's true to say that. And furthermore, I'll back it up by saying this; A.A. Hodge

includes them as Calvinists. Hypothetical universalism as Calvinism, and the same thing I think with others, but Hodge himself does. My recollection is Charles Hodge does too. But they regard them as being inconsistent Calvinists. But perhaps not as strong as Dr. Gerstner. I mean, I know from what you've told me there.

[Comment from the audience]

[Johnson] I know also he said logically they're not preaching the gospel either. I read that. But tell me what page my name is on. [Laughter]

[Comment from the audience]

[Johnson] Did you get in it, too? Oh well good, we're in good company. I love Dr. Gerstner, but he does like to paint things black and blue. He talks about Charles Stott as the erstwhile evangelical. [Laughter] I thought that was very interesting, erstwhile evangelical.

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]