



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

"Inconsistencies in Modified Calvinism, Part IV"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] If he died for all, he expiated all sin. Thus if this be true, he died for unbelief, which is a sin. Thus the sin must be pardoned if he died for it. Amyraldians say that he died for all if they believe. Now, pay careful attention to what I'm going to say, and it's not original with me. This is the same as saying that Christ died to atone for man's unbelief, providing he would not be unbelieving, [Laughter] but believing. As to say Turretin points out, "I have found out an infallible remedy for the healing of a blind of leprous man, which shall be applied on this condition, that he not be blind of leprous." [Laughter] Astonishing.

The implausible character of Amyraldianism -- let me sum up. I don't want to give you the impression I'm just making fun of our fellow believers, because there are fellow believers who hold this doctrine. If I had been sitting in the audience twenty-five years ago and you had said the things that I have said in this particular letter, I might get a little mad or hot under the skin, because at one point that's where I stood. As a matter of fact, I was converted through a man who claimed to be a Five Point Calvinist. I grew up in the Presbyterian church, I was supposed to believe that, but I didn't understand Reform theology. And in my early days, I can go all the way back to when I was in the early days of my preaching, I preached leaving the bondage of will and unconditional election.

And I appreciate my friends who say "I'm a Four Point Calvinist," if they really preach what they say they believe. And I think it's important for us to remember they are our fellow believers. What we would like to be able to do, because we have much to learn ourselves. I speak for myself not for you, I have much to learn. What we would like to do is to be an instrument whereby some of the things that we think we've come to understand, they might come to understand too. So when we talk about the implausible character of Amyraldianism, we just want to say to our friends and our brothers in Christ, "You're standing on ground that's not the best ground, not the most rewarding, not the ground that really leads to the praise, the thanksgiving, the exaltation of the Lord God in our hearts, that will build us up in our faith."

The implausibilities arising from hypothetical universalism include the following. First, he died for all men on the condition that they would believe. That is for innumerable multitudes to whom his death has never made known and who therefore could not believe, but Christ died for them. That seems to be an utter waste, does it not? Second, he died for those whom he knew were sons of perdition, whom God in his infinite wisdom by his decree had passed by exercising ineffable love toward those to whom he and the Father would suffer to cause the pangs of eternal wrath. In other words, in the decree of God we have already passed by individuals in his eternal decree. That's in his word. He hardens whom he wills. It's there, and yet at the same time we're affirming that he dies for them in them in the biblical sense. Third, he died for those who had already died in unbelief and were in Hades and torment awaiting the Great White Throne judgment. So when Jesus Christ died on the cross, he is dying with the intent to bring to salvation those who are already in hell. I cannot conceive of the problems with that. As their surety he suffered punishment for those who were already suffering punishment for themselves and would continue to suffer punishment throughout eternity. And fourth, he is considered the Savior and Redeemer of those who not only will never will be saved but never can be saved or redeemed. Or if not, then he must be an

imperfect Redeemer who has procured a salvation, which he has never applied. For surely he cannot be called a true Savior of any but those whom he has given through faith in him, eternal life.

The inconsistencies of hypothetical universalism or Amyraldianism or Amyraldism as it's sometimes called, are so obvious that it's rather amazing that the system ever gained many followers. The appeal, however, of a careless reading of texts with the words all, every, and world is strong with many who read the Bible in a cursory way and avoid the hard task of exegesis. Only two schemes of Christian doctrine are logically possible, Arminianism with it's grounding in the free will decision of man and Calvinism with its grounding in the sovereign activity of God alone in the work of salvation. I leave out those approaches that deny cardinal doctrines of Christian theology because they really can only be called in an external sense Christians. As Shedd has said, "Both scientific theology and dogmatic history events that there is no tertium quid, no third something between Calvinism and Arminianism, and that the choice of an individual or of a denomination, consequently, lies between one or the other." And so I say to my Four Point Calvinist friends who are not Arminian, your position tends to that of the Arminians on that point, and you will be happier and sounder in theology when you move over to Calvinistic particularism.

Well, that's all I want to say to you, and I think we'll have some time for a question or two, will we not Gary? A few minutes, simple questions please. [Laughter]

[Gary] I wanted to make a statement before we start the questions. The banquet...

[Johnson] Alan?

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] The question is, what is Dallas Seminary's position regarding the matters that we've been talking about, limited redemption and what are they teaching over there at the present time? Well I would like to renege a little bit about what they are teaching over there at the present time, because I do not keep up with that to the extent that I would know the answer to that question. Knowing that they are at about seventy-five faculty members, the chances are that you would have a variety of things that are being taught within the circle of the doctrinal statement. But let me just simply say this, that to this point, to my knowledge, no one has been able to deny the doctrinal statement concerning particular redemption and remain on the faculty. In other words, to this point, to my knowledge, there is no consistent Calvinist on the faculty who signs the statement and has informed the administration that that's where he stands. I think there may be a few who are there who would believe that, but they still have to sign the statement each year of the seminary.

And the statement of the seminary is a very confusing statement, because if you were to look at it as John Gerstner might say, logically, it's an Arminian statement. But they never intended it that way, and Dr. Chafer spoke of himself as a Calvinist. He used the term, and he even said, "We are Calvinists and we avoid Arminian teachings." But then of course, it's possible for someone who understands only the doctrine of eternal security, he understood more than that, but it's possible for such a person to say, "I'm a Calvinist," because his definition of Calvinism is not what we would call a more sophisticated definition inclusive of Calvinism according to the great creedal standards of Reformed people. Dr. Chafer's statement states effectively that the unbelieving man may of himself believe states that specifically. When the unregenerate man believes, well if you want to take that logically and start right there, then you affirmed that he has ability to turn to God. That denies total depravity, right in the beginning, and so all of the other doctrines would follow. But then you have to remember that there are people who are three will say, "No, no that's not what I believe."

And so it's very difficult to answer your question, Alan. I think what you have in my opinion is a great deal of confusion on these points. And I think that's all that can be said. There are some awfully good men there anyway.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] The question is, if Christ's death obtains certain benefits for the reprobates. Well just to take the benefit of common grace, the common blessings of life that we call common grace, that Paul talks about in Acts chapter 14, for example, when in his preaching he comments on the blessings that are conferred by God upon all men, life, seasons, the rains, the restraint of sin in the universe, actually the Holy Spirit restraining sin, because if sin were not restrained in order that God accomplishes his purpose we would have total chaos within the human race, for example. It's that type of thing that we're talking about as being blessing that are ultimately procured by what Christ did on the cross.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] The question is, when Calvin in the later edition of his *Institutes* moved the doctrine of predestination, election, from the Doctrine of God to after the Doctrine of Salvation, was there as specific reason for that? Well, I don't consider myself a Calvin scholar, and when I'm using that term I mean a man who has devoted all of his life to just the study of Calvin, there are such individuals. However, I do read what they say, and I don't know of anyone who has ever been able to point to anything that was said by Calvin, "This is why I did that." In other words, he did it but it's unexplained by Calvin why he did. And so it's an inference derived from that fact. But as I mentioned last night, other Calvinists, and Herman Bavinck was one of the great ones of the 20th century,

made to my mind the point that it doesn't make any difference. The doctrine is still there, whether you put it there or you put it later does not really affect the doctrine. It only affects the way in which we may think of it, and so in that case there's no real difference.

And he went on to say that the reason that the Calvinists put it in the beginning, the orthodox, they put it there for the simple reason that they regarded the glory of God that toward which everything tended in God's divine revelation. So it seemed a proper place to them. I think also it needs to be born in mind, too, that we tend to think in Reformed circles today, as Calvin as the normative theologian. But he was not regarded as the normative theologian in those days. He was not, he himself cited others, gave accord to them, and followed their teaching. And even for into the 17th century he was not regarded as the normative theologian. So you can understand why the Reformed did not follow Calvin in this respect. They made no reference, so far as we know, to that being significant. But they knew about it. I don't know whether that answers your question or not, Drew.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] No, I don't really think it would make a bit of difference.

[Comment from the audience]

[Johnson] Well let me say this in support of Dr. Clark, I know of other places where Calvin made a mistake. [Laughter] For example, in the Garden of Gethsemane he said that that the Lord let come from his mouth a statement which he corrected when he said, "Oh my Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me." But then he corrected it by saying, "But nevertheless not my will but Thine be done." Even Calvin fell into some errors, and those who have studied Calvin know that there are not just that one, but there were others as well. Yes, Eric.

[Question from the audience]

[Johnson] Well we are saved when the cross work is applied to us. So our salvation dates from the time of our faith. At the ground of it is what happened at the cross and the guarantee of it is what happened then. So we don't say we were saved when Christ died on the cross, effectually, of course, that was accomplished, but in time the carrying out of it, God worked it out, because that was part of the gift to bring you to faith, part of the purchase, and it is applied when you come to faith in Christ. Ask Randy a question. [Laughter]

[End Dr. Johnson's participation in question/answer session.]