



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

"Inconsistencies in Modified Calvinism, Part VI"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] ...Willing that any of you, the beloved, should perish but have time or room for repentance. So Peter reflecting on the divine purpose regarding the Lord's elect marvelously answers the scoffers. "All the sheep given by the Father to the Son, shall find their way into the fold in constraining grace." So it's a marvelous promise that God is going to save every one of his elect if it does take 2000 years. Every one of them is going to be brought into the fold. I like to think that when the Lord Jesus was hanging on the cross and said, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," he was referring to this. And do you know why? Because the term forgive, in my opinion, aphimi is the Greek term, should not be translated forgive there.

If you just think for a moment, I'm trying to encourage you to think about the texts that you read. Look, "Father, forgive them for they know what they do." Is ignorance an excuse? If ignorance were an excuse, then our task as believing people would to see that every one in this world did not have a knowledge of the gospel and they'd be saved!

[Laughter] And if they say, "Keep it from them," they're doing a pretty good job of that incidentally, [Laughter] but "Keep it from them." Now, this term is translated in other places "let go, release." In fact, that's precisely what the term itself suggests from its origin, but it has that usage as well. Let them go, release them. And so I suggest to you

that when Jesus was hanging on the cross he said, "Father, release them." That is, from immediate judgment. "They don't know what they're doing." Ignorance is a legitimate excuse for delay or postponement of judgment, but it's not a legitimate excuse for the judgment. And so in my opinion that prayer on the cross of Calvary is a prayer that has been answered down through the years. Jesus himself said, "I know that Thou hearest me always. And so down through the years this prayer's been answered in the salvation of every single elect person. Augustine's salvation, the answer to the prayer, "Father release them for they know not what they do." Augustine, Gottschalk, Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, and so on down and inclusive of you and me as well. "Not willing that any should perish but that all, all of us, all the beloved, all of you to whom I am writing, should have room for repentance.

1 John chapter 2, verse 1 and 2. This is another crux interpretum, that is difficult text. "My little children, these things I write to you that you do not sin. And if any one shall sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And he is the propitiation for our sins," or concerning our sins, "not concerning ours only, but also concerning the whole world." Still another text that the Arminians claim to be theirs is the one before us. Confidently claimed by them to be a lethal missile, a doctrinal silk worm [Laughter] lasered into Calvinistic hearts by their universal redemptionist brethren. One can see why they are so confident. Perhaps the most popular explanation of the text in evangelicalism is this, Christ suffering as a penal substitute appeased the wrath of God, not just for the elect, our sins, but equally for the non-elect the sins of the whole world. My old believing, and he is a believer, my old believing colleague Robert Lightner calls this "the normal unbiased approach to the text." So now you will hear an abnormal, biased approach to the text.

In the limited space at our disposal and time too, let's consider several critical things. In the first place, we must bear in mind the apostle states that Jesus Christ has as a penal substitute appeased the wrath of God for us and for the whole world. But what

does the term whole world mean? The term world occurs again, I repeat, the statistics, about one hundred an eighty-five times in the New Testament with over ten different senses, and so we must carefully analyze each of its occurrences. In the text we are discussing it means all without distinction and probably refers to gentiles as well as Jews. I'll seek to support that in a moment.

Second, if the unlimited redemptionist is correct, how can we say that some are lost? On what possible grounds can they suffer spiritual death when their sins have been propitiated by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the righteous? That's what he says. He's the propitiation for our sins and not concerning ours only, but also concerning the sins of the whole world. What right do we have to insert and this is very important, what right do we have to insert the words "potential." He's propitiation for us who believe and potentially for the whole world. John didn't write potential. What right do we have to insert the word provisional? He didn't write provisional. Or what right do we have to insert the word conditional. John didn't write that. He said he's the "Propitiation for our sins and also for the sins of the whole world." He didn't say conditionally, he didn't say that. He didn't say potentially. So the idea of a potential or a conditional or a provisional substitution is nowhere found in Scripture. Is this, Professor Lightner, the "normal unbiased approach" to take words that don't appear in the text of Scripture at all and insert them in the text and then say if we interpret the text as these others who just take the text as it is written, that they are not following the "normal unbiased approach."

Norman Douty has commented at this point, "This means that he's the potential propitiation only, otherwise the apostle would have been teaching universalism. Well he's just said that he's the actual propitiation for our sins," Mr. Douty had, "but now suddenly the term potential has appeared in the text." It's not occurred to Douty that there's another alternative. For him it's either everybody or universalism. He doesn't realize that there's a third alternative, that when he says he's "The propitiation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world," that he might be talking about that third alternative.

Now, Douthett, of course, has just given the term propitiation two different senses with no verbal support at all. The text says simply, "He is the propitiation for our sins, not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." That's what the text plainly says. Now I ask you, how can our adversaries criticize the particularist as one who espouses forced and unnatural interpretations when he blithely adds words to the text when he needs them to support his presupposed doctrine. I. Howard Marshall, Professor of New Testament at the University of Aberdeen, a leading evangelical New Testament scholar follows the same train. He says the text speaks only of the possibility of forgiveness. Is this the intent of God? If so, how does the potential or possible become actual? By something I do, such as my faith. Well, Professor Marshall is an outstanding Arminian and that's harmonious with his other views. But then is it not true to say that the cross is not the saving instrumentality. And further, since it is admitted by on all hands that all do not come to actual forgiveness, has not God been frustrated in his intent contrary to expressed statements of Scripture?

Universal redemption flounders here, for ultimately if it does not fail by crashing against the Scylla of universalism, it's swallowed up in the Charybdis of its plain implication of a frustrated deity. Sovereignty thus becomes a mockery. As one of the poets put it, "The universe he feign would save, but longs for what he cannot have. We therefore worship, praise, and laud a disappointed helpless God." We are left with a propitiation that is ineffectual, a substitution that is not efficacious, a frustrated deity and the reality of double jeopardy for the lost. Did Christ die for the sins of the lost thief, exhausting wrath in himself for him, and then when the thief died a few moments later, did the thief then face the second time the same outpoured wrath of God? I must conclude then that the propitiation was ethnically universal, for the whole world of Gentiles as well as Jews.

Recent studies, incidentally, support that view, because that John had in mind Jewish believers in writing his epistle. There are other ways to view the text, of course,

we could take it geographically. That is, the whole world, all believers outside Asia Minor. And Calvin apparently held that view. Or eschatologically, that is the ultimate salvation of the world by the long process of the centuries, as Warfield held. Matthew Henry seems to have held both the ethnological and eschatological views.

I want to close this section with some words from George Bishop. Before I do, I just want to underline what the text says, "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also the sins of the whole world." We have to follow the text. He's the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, so we do have universalism or we have a partiucularism, that is of both Jews and Gentiles, the whole world. And if you had grown up in the Jewish environment in which the Scriptures were there Scriptures and the revelation from God was their revelation, and they had been taught properly that salvation was of the Jews, as our Lord said salvation is of the Jews, and how he came not for the Gentiles but to the Jews, then you can understand the environment, which is changing now in the light of Israel's casting off. And the gospel has gone out to the Gentiles; these Jewish men are now saying things in present environment to take account of what has happened. The gospel is now going out not simply to us, but it's going out to the whole world, whole world of Gentiles.

I close this section, I say, with some words from George Bishop. "For if Christ died for all alike, then he did no more for those who are saved than for those who perish. And if he died for all alike, then he bore the curse for many who are now bearing the curse for themselves. And he suffered punishment for many who are yet lifting up their own eyes in hell, being in torments. And he paid the redemption price for many who are yet paying in their own eternal anguish the wages of sin, which is death. To say this, of course, is to convict God of the grossest injustice, for it is to represent him as receiving from the hand of Christ full atonement, and then as dashing down to perdition millions of those for whom Christ had died to atone."

"The story is told of Pizarro, Francisco Pizarro, that when he had imprisoned the Peruvian Inca, that is the king of the Quechuan peoples of Peru, that monarch lifting his hand to the level of his head upon the wall behind promised to fill the apartment with silver and Gold to that level, provided Pizarro would let him go free. Pizarro agreed to this, and then when the loyal subjects of the Inca, by denying themselves to the utmost, had brought together the requisite ransom, Pizarro led forth their beloved Inca and before their smiling, expectant faces put him to excruciating death. Now," Mr. Bishop says, "that Pizarro lifted and broadened to infinite proportions is the shadow which a universal atonement projects upon God. It makes an infinite Pizarro and subverts the very substratum upon which is built the throne of God. That God should punish the countless millions who never have the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ when he has already caused that infinite punishment to fall upon the Son of God. But we don't have anything to apologize about in the kind of gospel we proclaim."

Our time is really up. I hesitate to go any further. Well, just a few minutes at least. I wanted to say something about John 3:16. This text has been called the greatest text of all, the miniature gospel, everybody's text. Spurgeon said he preached on it every year, because he knew that he couldn't say anything new about it. Thus when God continued to save souls by it, he was reminded of the fact that God saved souls through his word and not through our words. John Gerstner's view of the text is simple and clear, he says it's one of the strongest texts, in his opinion, on definite atonement for it plainly says, "Christ died for all believers in the world." Where do believers come from? From God. Those words over a telephone; I had heard him make some of these statements, I wanted to be sure and get them precisely, so I called him on the phone a few years ago and that's precisely what he said. "Christ died for all believers in the world." Where do believers come from? They come from God.

Warfield took the term "world" intensively not extensively. "God's love is so great that it's given for the world, a synonym for everything evil, noisome, and disgusting. His

love was so intense that it was not deterred even by the sinfulness of its objects. Of the term world he says its primary connotation is ethical and the point of its employment is not to suggest that the world is so big that it takes a great deal of love to embrace it, but that the world is so bad that it takes a great kind of love to love it at all, and much more to love it as God has loved it when he gave his Son for it."

Now, I have the greatest respect of Warfield, as you can tell. Having taught semester courses on Warfield and his theology I tend to think, however, that that interpretation is not quite right. I tend to think of this text as emphasizing again the universality of God's love. It is for Gentiles as well as Jews, for them as living throughout the world. Three things argue for it. In the first place the context. Nicodemus likely held a view of the Jews that the Messiah was coming to bring them the kingdom and to bring judgment to the Gentiles. It was very common in Jewish thought at this time for the Jews to say that the future would reveal two things from the Messiah, kingdom and judgment; the kingdom for Israel, judgment for the Gentiles. And our Lord has been revealing the salvation destined for all the world and now he establishes the judgment which passes upon all. So a thought back of this again, is this context between Jew and Gentile.

Other passages in John such as chapter 1 verse 29, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," not everybody in the world, but again not everybody without exception but everybody without distinction. And then in John chapter 4 and verse 42 Jesus is called the Savior of the world. To whom has he been speaking? The Samaritan woman, Savior of the world. Chapter 3, verse 17 follows also.

A word about 1 Timothy 4:10. I really am getting close to the end, aren't you happy? This text 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 10 appears to teach specifically that Christ is the Savior of all men potentially, or conditionally, but particularly for them that believe. Let me read the text for you, 1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 10. "For this cause we both labor and strive for we have hoped upon the living God who is the Savior of all men, especially of ones that believe." Can we ever say, as we've been arguing, call one a

Savior who purchases salvation for some to whom the salvation is never applied. To save demands the application of salvation to those who are saved. That Christ was sent to remove all obstacles to salvation and to apply the salvation to the elect savingly is stated by Matthew 1 verse 21, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins."

Further, doesn't the text say he's the Savior of believers? Well yes, but in the sense in which he saves believers he's not the Savior of any others. As the Amyraldian, Ralph Wardlaw says, "He saves none but them that believe." He doesn't save them especially and others partially or conditionally. He saves them exclusively. What then is the sense of the text? Well the term Savior may perfectly well be translated upholder, preserver, Savior in that sense, referring to God's providential care over our lives. "In what other sense than as upholder of all men," Turretin says, "Can he be said to be the Savior of men who finally perish?" How can you call him the Savior of all men when men perish? He's not the Savior of those men. We don't call one a Savior who only intends to save. I've said this over and over again, but I'm trying to make a point. But our Lord can be called the preserver of all men, and particularly of believers who are the objects of his special care. He saves them from the difficulties and trials of their official life and from the false teachers' doctrine, which is in the context specifically verse 1 through verse 9 and then again at verse 16. Turretin adds, "Whence Chrysostom, Ecumenius, Primacius, and Ambrose say that he is the Savior of all in the present life but of the faithful only as to the eternal life."

Now the exegetical strengths of particularism and I mention Romans 8:32. We've said a good bit about this, so I'll maybe try to sum it up. We frequently have friends say to us, I'm speaking of myself, "We admit that Calvinism is a logical theological system. But it has difficulty with the texts exegetically." Now, I must tell you that I have, and I'm not saying that I'm the best that's ever done this, but I have experience. I have taught the Greek New Testament text exegetically for forty years, over forty years actually, and I still

do it on occasion. I smile when someone says to me that Calvinism has great appeal logically, but it has difficulty with specific texts exegetically. They don't realize the people who say that, the massive force of the texts that refute universal redemption, for example. I'll just take one thing to show you to make the point. Since substitution in the New Testament is always an effectual substitution, every text in the New Testament that refers to Christ's substitutionary atonement, which incidentally my adversaries generally love the substitutionary death of Christ. Every one of those texts support particular redemption, every one of them. When you say he is our substitute and has born our judgment, how can we be judged, our punishment has been born. Those texts are all ours. So we transfer all of those texts which Arminians and some Amyraldians think they have and let's put them over in the Calvinistic column. Then we look over there and their texts don't look so imposing.

Further, their substitution is ineffectual so their atonement is limited. When we add some of the necessary implications of universal redemption such as a frustrated sovereign deity and a confusion of purpose within the trinity among other things, then we begin to see that universal redemption cannot stand. But let me say specifically something about Romans 8:32. This passage is strongly particularistic. Note these things, the "we" and the "us" refer to those mentioned in verses 28 and 30. "He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us." What us? Well the ones of chapter 8 verse 28 through 30. Those for whom God works that which is good in their lives, he works according to the purpose of God. They are foreknown, they are foreordained. They are called. They are justified. And furthermore, they have been glorified. It's so certain, you know. It puts it in a past tense. So these are the individuals of whom he's saying, "If he that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us," foreknown, foreordained, called, justified, and glorified ones. And the us becomes us all in verse 32, "How shall he not also with him also freely give us all things." That is, to the foreknown and foreordained saints. The all is not broader than the us in the context. And third, the

scope of the sacrifice is the same as the scope of those who by this a *fortiori* argument, which is "How shall he not with him also freely give." If he does this, he's bound to do this logically.

The scope of the sacrifice is for us and it's the same scope as far as the all things concerned. The all things are given to those for whom he gave himself. Do you see the point? "He that delivered himself for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" So those for whom Christ died have everything. In fact, this one text is enough to show that particularism is the teaching of the word of God. Those for whom he died are partakers of all the other gifts of saving grace, such as the gifts of regeneration, faith, and perseverance. And all is grounded in divine election, verse 33, and the perseverance is rhetorically spelled out in verse 35 through verse 39. "Nothing shall separate us from the love of God." In addition the inviolable connection between the offering of the sacrifice and the intercession is spelled out here as in 1 John 2:1-2. Because we have him dying and then in verse 34 we have him ever living to make intercession for us. So he dies for us and then he ever lives to pray for us. At this very moment he's praying for every one of us.

It's impossible to say, as our Four Point Calvinist friends say, that there is no such impregnable connection between our Lord's sacrifice and his intercession for his own. One cannot make the sacrifice universal and the intercession limited, as Moise Amyraut sought to do. The logic of the apostle's reasoning cannot be gainsaid, and I don't think there will ever come a time when I'll have to say, "Now I would like to gainsay that." All for whom he died shall receive all other the saving graces. Owen puts it this way, "Therefore if the love there mentioned be the cause of sending Christ, as it is, it must also cause all other things to be given with him, so there so can be towards none but those that have those things bestowed on them, which are only the elect, only believers. Who else have grace here or glory hereafter?"

2 Corinthians 5:14, 15, and 19, I think I can just answer by stating a point or two with reference to it. Those for whom Christ died have also themselves died in Christ, as the Greek text explicitly said. They died in their representative. Thomas Goodwin quaintly put it this way, "There are but two standing before God, Adam and Christ. And these two have all other men hanging at their girdles." As Hodge puts it, "Christ died for all who died when he died. And significantly all who died in Christ," he says in this context, "rose again with him. Those for whom Christ dies are those who died to sin and live to righteousness." In other words, the intent of his death is learned both from Scripture and its effects.

By the way, someone has been after me to give them a quote that I gave in the first message, and I haven't had a chance to really look at it. But now that I'm practically free, I will. But it reminded me of something I had in my folder by William Ames. William Ames wrote some words that are these. This is exactly what he wrote, "Quibus intenditur et eis applicatur sed non omnibus obligatur ergo nec omnibus intenditur." [Laughter] Now I was hoping someone would say "Amen" or two. But this is the translation, Ames was an Englishman, and incidentally his works have been of great significance in America in the earlier days in New England. But listen to this Mr. Ames wrote, "To whom it is intended, to them it is applied. But not to all is it applied. Therefore not to all is it intended." It has to do with this, the statement in verse 19 should be noted, not reckoning their trespasses unto them, the world are those whose trespasses are not imputed to them. So we must take the world in the sense of everybody without exception, but rather a reference those whose trespasses are not imputed to them, the world without distinction.

The argument from Revelation 5:9-10 I've never seen, and so I'm going to pass it on to you as the one original thing maybe that I have to say to you. And this is the text, I'm reading again from the Greek text and it's Revelation chapter 5. "And they sing a new song saying, Worthy art Thou to take the book and to open its seals, because Thou hast

been slain and hast purchased to God by Thy blood." Now, the Greek text says simple, from. "From every tribe and tongue and people and nation and hast made them to our God a kingdom and priests and they shall reign upon the earth. In verse 9 it's important to note the partitive construction. The text reads, "And they sang a new song saying, Worthy art Thou to take the book and break its seals, for Thou hast slain and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men." Now, that is inserted by the New American Standard Bible, for example, to explain how the text says that he was slain and has purchased to God from every tribe.

Now, in order to give the sense of "from every tribe" the partitive sense, it means he's taken some from each of these. The word men has been inserted in this case. And it's put in italics as an indication the translators have supplied it. Some would have been acceptable too, because he has purchased from, not purchased the tribe, but purchased from the tribe, kindred, tongue, and nation. So the translation then is an attempt to recognize the partitive sense of the prepositional phrases. Thus the scope of his death is not said to be universal. He was slain and he has bought for God, by his blood, from every nation. It doesn't say he bought every tribe, every tongue, people, and nation. But he bought some from them, men from them. He bought a part of them. So this partitive expression indicates that what we have here is a particular redemption.

And furthermore, of course, it is an effectual redemption because he goes on to say, "He has made them a kingdom and priests. And they shall reign upon the earth." So all of those bought have truly attained the benefits of the redemption, but they have not all, because it's not every tribe, it's from every tribe, kindred, tongue, and nation. Do you get the point? "It's in keeping with the Passover theology of John," Beasley-Murray notes, "that the sacrifice of the lamb led not simply to a general emancipation of men, but to the creation of a people for God." So I've come to my conclusion, aren't you happy?

[Laughter]

Though I affirm the particularity of the intent of Christ's death, I do not in any way admit a limited atonement. Let me remind you of a few sentences from the greatest preacher of definite atonement of the 19th century, in my opinion. "We're often told," Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, "that we limit the atonement of Christ because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men or all men would be saved. Now our reply to this is that on the other hand, our opponents limit it, we do not. The Arminians say that Christ died for all men. Ask them what they mean by that, did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all? They say, 'No, certainly not.' We ask them the next question, 'Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular?' They answer, 'No.' They're obliged to admit this if they're consistent. They say, 'No, Christ has died that any man may be saved if,' and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now, who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why you, you say that Christ did not die so as to infallibly secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon when you say we limit Christ's death. We say, no, my dear sir, it is you that do it. We say Christ so died that he infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ's death not only may be saved, but are saved, must be saved, cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved." [Laughter] "You are welcome to your atonement, you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it. The old answer is after all the only sufficient one."

Warfield wrote, "God in his love, saves as many of the guilty race of men as he can get the whole consent of his nature to save. Being God and all that God is, he will not permit even his ineffable love to betray him into any action which is not right." One thing we can say and do say is this; the Amyraldian scheme of two contradictory determinations of the infinite God cannot command credence. One Arminian, perhaps the greatest one, was right at least once. Richard Watson, the Methodist theologian, said of the Four Point system, the scheme of Amyraut, "It makes great concessions to that view of the scriptural doctrine which we have attempted to establish." In other words, he says,

it makes great concessions to us Arminians. "But for want of going another step it is perhaps the most inconsistent theory to which the varied attempts to modify Calvinism have given rise." I hope at least one thing has been communicated, and that is we cannot go around saying when some of our friends ask us, "Are you a Five Point Calvinist?" No, as a matter of fact I'm a Four Point Calvinist. In fact, I'm a Four and a Half Point Calvinist. Or I have a friend that says he's a four and three quarters, [Laughter] just as inconsistent as anyone. We're talking about the teaching of the word of God, and so consequently we cannot say things like that. We are either logically and consistently Arminians or Calvinists. There is no ground in between that is consistent and logical. And I mean in the biblical sense.

May God help us to continue to study the word but at the same time hold to the truth that is revealed to us in it through the Holy Spirit. I apologize for you for writing such a lengthy paper here on the last one. I wish that there was some way I could have prevented that but like most people I failed in this case...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]