



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

“Constraining Substitutionary Love”

2 Corinthians 5:11-15

TRANSCRIPT

We’re turning to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, and reading for our Scripture reading verses 11 through 15. You’ll remember in the context the apostle has just mentioned the fact that though at home in the body and away from home from the Lord, he nevertheless is confident, and he looks forward to the day when he will be at home with the Lord, in the meantime walking by faith and not by sight. He mentions his ambition; then in the 9<sup>th</sup> verse, an ambition to be well-pleasing to the Lord because we must all.

Now, it is clear from the context he’s speaking of believing Christians. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each may be recompensed for his deeds in the body according to what he has done whether good or worthless. And now continuing, the apostle rights in verse 11,

“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are of sound mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us. (I still like the Authorized Version’s rendering of constrain,

but it’s very similar to “controls”) For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all; therefore, all died;”

Now, it’s important for you to notice that this is a reference to an event. The Authorized Version renders this something like therefore all were dead, but that is plainly a mistranslation. The New American Standard Bible from which I am reading says that one died for all; therefore, all died. And he died for all that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again on their behalf. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we turn to Thee with great thanksgiving, reflecting upon the love that the Son of God has had for us from the ages of eternity past. And we thank Thee that the Scriptures are the means by which we have come to know the love of Christ for us which found its consummation in time in the death, burial, and resurrection, the great redemptive event. And we thank Thee that today, on the Lord’s Day, we can look to a finished work of redemption. And we thank Thee for the assurance and the confidence that that does give to those who by Thy grace have been brought to the knowledge of him.

We thank Thee for the day in which we live and for the privilege of proclaiming the good news of the glory of God in the face of Christ in our generation. And, Lord, we pray that in order that the Son of God’s name may be lifted up, the Holy Spirit will bring conviction of sin, regeneration in faith, and confidence in the blood that was shed and in the presence of the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us to give us that assurance of adoption and sonship.

We thank Thee for the day in which we live and for the challenges of it. And we thank Thee for the Spirit of God who illumines our minds and by Thy grace enables us to understand life in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Help us, Lord, to be submissive and obedient and

responsive to the fact that we have been bought with the price and, therefore, we belong to Thee.

We pray for the testimony of the word of God wherever it goes forth today. May it be profitable and fruitful and may many outside of Christ come to know him and become part of the body of Christ, the believing church. And for the Christians, Lord, give enlightenment and instruction and growth and edification in the things of God. May, by Thy grace also, Lord, our affections be turned away from in the enjoyment of perishing temporary things of the world to the living, vital, eternal things of Thy presence and of heaven itself. May the word of God today speak to each of us. We pray for Believers Chapel and its ministry. We pray for the whole church. We pray for our country and especially for those who have requested our prayers, we remember them, Lord, all of those whose names are listed and those in whom many concerns are represented, minister to them. We pray, Lord, that there may be affirmative answers to their prayers and deliverance. We commit them to Thee. We thank Thee for the sovereign promises of our triune God in heaven of whom we have just sung the great 1 and 3. Be with us through the remainder of this service as we sing, as we listen to the word of God. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for today in the continuation of our exposition of Paul’s great Second Letter to the Corinthians is “Constraining Substitutionary Love.” The final stanza in Paul’s great hymn of the ministry concerned with the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, as he puts it, and the vicissitudes of its preachers -- which he has just described in the preceding chapter -- begins here. And those who love and study Paul’s words acknowledge the pregnancy, the difficulty, and the importance of this passage.

There are some very striking paradoxes that the apostle has presented to us. For example, the paradox of the fact that this treasure of the gospel of Jesus Christ is found in vessels that are clay. So the great gospel of the glory of Christ in what he calls earthen

vessels that the surpassing greatness of the power of God may be seen is one of the paradoxes presented in this chapter -- in this passage.

The other is -- or another is the paradox of the authority of an apostle such as the Apostle Paul as over against his own life of complete submission, not only to our Lord, but to the Corinthians and others to whom he was sent by the Lord God.

And there is still a further paradox, and that paradox has to do with the glory of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ centering in the cross of Jesus Christ.

So the passage is a passage of importance. It’s a passage of pregnant thought. It’s a passage of difficulty, but at the same time, of tremendous significance for us. I really think that it’s hard to find a more significant theological chapter in Paul’s writings than in this one. And it illustrates for us, I think, the importance of the study of the word of God for all believers, whether new or old in Christ.

Mr. Moody once said, “I never saw a useful Christian who was not a student of the Bible.” If a man neglects his Bible, he may pray and ask God to use him in his work, but God cannot make use of him for there is not much for the Holy Ghost to work on.

Matthew Henry, the author of the great set of commentaries on the Bible, has said, “We shall not only be called into account for truth we know and did not apply, but also for truth we might have known but did not.” I’ve referred to that a number of times, but it’s a striking statement, I think. Or take, on the other hand, a man who did not know much at all of the grace of God, but who, nevertheless, was important in the life of the United States: Patrick Henry. “Give me liberty or give me death.” Mr. Henry, when he was near death, said, “Here is a book, the Bible, worth more than all of us that were ever printed. Yet it is my misfortune never to have found time to read it.” What a commentary by the life of an important American.

So in our reading and pondering of literature, let us put at the head of our list the word of God. The apostle has just referred to his desire to be pleasing to the Lord for we must within the house when we come into the presence of the Lord, face examination at

the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. And in the light of that solemn event, he discusses his motives for ministry. In fact, the picture that Paul gives of himself here is the picture that John Bunyan had in his mind when he wrote in his great *Pilgrim’s Progress* of the visit of Christian to Interpreter’s house. I referred to that on another -- with another emphasis not too many weeks ago. When Christian came to Interpreter’s house, “Sir,” said Christian, “I am a man that has come from the city of destruction and am going to Mount Zion. And I was told by the man that stands at the gate at the head of this way that if I called here, you would show me excellent things, such as would be helpful to me in my journey.” And then Interpreter responds, “Come in. I will show thee that which will be profitable to thee.”

So Mr. Bunyan says, Interpreter commanded the man to light a candle and he bad Christian to follow him. So he had him into a private room and bad his man open a door. The which when he had done, Christian saw a picture of a very grave person hung up against the wall and this was the fashion of it. It had eyes lifted up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, the Law of Truth was written upon his lips, and the world was behind his back. And he stood as if he pleaded with men and a crown of gold did hang over his head. And then Christian said exactly what we say the first time we read something like this, “Well, what does this mean?”

And so Interpreter interprets. The man whose picture this is is one of a thousand. He can beget children. And you’ll remember that Paul said to the Corinthians that he had through the gospel begotten them. He can travail in birth with children. That’s what Paul said he did with reference to the Galatians, he travailed in birth until Christ would be formed in them. And he can nurse them himself when they are born, which is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians that he was doing for the Corinthians, feeding them milk and meat when able to receive it. And Interpreter continues, “Whereas thou sawest him with his eyes lift up to heaven, the best of books in his hand, and the Law of Truth writ on his lips, it’s to show thee that his work is to know and unfold dark things to sinners. Even as

also thou seest him stand as if he pleaded with men. And whereas thou seest the world has cast behind him and a crown hangs over his head, that’s to show thee that slighting and despising the things that are present for the love that he hath to his master’s service, he is sure in the world that comes next to have glory for his reward. Now said the interpreter, I’ve showed thee this picture first because the man whose picture this is, is the only man whom the Lord of the place whether thou art going hath authorized to be thy guide.”

And he refers to the apostles, and particularly the Apostle Paul. “In all difficult places thou mayest meet with in the way. Wherefore take good heed to what thou hast seen lest in thou journey thou meet with some that pretend thee aright but their way goes down to death.”

This marvelous picture of evangelists and Paul ultimately in this case the apostle with his eyes to heaven for the love of Christ is that which moves and constrains him, the world behind his back, the best of books in his hand, the love of truth upon his lips, and pleading with the souls of men; marvelous picture of the ministry of the word of God.

Now, the apostle is going to tell us some of the things that moved him to have that kind of position before men. There are three motives that he refers to here, and the first is the fear of the Lord. You’ll notice in the 11<sup>th</sup> verse he writes, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord.” He’s just said that he has an ambition to be pleasing to the Lord because he must appear, as all believing Christians must appear, before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord -- the awe of Him -- we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God. And I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences.

Now, in full awareness of the fact that the apostle faces judgment at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, he seeks to persuade men. Now, it would be natural for us to say he seeks to persuade men to respond to the gospel. And many interpreters take that to be the apostle’s meaning. In the light of the words that follow, however, and I hope that we

are made manifest in your consciences. We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us. It’s more likely, it seems, that the apostle is saying we persuade men of our integrity. That is, that we are doing this for devotion to the Lord God and not out of any personal self-interest. The preceding context suggests that that was likely on the apostle’s mind. If you’re not convinced by that, you probably can agree with some who say the apostle had both of these things in mind. He was seeking to persuade men to come to Christ, but at the same time he was seeking to persuade men of his integrity.

So the first motive the apostle has in the ministry of the word of God, as he expresses it here, is the fear of the Lord. It’s a solemn thing for all of us to realize that the time is coming when we must -- if we are believers -- stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ.

Now, if we’re not believers, we face an even sterner future. But even believers face the judgment seat of Jesus Christ to receive the things that have been done in the body according to what we have done whether they are good or worthless. And though we may be young and healthy and think that our years are long, and we needn’t think about these things at the moment, as the years go by -- if they do go by, and we have no assurance that this is not an event in the relatively near future -- these things should impress themselves upon us as being the really significant things of human life. So the fear of the Lord and the apostle, though an apostle, had genuine fear. That is, fear in the sense of awe. He had no fear in the sense of acceptance. He’s just said above in verse 6, he’s of good courage. And verse 8, we’re of good courage; we know that our future in the presence of the Lord is established, but we have the natural fear of the judgment seat of Jesus Christ when God examines our life, our deeds, our thoughts, and we are rewarded in the light of them, certainly a solemn thing.

Now, the second motive that he speaks about is the favor of the Corinthians themselves. He’s interested in them and interested in their favorable response to him.

And so in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> verses, he says, “We are not again commending ourselves to you but are giving you an occasion to be proud of us, that you may have an answer for those who take pride in appearance and not in heart.”

Now, what he means by that is simply this: in Corinth there were individuals who were there who were professing believers who evidently had rather close connections with the city of Jerusalem and the earliest body of believers there who were proud of the fact of their ancestry and relation to Jerusalem and probably had the same kind of tendency to a more legalistic approach to gospel -- to the gospel of the Lord and had come in among the Corinthians and were causing difficulty among the Corinthians. And evidently the Corinthians -- after all, they were relatively young believers -- had little to savor to them. These men had the appearance of being from the original church, the classic believer. They had history behind them, the things that had happened in Jerusalem, and they were from there.

And being, it is likely, Jewish men, they had a natural knowledge of biblical things that new Gentile believers did not yet have. And so they took pride in appearance. That is, they took pride in their face, it says; took pride in the history and tradition that was represented by them and looked down upon those who were followers of the Apostle Paul whose apostolicity actually was called in question by some. And so, Paul says I would like for you to have a rejoinder to them and when they say things that are critical of me or of the message that I am giving, I want you to know that when I say what I’m saying here, I’m not trying to commend myself, but I’m trying to give you reason to respond to them so that you may have an answer for those fellows who are taking pride in their appearance and not in their heart.

Now, we do have a clue also of what they had, perhaps, said about Paul. For the 13<sup>th</sup> verse says, “For if we are beside ourselves, it’s for God; if we are of sound mind, it’s for you.” So there must have been some reason for people to say, concerning the Apostle Paul, that that fellow is afflicted with religious mania. He is a fanatic.

Now, fanaticism or religious mania is the kind of criticism that is given to many, many believing men down through the centuries. As a matter of fact, it’s found right in the Old Testament, the prophets themselves. Do you remember Hosea? We expounded Hosea here several years ago and in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter in the 7<sup>th</sup> verse of the Authorized Version, the text there is rendered, the prophet -- people are speaking about the prophet. The prophet is a fool, and the man of the spirit is mad. So the idea of prophets being strange fellows, religious maniacs or fanatics, that’s a biblical truth of both the Old and the New Testaments. And if you went through the Bible and tried to pick out things like that, you would find that you would have reason for a series of messages on the religious fanaticism of the men who follow the Lord God. As a matter of fact, the apostle was accused of this when he was giving his defense before Agrippa.

And remember, finally, that Festus couldn’t stand it any longer and so he broke out in a criticism of him. While Paul was saying this in his defense, in Acts chapter 26, verse 24, we read, “Festus said with a loud voice, ‘Paul, you’re out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad!’” But Paul said, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth. For the king (that is, Agrippa) knows about these matters and I speak to him also with confidence; since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice, since this has not been done in a corner.” And so Festus accused the apostle of being mad and of course the one who was accused of being mad ultimately is the Lord himself. And in Mark chapter 3, if you want to read about it, Mark says as he records the giving of the parables there, he says, “For they were saying that he was out of his senses” -- the very same Greek word that is used here; for if we are beside ourselves, it is for God. And further, in that passage in the light of the tense of the verb for they were saying, it’s evident that it was not just once but a number of times that the Lord Jesus was accused of being mad.

Now, of course, sometimes the world is right. There are some mad fellows out there, and all we have to do is read our papers today and discover that there are some

people out there who are mad. They are not using their minds and their senses and their intelligences. And as a result, they’re making foolish and radical statements. It’s true, there are such. But they’re not men who follow the Apostle Paul and follow the things that he has written in the Scriptures. So the apostle wanted to give them something that they could say in answer to those who were saying things about him.

We know that the history of the Christian church is full of that. The Pope said Luther ought to be in bedlam. They charged the Wesleys, when they came on the scene, with madness. They drew from the Wesleys the retort fools and madmen let us be, but still is our trust in thee. When William Booth founded the Salvation Army, broke through the barrier of ecclesiasticism that was strangling his message; they said, “He’s not quite all there.” And of Billy Sunday they said, “He’s a fool.” And so the conception persists as Hosea said, the prophet is a fool, the man of the spirit is mad. Some people will always believe that but there are others who want an intelligent answer, and the apostle gives it to them. He says for if we are beside ourselves, if we really are mad, it’s a madness for God. We are sold out. We are committed. We are completely committed to him. And what we do, we do for him.

I’m sure that if Paul had time to give a theological lecture he could point out how the friend of the world is the enemy of God and therefore, the man who is given over to God is going to be a man who naturally will have values and a lifestyle and will do things that the world does not approve nor even understand. That is one of the necessities of the case. So he says if we are beside ourselves, it is for God and if you occasionally find us of sound mind, intelligent, interested in holiness and the things of truth and righteousness, well then, that’s for you because I’m interested in you. That’s the second of Paul’s motives.

Now, we come to the third and final motive -- but don’t think we’re coming to the conclusion of the message. The third and final motive is expressed in verses 14 and 15: For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all

died; and he died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Now, you’ll notice again that little word “for,” for this introduces the explanation of his madness that is, for their benefit. And it leads to a fundamental statement of Christian doctrine. For the love of Christ constrains us, we having determined that one died for all, therefore all died.

Now, of course when the apostle says the love of Christ constrains us, he’s talking about the mercy that is shown to him, the same thing that he expresses in chapter 4, verse 1 when he says therefore since we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. That was something the apostle could hardly ever get over, the fact that he had received mercy from the Lord.

But now looking at the constraint: the love of Christ constrains us. The ground of all of his behavior, the source of his lack of self-interest is the love of Christ. Of course, when we see an expression like this, the love of Christ, that can be understood in two ways. That can be understood the love of Christ. That is, Christ’s love for us. Or it can be understood as a love of Christ. That is, the love for Christ. Now, then the Greek text, either one of these interpretations is grammatically permissible, but things that are grammatically permissible are not necessarily exegetically permissible. And it’s clear in this case that we’re not talking about the love of Paul when -- for Christ -- when he says for the love of Christ constrains me -- or us, because the context goes on to talk not about Paul’s love for Christ but about Christ’s love for Paul and others. So it’s very plain that this should be understood as the love of Christ for us.

So we read this then, for the love of Christ for us controls us and constrains us because we judge that if one died for all, therefore all died. All the New Testament writers find his love; that is, his love for us concentrated and focused in his death. And so it’s not surprising that he should speak of the love of Christ for us and then express it as:

one died for all, therefore all died. And he died for all that they who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died and rose again on their behalf.

So after all, it was for us that Christ performed his magnificent work. I’m sorry, if you’re worried about my banging these glasses on this particular pulpit as someone told me after the message this morning, really the reason I’m doing it is so you will notice that these are Gucci glasses and then thinking about the cost of them, I think I’ll put them back in my pocket. But at any rate, the point that Paul is making is that this is the love of Christ for us, it finds expression in the death that he dies for us. So the love of Christ for us; oh, the singularity of the love of Christ.

There isn’t anything like this in all of this world. Think about it for a moment. It’s an eternal love. In the ages past before you or I ever appeared on this scene, long before the prophets ever appeared on the scene, long before in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the Lord God set his heart and mind upon us and chose us in him. And this love, thus, is an eternal love. The Lord Jesus speaks about it in his great high priestly prayer in John 17 and speaks about how the Father and the Son looked forward to the saints enjoying the love of God, the same love that the Father had for the Son.

So it’s eternal. It’s free. It’s not something that we have called forth for ourselves. It’s spontaneous on the part of God. It’s what we call sovereign love, free and spontaneous, exercised on the part of God long before we could have ever called it forth. No one could possibly describe the love of God in the finite terms that are at our disposal. It passes the love of women. It passes the love of martyrs. It’s immeasurable. It’s infinite. It actually is inconceivable, so we learn from Scripture. In fact, the only way in which you can describe it in having any measure of truth about it is to say it’s a love like a god’s love. That’s what it is, the love of Christ. And Paul finds it a thing that constrains him, that controls him, that actually moves him to be involved totally in the work that God has called him to do.

This particular text contains a verb translated control here that occurs in Philippians chapter 1 in verse 23 where Paul is talking about the fact that to me to live as Christ, to die is gain, but if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor to me, and I do not know which to choose; that is, to stay here or to go to be with the Lord. And in the 23<sup>rd</sup> verse he says, “But I am hard-pressed from both directions.” That is, the desire to be with the Lord, but on the other hand, the commission to stay here and to continue fruitful ministry. I am hard-pressed from both directions having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better. Yet to remain in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. And Bishop Lightfoot in trying to express this particular verb and translates it “I am hemmed in on both sides wanting to go, feeling the necessity to stay;” constrained, controlled by the great motive expressed there.

One can think of a mighty river. I think one of the greatest of the rivers, to me, has always been the Niagara River because of the falls that lies down near the end of it as you come over the Canadian border -- or stand at the Canadian border for that matter -- and come over on the side of the United States and go over and above the falls stand over the Niagara River. When I go there, and I was a grown man, I didn’t want to get within fifteen feet of the Niagara River, afraid somehow or another I might slip and slide into the Niagara. And if you’ve ever seen that massive flow of water and the control exercised by those two banks leading down to that great falls, unfortunately it’s on the Canadian side, but nevertheless, magnificent picture and you can just think of the Apostle Paul with the love of God hemming him in and controlling him and constraining him to give himself wholeheartedly to the preaching of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

No one ever accomplishes anything who does not have some measure of constraint. An Alexander had the constraint of a desire to rule the world; a Caesar, a same kind of thing. In our day, relatively speaking, some of the men on the political scene in the twentieth century have had something similar to that. Or anyone who succeeds in almost any endeavor has some form of vision, some form of ambition, some

form of motivation that is the controlling thing of his life. Even a golfer may be so controlled by the desire to excel that everything in his life is devoted to the accomplishment of that goal. That’s only a faint illustration of what Paul is speaking about when he says for the love of Christ controls us, constrains us. He’s hemmed in and cannot do anything but proclaim the message to the Gentiles that God is given him to proclaim.

And why is this love so constraining? Why, he goes on to say. We’ve determined, having concluded that one died for all, therefore all died. This is the reason why his love is so constraining. This love is free, responsible, and intelligent. In the apostle, the intellect and the affections merge. He reasons as a result of thinking about the love of God for him and feels its constraining power intelligently. Every Christian ought to have an intelligent conception of his faith; why he believes, why it’s great, why Christ is who he is, and why the salvation God provides through Christ is the truth.

Now, he speaks about this control as one died for all, therefore all died. Now, what does he mean when he says one died for all? Well, he means simply this: that the Lord Jesus Christ is a representative substitute. One died for all. Now, someone might say -- in order to answer or to object, someone might say, Well, perhaps it means simply one died for the benefit of all and not in the place of all as a substitute, because after all, the Greek preposition *for* sometimes does have that sense. So why not say: he died for the benefit of all?

Well, let me show you how that could never be in this context because the only legitimate conclusion to one died for the benefit of all would then be: therefore all remained alive. If he died for the benefit of all and all did not die in his death, then we could say: one died for the benefit of all, therefore all remained alive. Therefore, all did not have to die. But that isn’t what the apostle states. He says one died for all, therefore all died. In other words, if we all died when he died for us, then his death is somehow our death, too. That’s plain. That’s clear.

So when the apostle speaks about the death of Christ, he speaks of it as a representative death. We are regarded in the mind of God and truthfully for he was our representative and our mediatorial head when Christ suffered the punishment of our sins, we died, we suffered the punishment of our sins in his death. That’s so plain that the only reason that I can think of that individuals would like to say something otherwise is they find it difficult to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is our substitute. Now, he says the consequences of this is therefore all died -- not were dead -- died.

So the very fact -- I should say this -- this is not Paul’s emphasis -- the very fact that he died for all infers his deity, for no one could die for all. In fact, if we conceived of the Lord Jesus as just being a sinless human being, he could never die for all. The very fact that Paul says he died for all is an evidence of his deity, of the infinite value of his person, of the infinite value of the death that he died. One died for all. Ridiculous were it not for the fact that the Lord Jesus, as the infinite son of God, offers a sacrifice that has infinite value, sufficient to cover the sins of all men and even others if they were born but never have been born; an infinitely valuable sacrifice.

So therefore all died but coming back to what Paul says, he infers that the all in that last clause refers to the all in the preceding clause. That the one died for all, therefore -- and in the Greek text there is an article there -- therefore the all die; that is, the all for whom Christ died, they are the ones who died. So if we say Christ died for all, then we have to say if we want to posit a universal atonement, everybody has died in the death of Christ. We don’t want to say that because nowhere in Scripture does it ever say anything like that. For those who are not believers in Christ, have not died in Christ’s death. Therefore, when he says one died for all, he’s talking about the all who died in Christ’s death. He’s talking about all believers. It’s clear. One died for all believers, therefore all believers died.

What does it mean to die as the substitute for us? There’s a quietness over the auditorium. Maybe you’re expecting I’m going to say something about a form of

atonement teaching with which you’re embarrassed. I’m not embarrassed in the slightest. I hope you won’t be either. What does it mean when we say Christ is our substitute? What do we mean by that? Well, look, this is what we mean. We mean he discharged my penal obligation to God. He paid the penalty that I, as a sinner, have to pay, either myself or in a substitute. He discharged my penal obligation to God. That’s why we said last week this is an amnesty of immeasurable mercy. This is what Christ has done for sinners.

Well, now, that means then that there is either a universal salvation or a restricted scope of substitution. Because, you see, if it says one died for all, as their substitute and discharged their penal obligation to God, if that’s a reference to everyone, then everyone goes free. Everyone has had his penal obligation satisfied.

But if you were to say to me, but he must believe, I would say to you, is unbelief a sin? And you would have to say yes, unbelief’s a sin. As a matter of fact, that’s the sin. Well, then evidently he didn’t pay for all when he died; not for you unbelief. But you see, he did die for all, all sins. He paid for sins, all sins. But all sins of the all, who died when he died. In other words, Christ died for the all who died when he died. That is, the death is numerically one; it’s Christ’s death and we participate in his death, and we share in its benefits.

Now, when we think about this, of course, there are some things about it that are very significant. If I may just for a moment say another word about substitution. The consequences for the doctrine -- or the consequences of the doctrine of substitution for the design of the atonement are momentous. If Christ discharged my penal obligations to God, then the cross was decisive for my salvation and guarantees that I should be brought to faith and through faith to eternal life. If we affirm penal substitution as an effective saving act of God, then we must infer either universal salvation, all, meaning everybody without exception, or to evade this, restrict the scope of the substitution and say the all means all believers, making it a substitution for some, not all. If we attempt to affirm

substitution for all, but then we have some die in their sins, then we must give up the position of, for example, Augustus Toplady who said, “Payment God cannot twice demand, first for my bleeding shirt, his hand, then again for mine.”

In fact, as John Murray, and I think very succinctly and well, “Unless we believe in the final restoration of all mankind, we cannot have an unlimited atonement on the premise that some perish eternally, we are shut up to one of two alternatives: a limited efficacy or a limited extent.”

And if we say that Christ died for everybody, he tried to save everybody, but he didn’t save everybody, what are we saying about God? We’re saying God tried to do something and couldn’t do it. You see it comes down finally to the kind of God that we have. Do we have a sovereign God who accomplishes all of his purposes or most of his purposes? Now, I happen to be convinced that we have a God who is a sovereign God and who consummates all of his purposes. And therefore, when Christ came to die, he died for the all who died when he died. And he accomplished his purposes. And therefore, the saints of God are assured, not simply of the beginning of salvation but the continuation of it and the ultimate presence in the Lord God.

So as Murray says, we shut up to one of two alternatives: a limited efficacy or a limited extent. There’s no such thing as an unlimited atonement. Let us remember that. People like to say, “He believes in limited atonement.” Look, everybody believes in a limited atonement, even the Armenians. Their atonement is limited efficacy. He tried to save all in his death, but it’s not accomplished. On the other hand, believers in sovereign mercy believe in a limited extent of the atonement. He came to accomplish atonement for a particular people, and he has accomplished it.

To give you an illustration of how interpreters bound by presuppositions come to a passage like this and seek to find unlimited atonement in it, I refer you to one man, well known as one of the leading interpreters of the Pauline literature coming to this particular passage and attempting to evade Paul’s statements and the logic of them, says that all

potentially dead. Now, if you could read through this passage and if you can find the expression “potentially dead,” I’ll be happy to pronounce you Professor of Systematic Theology at 13642 Ashridge Street. I can’t give you any more authority or title than that, but I assure you you will not find anything like potentially dead. He said, one died for all, therefore all died. He speaks of universal possibility. But there is no word for possibility of new life here. He says of God potentially at least reconciling us. But the text says he reconciled us, not potentially. You see he’s adding words: possible, potential. And many do that without even realizing what they’re doing because of preconceived opinions.

He even speaks of Christ’s death as the death of all men’s so far as they are willing to die with him, linking everything finally to the decision of the free will. That’s not exegeses. This man is an authority. That’s not exegeses. It only shows that men of great reputation are human after all. And if you are looking around for one who is human after all, take a good look at the fellow who standing behind the pulpit. One good thing he did say was, you’ll notice there’s no reference to baptism here, for salvation is linked with the death of Christ.

The purpose of it is stated in verse 15, he died for all that they who live -- that is, those who died when Christ died. They who live should not longer live for themselves but for him who died and rose again on their behalf. They who live is the same as the all. The proximate design, the near design of his death is to expiate our sins, propitiate God to, as we said a moment ago, to discharge our penal obligation to God. But that has as its goal, its ultimate design, is that our life for him be a life of fellowship, be a life of righteousness, be a life represented by resulting good works. And when we understand the nature and saving power of his death, then we do not live for ourselves, we live for him.

Charles Hodge has put it this way, “But the Bible teaches us that if we are partakers of Christ’s death, we are also partakers of his life. If we have found any such

appreciation of his love in dying for us as to lead us to confide in the merit of his death, we shall be constrained to consecrate our lives to his service. That is true. If you see -- if Jesus Christ really did stand in my stead, the only response can possibly be: oh, how I love him.

And further, if Jesus Christ died for me, then his love must master me. If I’ve come to realize that his love must master me and, henceforth, it holds me as a willing captive and I can only pray as one of my great teachers has said that we should pray: O sacred substitute, I’m Thine in all that I have. That’s the only response that I can possibly see to the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There’s a marvelous little story -- and I close with this -- Francis Ridley Havergal, who has written some well-known hymns and poems, visited Germany with her father who was getting treatment for his afflicted eyes. While in a pastor’s home in Germany, she saw a picture of the crucifixion on the wall with the words under it: I did this for thee, what has thou done for me? Quickly she took a piece of paper, she wrote a poem based on that motto but she wasn’t satisfied with it. So she rolled it up and she threw it into the fire, but unfortunately it didn’t catch, it fell out on the floor.

And later her father saw it, picked it up, read it, asked her to publish it, and we sing that little poem today to a tune composed by Phillip Bliss, “I gave my life for thee, my precious blood I shed that thou mightest ransom be and quicken from the dead. I gave, I gave my life for thee, what has thou given for me?” I think Paul would answer by saying, “Everything. Everything. Everything belongs to him.” That’s the only response for the particular eternal, free, spontaneous, everlasting love of the father in heaven for the saints for whom Jesus Christ died and who have come to trust in him through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. May God help us to respond accordingly. Shall we stand for the benediction?

If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we remind you, as Paul has reminded the Corinthians, one died for all, therefore all died. May God, in his marvelous grace, cause you to see the substitutionary sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. And if you have any question whatsoever about your eternal existence being represented by that all, don’t go out saying, “I don’t know whether I’m one of the elect or not. Therefore, I don’t know whether that’s for me.” You can settle the question right here. No one knows the answer to that question until by God’s grace he’s responded to the gospel.

And so we call upon you to turn to Christ, acknowledge your sin, acknowledge the blood that was shed as Paul has referred to it here, and lean your life upon the Lord Jesus and the death that he died for sinners and walk out knowing that God has brought you into his family and that all of these things about which Paul has been speaking are things that were really for you, though settled in the ages of eternity past. If you don’t want to do that, if you have no desire whatsoever to do that, if you dislike the whole idea, we plead with you to change your mind, but we also say that under those circumstances, you do receive exactly what you want, and therefore there is no excuse. May God help you to come to Christ. Let’s bow in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for these words that have come from the great apostle. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the good news that someone has discharged my penal obligation to God. What a thrilling fact. And we worship Thee, O sacred Substitute, we are Thine in all that we have.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

