



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

“Amnesty International, Embraceable and Imperative”

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

TRANSCRIPT

“We would like to encourage you to come on Wednesday night. Dr. Daniel really just got started in Philippians. And I know that you would profit if you come. And if you come this Wednesday -- of course you may come any Wednesday -- but if you come, you will not miss much, and it will enable you to follow along through the book in a way that will bring you, I think, a very sound and interesting and fruitful understanding of that epistle that the apostle wrote.

And one final word, Mr. Pryor of course, knows all of this much better than I, but we live in a day in which tapes have become very popular with believing Christians. And we all listen to them and generally, of course, we pay for them. In fact, this last week I sent off for eleven tapes of a conference and paid for them. Fortunately for me they were not too expensive, but nevertheless we paid for them. Surprise. Believers Chapels tapes are free! And I know that some of our friends might say, as they said of Paul in the days in which he preached, the reason the apostle makes his message free of charge is that it's not worth much. [Laughter] So if you want to respond that way, that's fine, but still we'd be happy for you to obtain the tapes and listen to the ministry. And then if you want to say, I see why they are free of charge afterwards, then you have a scientific basis for saying that. And that will, I think, give you much greater peace of mind.

The Scripture reading for today is two verses, 2 Corinthians 5:20 and 21. This, in one sense, is the climax of the apostle’s section on the ministry. Not the conclusion of it but the climax of it. And these verses that we’ve been studying rather intensively -- not as intensively as we could have, but rather intensively -- are really the climax of his doctrinal explanation of what he preaches. He has just said in verse 14 of 2 Corinthians 5, “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,” -- and of course as we try to point out we do not introduce any different persons here, those who live are those who died when he died, “Should no longer live for themselves but for him who died and rose again on their behalf.” And a few sentences later he states in the 19 verse, “Namely to give the ministry reconciliation, namely that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself not counting the trespasses against them.”

That statement makes it plain that the term “world” is not everyone without exception, but everyone without distinction. If it were everyone without exception, then of course their trespasses would not be reckoned to them, and we would therefore be required to believe in universal salvation, because the reconciling action cannot be greater than the inevitable result of it. Let me say that, the reconciling action cannot be greater in its results than the inevitable issue of that action.

And Paul states the inevitable issue of the reconciling action is not reckoning their trespasses to them. So reconciliation, in its effects, is defined as not reckoning their trespasses to them. So, therefore, world must refer to those whose trespasses have not been reckoned to them and thus everybody without distinction, Jew, Gentile, rich, poor, et cetera, not everyone without exception, everyone without distinction. That’s so plain. It’s amazing that we can miss it, isn’t it? And I confess I missed that for a long time. I sought to introduce the word “provisional,” “potential,” words that Paul didn’t write at all. But we like to put them in in order to explain what seems to us to be necessary, but it’s not.

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Now we come to the 20<sup>th</sup> verse, and Paul draws an inference from it,

“Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were entreating through us, we beg you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God.”

I will try to point out in the exposition that when he says, be reconciled to God, he’s not speaking to the Corinthians. Some have suggested that perhaps he means, you Corinthians be reconciled and is suggesting, he thought, a fresh reconciliation or a daily reconciliation. These truths, of course, may be necessary in a certain way, but the you is not there. And when he says, we beseech, be reconciled to God, he’s giving the message that is proclaimed to the world just mentioned above. Now then in verse 21 without any connection, he states,

“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

One could not really emphasize that final text too much. It lies at the heart of the message that the Apostle Paul and his compatriots in the ministry preached.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we thank Thee and praise Thee for the word of reconciliation. The message that the apostles have been commissioned to proclaim and specifically the Apostle Paul, commissioned by Thee to proclaim that God has reconciled us to himself through the death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And, Lord, how wonderful it is today to know that we who were at one time enemies have now been made friends by virtue of the blood that was shed.

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And we pray that in our own preaching and witnessing we may effectively and accurately and truthfully proclaim the Lord Jesus as the ground of the salvation of those who have felt their guilt and have felt the need of a right relationship to Thee. And, Lord, we pray that if it should please Thee, there may be some in this audience who, through the preaching of the word, may come to a conviction of their lost condition and of the gospel of the Lord Jesus as the remedy. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the day in which we live and for the privilege of proclaiming Christ in 1987.

We pray Thy blessing upon our country, upon the whole church of Jesus Christ. Upon this local church and those who are involved in it and the ministries of it. We pray Thy blessing particularly upon those who have requested our prayer for them. And, Father, on this day in this city we particularly offer prayer in behalf of those families who have lost their Christian fathers this week. We grieve together with them. We mourn over the loss of the heads of their homes, and we particularly remember them. We pray that Thou art give strength and encouragement in the midst of tragedy that Thou will sustain them and strengthen them. And we particularly pray for Dr. Wood who has been a member of our congregation who has lost his son-in-law. We pray for him and for members of his family especially. We commit them to Thee. And now, Lord, as we sing together and as we listen to the word of God, may we have the sense of Thy presence with us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] I must apologize for my title today. You know, in Believers Chapel we try not to move with the flow of the times, but Monday morning when I was thinking of a title, I confess that I had a slippage in the mind and entitled it “Amnesty International, Embraceable and Imperative.” And I’m sure that that title doesn’t mean a whole lot to you. I hope that through the ministry of the word, you will understand at least what I was trying to represent and that is the forgiveness of our trespasses that is represented by

the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ that it is something that we may embrace by being reconciled to the Lord God or by the reception of that message. And, further, that sense the apostle says, “Be reconciled to God” and uses the imperative mood that it is something that is imperative if we wish to have the assurance of a right relationship with the Lord God.

One notices immediately here if one is a student of the theology of the word of God, and we all are in more to more or less degree, that the apostle’s concept of reconciliation is very closely related to his concept of justification. It’s very difficult to separate them other than some separation of emphasis. And one can see that because in that 19<sup>th</sup> verse he states that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself not counting their trespasses against them or not reckoning their trespasses against them. And he will recognize immediately that that is associated with the doctrine of reconciliation. You may also remember that the apostle in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter to the Romans begins his letter by saying, “Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God,” and then in the integrated paragraph, which reaches its conclusion in verse 11, justification imperceptively almost moves into the doctrine of reconciliation, the note upon which he closes that paragraph in Romans 5, verses 10 and 11.

The church has never been in doubt about the importance of the doctrine of justification by the faith on the principle of grace. John Calvin in *The Institutes* states that this is the main hinge on which the religion turns. Lutherans like to call it the *articulus fundamentalis* or the most fundamental article of the Christian faith. Luther’s experience I think effectively illustrates it. Luther, as you know, was an Augustinian monk and Luther had been taught, so he said on one or more than one occasion, that the justice of God, *justitia dei*, the Latin expression about which he speaks, or the righteousness of God. He says that he was taught that that was to be taken actively. That is, it was the justice formal and active with which God is just and punishes unjust sinners. It’s the kind of justice that punishes that which is contrary to his will. So the justice of

God is that attribute of his by which he punishes sinners. So he was taught that, he says, on more than one occasion.

Now, Luther, by the grace of God, felt that he was a sinner, no matter how irreproachably he lived as a monk and, therefore, he hated the just God, concerning whom he had been taught. He felt he was a sinner and so, therefore, since God was a God who punishes sinners, he was angry with God. He confesses he was angry with God, and he, furthermore, believed that it was enough that miserable sinners should be eternally damned with original sin, but it was more than enough if in the gospel itself the justice of God should be proclaimed.

And he referred to the text in Romans chapter 1 where Paul speaks about a righteousness of God being revealed in the gospel. And since the righteousness of God or the justice of God was revealed in the gospel, the supposed gospel itself taught that God punishes sinners. So he said, It’s bad enough to be born a sinner, it’s bad enough to be under original sin, but it’s even worse when in the gospel we have the justice of God again that simply condemns sinners. He pondered Paul, he said. He went like a person who prayed importunately to the Apostle Paul for some kind of explanation and for a long time he was unable to obtain it. He ardently desired to know what Paul meant.

Well, we know of Luther’s experience that when he was lecturing at Wittenberg, it in the year of 1513, he began to give a course of lectures under Staupitz’ direction on the book of Psalms. Perhaps Staupitz, who understood more than Luther at that time, did it so that Luther could obtain some of the knowledge that Staupitz himself had. And so he began to lecture on the book of the Psalms. We don’t know specifically the place at which Luther came to understand the justice of God or the righteousness of God. It may well have been, many Luther scholars feel, when he reached Psalm 70 and 71, for the apostle -- or for the psalmist there at that point does speak about God in his righteousness saving individuals.

At any rate, probably in the year 1514 or '15 around there, Luther came to an understanding of the righteousness of God, and he saw that in Scripture not only was the righteousness of God that attribute by which he punishes sinners but the righteousness of God was that righteousness with which he endows sinners who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. And he himself said that he came to understand not simply that expression, the righteousness of God but other expressions of a similar character. The work of God was that which God works in us. The strength of God is that with which God empowers us. The wisdom of God is that with which he makes us wise. The salvation of God is that with which he saves us, and so on. And so the righteousness of God is that which he conveys to us through faith in Christ. He saw that it could be taken not simply actively as what God in punishing sinners but passively as that which he gives to men who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, when Luther began to understand that, of course, his world changed. It was like a revolution. It was like an explosion, and that explosion we are still feeling today. Among the things that Luther said are these: “This straightway made me feel as though reborn as though I have entered through open gates into paradise itself. From then on the whole face of Scripture appeared different.” Another thing that he said was this, “And now as much as I had hated this word, justice of God before, so much the more sweetly I extol this word to myself now so that this place in Paul was to me as a real gate of paradise.”

He went on to say afterward he read, Augustine whom he had read before but nevertheless he saw that Augustine -- in the book Augustine wrote a well-known semi, an anti-Pelagian treatise, on the spirit and on the letter that Augustine gave the same kind of interpretation. Although he said it was not perfectly done by Augustine, and there was a great deal of lack of clarity about, to use Luther’s words, imputation. So when we think about the doctrine of justification by faith, we are talking about a doctrine that has been

of the greatest significance in the history of the Christian church and particularly of the Western church. It truly is or can be the most fundamental article of our faith.

Now, a good place to begin is to remind us of the definition of justification. What does it mean to justify? And I’m going to do something I don’t normally do, although I think it’s a good thing to do because there are so many people who have the idea that to have a creed is a bad thing.

Now, I don’t hold that view. We don’t have a creed in Believers Chapel. As a matter of fact, we don’t even have a doctrinal statement. I often have people write, me young preachers particularly; we are starting a church we, would like to know what your constitution is. Would you send us your constitution? I usually write back, it’s difficult to send a Bible to someone who already has a Bible. It’s not necessary.

But that’s not the way by which we say we don’t have a creed. We do have a creed. As a matter of fact, we have a particular understanding of our creed, which is the Bible. We seek to follow *sola scriptura*, that is scripture alone. We have a creed. And, furthermore, at least I speak for, I think I speak for others here; we do highly regard the historical Christian creeds of the church because they give us what the Holy Spirit has taught believing bodies, believing Christians through the centuries. A person, who in 1987 says, I’m not going to pay any attention to the Christian creeds, I’m just going to follow what I see in the Bible, well is very unwise. In the first place, he’s arrogant. He thinks that the Holy Spirit has abandoned the opposite teaching which the Lord gave him and for 1900 years has been teaching things that are probably wrong and that he now in his limited intellect and his limited knowledge of Christian theology and of the issues involved is able to construct a theology. And often that particularly is stated by individuals who’ve never even been to a Bible school much less a theological seminary and certainly have not spent much time in a theological seminary, because one of the things they would learn after a while, although sometimes you don’t learn it until you graduated from seminary, and that is that what we have in the Christian creeds is a

reflection of the Holy Spirit’s teaching down through the centuries. It’s not perfect. The creeds are not our ultimate doctrinal standards. The word of God is.

But nevertheless there is a lot of wisdom in them. And beginning with them would be the place at which an individual who wants to exercise some originality should begin. That’s quite an introduction to reading a paragraph from the Westminster Confession of Faith, but here it is. This is what the confession states. This is not Scripture, but it’s a reasonably accurate representation of Scripture, and it certainly is put well, in my opinion. This is what we read in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of the confession:

“Those whom God effectually calleth, he also freely justifieth not by infusing righteousness into them but by pardoning their sins and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous. Not for anything wrought in them or done by them but for Christ’s sake alone. Not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing or any other evangelical obedience to them as their righteousness but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them. They receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith which faith they have not of themselves it’s the gift of God.”

Now, I won’t read the rest of the paragraphs for the sake of time, but I encourage you to read them yourself. There are three or four more significant paragraphs concerning the doctrine of justification.

Now, you can see from this that what is meant by justification includes the declaration of righteousness. When a person is justified, he’s not made righteous, he isn’t righteous yet, he is declared righteous. It is a forensic legal term, and God, through faith in Christ on the principle of grace, declares righteous those who believe in him. That is inclusive of remission of sins, and it is inclusive of the imputation of the reckoning of the righteousness of God to those individuals. It’s a gracious act. It is something that God performs. He gives the faith by which we rely and rest upon the Lord Jesus Christ

and are by that very fact the recipients of the right relationship with God. It is therefore the theology of certainty, not the theology of doubt. The theology of doubt is always connected with justification by works in one form or another. That is, by justification through a sacramental system or justification by good works or justification through the exercise of our free will plus the work that Christ did.

We are talking about the justification on the principle of grace through faith contrary to all of those things. I know that in our society, free will is one of the American doctrines to which we are all suppose to hold. We see it constantly in the newspapers. In fact, it’s so commonly said to us it’s hard for us to believe that it must not be true. So many people say it, but it’s false. And it’s very confusing for a Christian man to say, I believe in salvation by grace, but I also believe in free will.

Now, if I were to say, “I live in Dallas, Texas,” that would be a truth. If I were to say, “I live in New York City,” we could say that might be a truth. Both of those can be truths. But if we say I live at the same moment in Dallas, Texas, and in New York City, what do we say about a person like that? Well, we say at the minimum, he’s confused, and that’s surely true. That’s the theological state of a person who says, I believe in the salvation of God through grace, but I believe in free will. Free will, by its nature, is the declaration that the decision to believe in Christ arises, first of all, out of myself apart from divine enablement. That’s what free will means, that I have the ability to decide either for or against the spiritual truth.

Now, we don’t deny the exercise of the will, we deny the exercise of a free will. That is that it is God the Holy Spirit who moves my will to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. I don’t live in Dallas and New York City at the same time. I’m not confused to that extent. And I believe in salvation by grace, and if I do I cannot believe in free will. If I believe in free will don’t talk about salvation by grace, otherwise your confused.

As Dr. Clark use to talk and say a person who is confused is someone who has a charley horse between the ears. And that’s the position and incidentally that’s not my

position. I didn’t originate this. This is found in the Lutheran doctrinal statement. It’s found in the Calvinistic doctrinal statements. It’s not something new. It originated in clarity with Augustine in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. It didn’t originate then, it originated with the apostles. It was recovered then and recovered again in the reformation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and, unfortunately, it’s largely having to be recovered again in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in evangelical churches. Sad but true.

Now, the justification by grace through faith. Now, Paul has said in verse 19, that we have an effective actual reconciliation of the saints of all classes. Namely God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The inevitable result of that is that their trespasses are not reckoned to them. And if their trespasses are not reckoned to them, we either have, as I said, universalism, universal salvation or else we have world meaning all without distinction not all without exception. And since it’s in the inevitable result of reconciliation that our trespasses are not reckoned to us and since we know Scriptures don’t teach universal salvation, Paul must mean then what he meant in verse 14, the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this that one died for all, therefore all died. Christ died for those who died when Christ died. It’s as simple as that. It really is as simple as that. So there is an actual effective reconciliation of the saints of all classes. There is a gracious remission or justification; that, is our trespasses are not reckoned to us. And finally Paul said in the 19<sup>th</sup> verse, “There has been deposited with him the word of reconciliation,” the word concerning this the word I’m trying to bring to you this morning as a weak representative of the Lord Jesus Christ and follower of the Apostle Paul.

Now, beginning with the 20<sup>th</sup> verse the apostle says, “Therefore.” In other words here is an inference drawn from the reconciliation and the remission and particularly the depositing of this message, “Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ.” Now, that’s a remarkable statement. And it would be nice if we had the time to devote to what it means to be an ambassador. Without dealing with all of the ramifications of this, an ambassador, very simply, is a representative of the personal ruler of a land.

Our ambassador to Paris, France, Mr. Rogers, is a personal representative of Ronald Reagan, the President. Our ambassadors are representatives of rulers. And in the days of the apostles, that’s what they were. An ambassador then represents his country or the head of his country at the court or capital of another country. He works in a foreign land. Every ambassador works in a foreign land. All of our ambassadors all over this world work in foreign lands. That’s what an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ is.

Our citizenship is in heaven. We are ambassadors here. We don’t belong here. We have our citizenship in heaven. Heaven doesn’t issue passports, but, nevertheless, if I had a passport, that’s what my passport would be. It would have on the outside, heavenly Jerusalem or new heavens or something like that. I am a citizen -- our citizenship is in heaven, Paul said. We often talk about home missions, foreign missions. So many things, my Christian friends, so many things. My patience is nearing the end. I’m getting so old. But we have so many things that we talk about that are not scriptural. There isn’t such a thing as home missions and foreign missions. Where can you find that in the Bible? Missions we have. All missions are foreign missions. It’s foreign mission work for me to stand in Dallas, Texas, when my home is in heaven. That’s where my citizenship is, and I’m preaching to you poor people out here, most of you of course are citizens of that country too. But for those of you who are not, you are to me, a foreign person. I’m representing my head, the Lord Jesus Christ, the head of the church giving the message that he has asked those who belong to him to give in our society. So that’s one thing an ambassador is. He represents of course his government in all of its dignity. His person lends no weight to what he says. He transmits a message that is given to him. He doesn’t have any authority to add anything to the message.

Mr. Rogers does not have any authority whatsoever to add anything to Ronald Reagan’s ultimate words to him. He simply conveys them to those to whom they’re addressed in the land in which he’s living. Furthermore if he’s sent home, that signifies the breaking of relations. And so if my message is not responded to, then that signifies

that you have broken your relations with my country which is in heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven. To refuse the gospel is not to refuse me. To refuse the gospel is to refuse the one who sent me, the Lord Jesus Christ. He says that over and over in the New Testament as well.

Earthly ambassadors incidentally operate out of impressive headquarters. Oh my, that’s a whole other message about our headquarters in Moscow. I won’t say anything about it. But my, what an impressive building is being erected there with Soviet spy devices practically in every corner and brick of the whole thing, whatever it’s made out of. But our ambassadors act out of impressive residences, but the apostle says, as far as the ambassadors now, Well, our treasure is in earthen vessels that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves. And so I am his ambassador, and I want you to know that I do not operate out of very impressive headquarters but out of the exact opposite. But nevertheless I am the representative of the Lord Jesus Christ personally.

So he says, We are his ambassadors. And notice what he says about us, as though God were entreating through us. What a calling. What a calling to stand up or to speak on the street corner or to discuss in the confines of your office the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. God, the God of heaven entreating men to be reconciled to him through us. No calling could be greater than that.

That’s why Mr. Spurgeon said, “If God has called you to be a minister of the gospel of Christ, don’t stoop to become a king.” So we are ambassadors as though God were entreating through us. The God of heaven, begging or entreating or beseeching transgressors to receive the reconciliation he has provided. What a calling. One could never have a calling in this life that could compare with that. Christ’s men are the voice of God. And this does not pertain simply to preachers, apostles. It pertains to every one of us who is a believer in Christ and who opens our lips to give the gospel to our fellow men and women.

Now, Paul says that the appeal of the minister in the 20<sup>th</sup> verse is, “Be reconciled to God.” This is the way Christ’s men respond to the fact that there has been deposited in them the word of reconciliation.

Now, the Corinthians were, no doubt, in need of fresh experiences of reconciliation, but the apostle is not talking about that he’s talking about what he mentioned in verse 19. Christ reconciling the world. That is, everybody without distinction, not everybody without exception. And so, consequently, he’s talking about reconciliation as that by which we enter into the blessings of not having our trespasses reckoned to us. And the message is very simple, be reconciled to God, appropriate by faith the reconciliation that is available through that which Jesus Christ accomplished in his death on the cross.

Now, one might ask, what’s the ground of this marvelous message by which I may have my trespasses no longer imputed to me? What is the basis of that? What is the ground that enables you to speak so authoritatively of my possessing forgiveness of sins and a position of righteousness before God? Well, the 20<sup>th</sup> verse gives the haven of safety and the thought of verse 21, which is the ground of the appeal, is developed in terms of an exchange. The nonimputation of verse 19 rests upon Christ’s work referred to here. “And there is no foundation for anyone to stand up and preach the word of God” who does not ground his message in what Paul states in verse 21, “He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him.”

Just a few comments concerning this, one could speak for literally days on what is involved in this great statement. “He made him to be sin for us who knew no sin.” That’s a reference to the incarnate life of our Lord. No reference to the preincarnate life would be pointed. That would be pointless to refer to that. The apostle is referring to our Lord’s earthly life, his incarnate life. He’s referring to the way in which men and God approved of him. At the baptism, the voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I’m well pleased.” The Lord Jesus himself spoke in the light of it. He said, “Which of you

convinceth me of sin?” And there was no response. Around the cross the thief on the cross said, “This man hath done nothing amidst.” Even Pilate said, “I find no fault in this man.” The apostles united, bringing the changes on this sinlessness of our Lord. Peter said, “He did no sin.” John said, “In Him there is no sin.” Paul says, “He knew no sin.” He must be the sinless savior if he’s to be an adequate substitute for me.

Paul then says, “He made him to be sin on our behalf.” This is how Christ crucified relates to the message. “He made him sin.” He doesn’t say, “He made him a sinner.” He doesn’t even say, “He was reputed to be a sinner.” He said, “That he was made sin.” If we were to say, “Made a sinner,” that would destroy the antithesis with made righteousness that follows. In fact, that particular antithesis is destroyed by made a sin offering. Of course, in some sense that would be not too bad. We must give sin the same sense in both occurrences. And when it says, “He made him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf,” the reference is to the fact that the Lord Jesus was made sin by divine imputation of our guilt. He was officially guilty with our guilt, is the point. He voluntarily, from his standpoint wrapped himself in our guilt, and the father meted out upon him the judgment that was due sinners.

Now, he says, “That he made him to be sin on our behalf. That is, he did it as a substitutionary offering on our behalf. I don’t want to labor this point too much but it just needs it because people seem to have difficulty understanding it. He was a substitutionary offering. And my friend, if he is a substitutionary offering, it’s obvious he cannot substitute for everybody in the same way. Because if that were so, then if the Lord Jesus has truly borne the sins of all men in penal substitution there’s nothing left for divine justice to punish. If everyone has borne his punishment in Christ, how can we be punished? Then we would have to believe in universal salvation.

Now, if you were to say to me, “Oh, but we must believe.” I would simply ask you the question, “Is unbelief a sin?” And of course, unbelief is a sin because it’s the root of all sin. Did not Christ die for all sin, according to your own views? Well, yes. Then he

died for the sin of unbelief. You see, if we have a substitutionary offering, we must have an offering that is definite for a definite particular people. That’s very plain from the teaching of the Bible. It’s just so difficult for us who are sinners and whose minds have been affected by our sin to grasp, apart from the illumination of the Holy Spirit, the special offering of the Lord Jesus for men.

The concept of the universal spiritually egalitarian love of God lies at the basis of a great deal of the spiritual failure of our day, in my opinion. In fact, the doctrine of the universal love of God -- that is, he loves everybody in the same way -- is a doctrine imminently calculated to give comfort to the apathetic and indifferent among us, who seem to be dwelling in a kind of spiritual coma. That is, God loves us all in the same way, and we can believe any time we wish to believe. And the result is people pass out of this existence never having believed being encouraged by that. Let me be careful to point out something, lest you misunderstand. There is a two-fold love of God; that for the elect and that for the non-elect. While great benefits accrued to the non-elect from Christ’s atoning work, including the blessings of common grace that comes to its highest expression, not simply that he’s good to us and providing all these marvelous things about us.

All of the things that have to do with what we call common grace, God’s beneficent love of us, but that comes to its highest expression in the entreaties of the gospel when I as a servant of the Lord plead with you to respond to the message of a crucified Savior, that’s God’s grace to you. That’s God’s beneficent love for you, desiring to bring you to the knowledge of him. So common grace comes to that high expression in the entreaties, the overtures, the imperatives of gospel preaching. But there is nevertheless a radical difference between the love for every man in that sense and a special love by which through the Holy Spirit he works in the hearts of his divinely chosen individuals and brings them to the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let us remember that when we speak about the love of God, there is a two-fold love of

God, and it corresponds to the distinguishing nature of divine election. The love for God’s elect is distinguishing, it’s special, it’s eternal, in fact, it’s divine. And I want you to know it is the greatest blessing in the world for an individual to come to realize that he is the object of that divine, special, eternal love. The Holy Spirit alone can bring it to you.

Now, will you wait for a moment while I pick up my notes? After all, what can a preacher do if he doesn’t have his notes before him? Just preach the word. Well, anyway, I want to conclude by making a few comments concerning the last part of that verse in which the apostle says, “That we might become the righteousness of God in him.”

Now, the same method by which we have the imputation of sin because of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden, that method is the same method by which we have the imputation of God’s righteousness. He was constituted sin that we might become the righteousness of God. We are not made righteous yet, but we are regarded as such by virtue of our gracious union with him, our covenantal head.

When we think about this in verse 21, “That we might become the righteousness in of God in him,” we are talking about that which is eternal. And what a magnificent thing to realize that we have that which is eternal. Sometimes we think of eternity in different ways. We think of eternity around Dallas as until the city and state decide what to do with Central Expressway, that’s eternity. Or until DART becomes a viable enterprise, that’s eternity. But when we look at the word of God, eternity is under the ages of the ages of the ages, long after DART either has or has not become a viable thing and Central Expressway either has or has not become a viable expressway.

Paul says that we might become the righteousness of God, and all of the things that he says in other places indicate that this is an eternal relationship. I said at the beginning that Paul speaks of this as a kind of exchange. There is a remarkable statement made in a 2<sup>nd</sup> century document, the Epistle of Dognetas. It was a Christian work of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, very early, and these words are found in it. “O, blessed exchange.” Literally

the Greek word used there is sweet. “O, the sweet exchange. O, the unsearchable workmanship. O, the incredible benefits that sewed the iniquity of many should be hidden in one righteous and the righteousness of one should justify many iniquities.” Well, he was on to the truth of the exchange that Paul speaks about here. When Christ is made sin for us and we are made the righteousness of God in him.

And what a blessing it is to have this because all of the blessings of God are ultimately connected with it. As Calvin said, it’s the hinge on which our religion turns. I read a statement by George Will. In fact, it was a story that Mr. Will told in the presence of President Reagan at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the *National Review*. And the President was there, and Mr. Will went on to say in a very interesting and humorous talk that he gave there -- that he was at this particular place and this particular time. He was going to award Patricia Buckley, who is the wife of the publisher William Buckley, the John Jacob Astor Trophy for Editorial Composure, because in the midst of the anxieties and the trials of being an editor, she never lost her composure. And he went on to say that he called it the John Jacob Aster trophy for Editorial Composure because John Jacob Aster was on the *Titanic* when it sank. And when that ship hit the iceberg he turned to the steward who was standing by him. He said, “Look, I asked for ice, but this is ridiculous.” [Laughter]

Now, Luther said with reference to the righteousness of God that the righteousness of God does not come in pieces, it comes in a heap. And it really does. When we have the righteousness of God, we have an acceptable standing before God that means God is pleased with us because of what Christ has done. And we stand in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

Time is up. I simply say this. The church of the Jesus Christ about which we speak so much, the church is the communion of those who have received the gift of righteousness who have in measure perhaps not as violently as Martin Luther but in measure have come to understand what Christ did and what is conveyed through the gospel a righteousness that God approves that is acceptable to him reckoned to our

benefit. Our appropriation is by faith, not good works, not cooperation of our free will, nor by sacramental obedience but simply resting and relying upon what Christ has done for us.

If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, as an ambassador of Him, we say to you what Paul said to the men of his day, Be reconciled to God. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and Thou shalt be saved. Faith alone justifies, but not the faith that is alone. There’s always a test afterwards. *Sola fides justificat, sed non fides quae est sola*: “Faith alone justifies, but not the faith which is alone.” The evidences that you have truly believed in Christ, includes such things as the presence of the Holy Spirit. He that hath not the spirit of Christ is none of his. The evidence of a transformed life of a fundamental difference in our existence. May God, in his marvelous grace, reach out in this audience as well as over our land and bring men and women to the experience of the possession of a right relationship with God and the enjoyment of the righteousness of God in our covenantal head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee that we have such a message to proclaim. We could never hope to do it justice, could never hope to adequately expound. Him who knew no sin, God made to be sin in our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in him. How marvelous it is to know that in him we are acceptable to Thee. O Father, if there’s some in this audience who have never believed, may at this very moment by Thy grace, through the Holy Spirit, their wills be moved from unwillingness to willingness. And may they rest for time in eternity upon him who loved us and gave himself for us.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“Amnesty International, Embraceable and Imperative” by S. Lewis Johnson  
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