



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 5:11–6:10

Paul and the Ministry: 6

“The Strategy of the New Covenant Ministry: Part I”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for another opportunity to open the Scriptures and to listen to the things that they have to say to us concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for the section that we have been studying, for the emphasis that is placed upon the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we ask, Lord, that Thou will be with us in our time of study together. May our hearts and minds be responsive to the Word of God.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] That sounds a little loud to you—to me. Does it to you? They will. You feel sure? Our subject for tonight is “The Strategy of New Covenant Ministry.” And we’re looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 11 through chapter 6, verse 10, although we will only make one point from chapter 6 verse 1 through verse 10. This is the final stanza in Paul’s great hymn of the ministry. It could be entitled “The Glorious gospel of Jesus Christ,” and the apostle is speaking about the great privilege of the proclamation of it. I hope as a result of our study together, that one thing at least is true; that you’ve been stirred to study the Word of God more deeply for yourself.

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 Spirit to work upon.”

Matthew Henry 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.” That’s a rather solemn thing to think about. “We’re not only to be called into account for the truth that we know and did not apply, but also for the truth that we might have known, but did not come to know.”

Just a—a few—a couple of weeks ago, I ran across in one of the periodicals that I take, this quotation—it was made by Patrick Henry near his death—and it’s one of the saddest, I think, I’ve ever written—ever read. This is what he says, “Here is a book, the Bible, worth more than all others that were ever printed, yet it is my misfortune never to have found time to read it.” What a sad thing for someone to say.

Well, we’ve considered the ministry’s solemnity. We’ve considered it’s supremacy, for it is New Covenant ministry and not Old Covenant ministry. We have considered the sufferings entailed in the ministry of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we’ve also considered the supports that are available for us. The apostle has spoke very strongly about the things that are for our good, and he’s also spoken about the fact that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ and receive the things that have been done in our bodies, whether good or worthless.

And now he’s going to speak of the strategy of the ministry, and first of all, he speaks about the motives that move him and us in New Covenant ministry.

There are these dominant motives that are before the apostle, and will you listen as I read verse 11 through verse 15 of chapter 5. The apostle writes, “Knowing therefore”—he’s just spoken you see, about the judgment seat of Christ—

“Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also, are made manifest in your consciences. For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that you may have somewhat to answer them who glory in appearance, and not in heart. For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be of sober mind, it is for your cause. For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we

thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead. And that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again.”

The first of these dominant motives which move the apostle is the motive of the fear of the Lord. He says in verse 11, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord.”

Now, I think, in the light of the context—the immediately preceding words have had to do with the judgment seat of Jesus Christ—that he speaks of the solemnity of standing before the Lord some day, and receiving the rewards of the things that have been done in the body. The “terror of the Lord” is really the awe of the Lord, and it is a most solemn thing to realize, that the time is coming when every one of us who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ shall stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, and there we shall render an accounting of our lives. As Paul puts it, “We shall receive the things done in our bodies, according to that which we have done, whether it be good or worthless.” In other words, we shall be rewarded not in accordance with the things that we wanted to do, thought we did, but what we actually did do. That’s a solemn thing. It’s no wonder Paul speaks about the “awe of the Lord.”

And so in the light of that he said, “We persuade men, but we are made manifest unto God, and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.” What he means by this is, in Corinth there were individuals who were opponents of the apostle. He had a lot of difficulty with individuals who were well-known to the members of that congregation. Many of them who—to whom he refers in the latter part of this epistle, were like the Galatians and those that were troubling the Galatians. That is, they were Judaists. They were similar to the individuals who said, “It’s not necessary simply to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but it’s also necessary to be circumcised in order to be saved.” The apostle regarded that as a false doctrine, a heresy; and as is evident from Galatians, there was a great deal of feeling over this. He said, “Where is the blessedness? When I was with you, you would have plucked out your eyes, and you would have given them to me, but where has it all gone?”

When we were going through Galatians, I tried to make the point that one of the results of false doctrine is that we do lose the joy of the Lord. If you will observe carefully in your Christian experience, when individuals move off into doctrine that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible, inevitably the joy of the Lord is gone or leaves them. It’s characteristic. And particularly is it characteristic of those who move off into doctrines that are legalistic.

Well, in Corinth, they had some of the same types of individuals there, and they did not think a great deal of the apostle. He had many enemies there. Read the latter part of this particular epistle, and you will see how he speaks of them. Here he speaks of them as “those who glory in appearance and not in heart,” in the next verse. So when he writes here, “We are made manifest unto God,” what he is saying is, the Lord knows our hearts. He knows that we are ministering in the light of the solemn experience that we must ultimately undergo, standing before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ, and therefore, our ministry is a ministry out of sincerity. And he said, “I trust also that we are manifest in your consciences.” In other words, I—we trust that you understand how we stand before the Lord too.

Now, that sounds as if he’s commending himself, and so he says, “For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf.” What he wants—what he is saying is, “I’m not saying all of this in order that you might boast, or that I might boast to you but rather, that you may have a good illustration in my case, and you may have occasion to glory on our behalf, to have something with which to answer those who glory in appearance and not in heart.” And he continues. He says, “For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be of sober mind, it is for your cause.”

Now that of course, is the second reason, or the second dominant motive. It is, that the apostle desires the favor of the Corinthians. He wanted to give them a rejoinder to the enemies, and proof of selflessness in his own conduct. No doubt, he had been accused of madness, and that’s why he says, “For whether we be beside ourselves, it’s to God.”

Now, I think that’s rather interesting, because it is characteristic of those who stand for the truth of God to have this kind of criticism. Do you remember any others in the New Testament who were said to be mad? Well, if you’ve read much of the New Testament, you know that this is what they said of the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, the very same word that the apostle uses here when he says, “For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God,” is the word that was used of our Lord himself. It was used of Paul in Acts chapter 26 in verse 24 by others, and it was used of the whole Christian movement when it is said that, “Those who have turned the world upside down have come into our midst” in Thessalonica, the—exact word not used there, but the idea of the fact that they were troublemakers and had been the cause of a great deal of tumult.

So Paul says, “If we are mad—as they say we are mad—if we are crazy, well, it’s for the—it’s for the purposes of God. It’s for the interests of God. And if we are sober, it’s for your cause. Our ministry is for the benefit of you.”

Now, I say, the Lord is, of course, the outstanding one who has been accused in this way, but other Christians also have been accused of this down through the years. In Hosea, in the Old Testament, the prophet wrote, “The prophet is a fool, and the man of the spirit is mad.” That’s what they were saying about the prophets in Hosea’s day. And you may remember that the Pope said that, “Luther ought to be in bedlam.” And they charged the Wesleys with madness, and drew from the Wesleys the retort, “Fools and madmen let us be. Yet is our sure trust in thee.” When William Booth broke through the barrier of anaclessiasticism that was strangling his ministry, they said, “He’s not quite all there.” And some of the same things have been said about men like Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham, and George Whitefield, and Dwight L. Moody. In fact, sooner or later, every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who gives a true and ringing testimony to the gospel of Christ is going to have that kind of criticism. “The prophet is a fool. The man of the spirit is mad,” Hosea said.

So Paul speaks then about the fear of the Lord, the desire to have something with which the Corinthians may identified—may identify as proof of the selflessness in his conduct. And finally, as the supreme motive for ministry, he says in verse 14 and 15, “For the love of Christ constraineth us.”

Now, he has already spoken about mercy. Back in chapter 4, verse 1 we read, “Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.” But here, the love of Christ is the thing that constrains him. This is the explanation of the source of Paul’s lack of self-interest. He’s not really interested at all in his own standing. What he is interested in is the standing of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I like this word “constraineth,” because it’s used by the apostle in another place that is rather significant. In Philippians chapter 1 in verse 23 the apostle uses it. And if you have your Bibles there, turn over to Philippians chapter 1 and verse 23. The apostle is speaking here about the fact that,

“For him to live is Christ, to die is gain. If he lives in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labor: yet what I shall choose, I do not know.” [He doesn’t know whether he wants to stay here, or he wants to go to heaven.] “For I am in a strait between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better.”

“I am in a strait between two.” That is, these two things. I want to be here in order to minister for your profit, but I also want to be in the presence of the Lord, for “to die is gain,” the apostle says. Now this verb is a verb that has been translated in this case—I—“these two things hem me in on both sides.” So the motives of gain to be with the Lord, the motives of being an instrument of prophet for the Philippians; these are the two things that so press Paul in.

Now, over here in 2 Corinthians 5, he says, “For the love of Christ constraineth us,” hems me in. The love of Christ—the expression of the love of course, climactically in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, is what is ultimately upon the apostle’s mind.

I’ve often referred to something that Mr. Spurgeon said many years ago, referring to a woman who spoke to him once and said, “Ah, Mr. Spurgeon, if Jesus Christ does love me like that, he’ll never hear the last of it.” Someone has said—pointed out, rather—that the term “eccentric,” is

really a term derived from “ek” plus “centric,” which has to do with the center. So a man who is an eccentric, is a man who does not have his life around the proper center. So we say to an individual who is eccentric, “He’s strange.” He’s not like the rest of us who have a certain core of beliefs, around which our life gathers, but here’s a fellow who doesn’t move according to the same beat. And he, therefore, is an eccentric. But that is exactly what happens when a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ. His center is transformed, as he will say in just a moment. Those that are in Christ are a new creation. Old things have passed away. Things have become new. He has a new center. He is from that point on an eccentric. And sooner or later, that eccentricity will manifest itself in his life, unless he wants to cover up his faith and never say anything about it.

They didn’t notice anything much about Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus until finally, the crisis came, and then I’m sure that after Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus requested the body of the Lord Jesus Christ, who had just been crucified for blasphemy, and requested it in order to give burial to it, they said, “Something’s happened to Joseph.” He’s an eccentric from that time on, and I’m sure that he suffered for it.

So “the love of Christ constrains us, because we thus judge, if one died for all, then”—now, the Authorized Version says, “then were all dead.” But Paul actually wrote a simpler statement. All he said was this, “If one died for all, then all died.”

Now, what does that mean? “If one died for all, then all died”? Now, there are a lot of doctrinal things that this text would signify, and sometime I would like to speak on this text in the light of the doctrine of definite atonement, or particular redemption, because it’s one of those outstanding texts in Paul’s writings that clearly teach particular redemption. “If one died for all, then all died.” The apostle does not say, “If one died for all, then all potentially die.” But he says, “If one died for all, then all died.”

In other words, the Lord Jesus Christ is a representative for a certain people, and when he died, they all died. For in their representative, they died. It’s not that they’re potentially died—dead, if

they believe, but they all died in his death. Paul does not use words of potentiality or conditionality, but he states simply the facts. “If one died for all, then all died.”

Now, what does that tell you about “all”? It tells you that “all” is not everyone without exception, but “they all” is a reference to “all without distinction.” In other words, rich or poor, black or white, barbarian, free; some from every kindred, tongue and nation; that kind of “all.” But I don’t want to deal too much with that, because we’re really talking about the minister. I don’t want you to read be—read past it, and not notice it, of course.

So the apostle says, “It’s the love of Christ that has constrained him.” And he goes on to say, “And that he died for all.” Therefore, the “all” is all who belong to the people of God—all the people of God. “He died for all the people of God, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again.”

So what Paul says, “the love of Christ constrains me.” Why? Because I see that through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ as a representative—since he died for them—I have died with him. I have been identified with him in his death, burial, and resurrection, and I have been delivered from the judgment of my sins, because he has borne them, and my life has been now won by Jesus Christ, and I belong to him. I am his servant, because he has won me by redemption. I belong to him.” And, consequently, the love of Christ, the gratitude that he felt for an eternal redemption and deliverance from eternal hellfire, was so great with the apostle that from now on, his service is of the Lord God. Call him mad if you wish. Call him eccentric if you wish. He does have a new center, but nevertheless, he will serve the Lord and accomplish his purposes. In the final analysis, that’s what really counts, isn’t it? We are so earthbound in our comprehension of what is real—what life really is, that we do not see that the important thing is the Lord God and our relationship to him.

Now, the apostle speaks of the message of the New Covenant minister in verses 16 through 19. A new creature is brought into being. In fact, there is a creation of a new creation—a new relationship, grounded in the reconciliation of men to God. The apostle continues, “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet

now henceforth know we him no more.” What the apostle means by the statement in verse 16, “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh, though we have known Christ after the flesh,” is not simply that he’s now in a different sphere of existence, and therefore, the fleshly life of Jesus Christ doesn’t mean much to him.

What he—what he’s really saying, is that he has a whole new outlook on life. He’s not looking at things in a fleshly way, according to fleshly standards, according to human standards. “Wherefore henceforth we know after the flesh no man.” He formerly looked at things from the standpoint of human standards; the things that move people who do not understand the gospel of Jesus Christ; success, ambition, influence, the good of our families, the good of our children; all of the kinds of things that are characteristic of this life only. The apostle says, “In the light of the fact, that I see that Christ has died as my representative, and I’ve come to be his, now I don’t know after the flesh any longer. I did know Christ after the flesh; that is, I did look at Jesus Christ in a fleshly manner, and I saw him simply as a Jewish blasphemer who was worthy of death. I went out and persecuted his followers. I did know Jesus Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth, we do not know him that way any more. We have come to an understanding spiritually of what his life means, and what also it means for us. Therefore,” he says, “if any man be in Christ, there is a new creation. Old things have passed away; behold, they have become new.”

So Judaism is no longer the dominant thing for Paul. The Law of Moses is no longer the dominant thing for Paul. The interests of the triune God are supreme with him. There’s been a new birth, a transformation. Paul has been lifted out of one center, put in another center, and all of his life, and all of his interests, all of his aims and ambitions have been transformed. That’s what happens when a person becomes a Christian. Sometimes the out-working of these things in the life of a believer, may take a lengthy period of time until he realizes what has really happened. Sometimes believers seem to grasp this right from the beginning, and you can see just an almost about-face in their Christian experience. New birth; the wonderful land of beginning again. All who have experienced the new birth know what I’m talking about.

There’s a wonderful old story about a doctor who was dying; who really did not know what it was to have a new birth, but who had heard a number of spiritual things. And as he was on his dying bed, he was speaking with a minister who was there by his side, and he was talking to the minister about what he needed. And the man spoke to him about the fact, he’d been a wonderful man, a good citizen. He’d been a great influence in the community, and he said, “I—I know all of that, but that’s not what I’m interested in. I’m interested in something deeper than that. I’ve heard something about being born again.” Well, the preacher went on in his same way of saying, “Well, you’ve been very influential. You’ve been a good man in the community. You’ve helped so many people. And he said, “I know, but I have heard about being born again.” And then he spoke to the preacher. He said, “You know, I’ve brought many a life into existence through obstetrics, and I know it is possible to have a new beginning and no past.” He said, “When I bring a baby into existence, I have reflected often; this child has a future, but it has no past, and that’s what I want; a future, but no past.” I don’t know whether the preacher was ever able to lead him to the Lord God, but that’s what the new birth is. It’s the entrance into an existence in which you have a future, but the past is blotted out by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Yes, it is the wonderful land of beginning again.

When the apostle says, “Behold, they have become new,” someone has called this the spontaneous—the—has called it spontaneous jubilation. “Behold, things have become new.” James Denny once said that, “This is simple one throb of that glad surprise when we come to know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior.”

Now Paul continues, and he speaks about the ministry of reconciliation. He says in verse 18, “And all things are of God.” Incidentally, when he says, “all things are of God,” he is of course, saying what we all know; that all things are from God, but in this context he is likely speaking about the things that he’s just spoken about; all of the things that have to do with the new—new creation. They are all of God, so the change from enmity, which characterized his former life, to amity, which characterizes his life now towards the Lord; from enmity to friendship; it’s of God. Salvation is of the Lord. All of these things come ultimately from the Lord. “And all things are of God, who hath

reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” Well, reconciliation must be a very important doctrine, since Paul’s description of his vocation is vitally connected with it.

Suppose I were to ask you tonight—if I were just to call out some of you, and call you by your name. I’d say, “Dr. Wood or Mr. Parker or Jim Frasier, would you stand up and give me a concise definition of the doctrine of reconciliation?” I can tell by the smile on Dick’s face that he hopes that Dr. Wood is the one that I call on, or that Jim Frasier is the one I call on. Now, this was an exceedingly important thing for the apostle as you can see, from the fact that he puts it in the forefront of the preaching ministry, which the Lord has given to him. He says, “All things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” One well-known New Testament professor has said that, “Reconciliation is the best New Testament word to describe the purpose of the atonement.”

What is meant by reconciliation? Well, reconciliation is simply the work of Jesus Christ by which, through the cross, we who were en—emies of God in our sin are brought to the relationship of friendship to God. It’s a very simple teaching. “We who were unreconciled are reconciled through the cross.” The apostle states that in Romans chapter 5. Paul considered that his ministry. He preached the doctrine or gave the ministry of reconciliation. He preached the doctrine, that Jesus Christ had through his cross, made it possible for men to be reconciled to God, and he gave to Paul and the apostles that ministry of reconciliation, so that they were preaching it. The characteristic thing about reconciliation is that it is an activity of God directed toward man.

Now, there is a sense in which God is involved in this as well, but I think that the term “reconciliation” itself is particularly directed toward man. It’s the doctrine that stresses the men-ward side of the activity of God and human salvation; that is, the transformation that God brings about in men. As he will go on to say—verse 19—“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” So that reconciliation is the work of God whereby he, through the activity of the Holy Spirit based on the death of Christ, brings us into friendship with God.

Charles Wesley wrote a hymn which we sometimes sing, “Arise My Soul.” I’ve often said—and you’ve heard me say it many times—that, “Hymn writers are going to get to heaven so as by fire.” Well, all I intend to say by that is simply that, hymn writers are not always the greatest theologians. One of the stanzas in that hymn begins with, “My God is reconciled, his parting voice I hear.” Now, there is some justification for “My God is reconciled,” but very little in the New Testament. Reconciliation is directed toward men. Justification is directed toward God. Propitiation, particularly, is directed toward God, but reconciliation is directed toward men. One thinks of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and the Lord God coming down in the Garden in the cool of the day. And in a sense, through his activity speaking to men, and bringing them to himself, even though they are in the midst of their sins. Someone has said, “Jesus Christ did not come in order that God might love men, but because he loved them.” In other words, the gift of the Lord Jesus is the product of his love, and he did not come in order that men might—after he came—come to love him, except in the sense of the love produced by redemption.

The parable of the father’s heart in Luke chapter 15 expresses that. The parable of the prodigal son—and you’ll remember, when the prodigal son finally comes to himself, and the father looks down the road and sees him, he gathers up his robe in his hands and runs to meet him. Have you ever seen an old man run? Sometimes it’s embarrassing. Well, if you’ve never seen it, sometime I’ll run for you. [Laughter] It’s embarrassing to see an old man run, but something is great about this parable, and you think of the old man whose son has gone away as a prodigal, wasted his substance in riotous living, finally has come to himself, and is making his way back home. And you might think that the father would meet him on the road and say, “All right, I’ll receive you, providing you confess your sins and apologize, and do a few works too.”

But when he sees him coming down the road, he gathers up his garments and he runs to meet him, and the son is already thought up his little speech that he was going to say, and he’s not able to even get it out. The father falls on his neck. He starts to say what he’s going to say. The father covers him with kisses. That’s the meaning of the Greek text there. He covers him with kisses, and

doesn't even allow him to finish and says, “No, bring forth the best robe. Put a ring on his hand, shoes on his feet,” and he's established in the house as the son of the father. “Yet a great way off he saw me. Ran to meet me as I came. As I was my father loved me, loved me in my sin and shame.” That's what Paul had the privilege of preaching. That's what I have the privilege of preaching; the ministry of reconciliation.

“Who hath reconciled us to himself.” Now, notice he says, “Who hath reconciled us to himself.” Paul's still talking about believers. He's talking about those who have responded, and the one—the ones for whom Christ came to die. He doesn't say, “Maybe is the one who's reconciled you,” he says, “has reconciled us.” This text, incidentally, explains to us what the term “world” means in this context. “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.” The world is explained by us, just preceding. “Not imputing their trespasses unto them.” That could never be said, if the world is a reference to everybody in the world. “Not imputing their trespasses to them?” Not regarding them as sinners? No, no.

This is a reference to the believers, and the believers are the world. That is, all men, not without exception, but all men without distinction, some from every tribe, kindred, tongue, and nation. He's died for Jews and Gentiles. He's the Savior of the world, not simply of Jewish people but of Gentiles as well. “So God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” Because you see, there are still elect individuals out in this world who have not yet come, and my duty as a preacher of the gospel, and your duty as a Christian in your Christian service, is to give the testimony to the gospel of Christ, by which the elect—all of the elect—may be gathered into the body of Christ. Isn't that a great privilege? To think that I may be a link in the gathering of an elect sinner into the fold of the family of God. I don't think there could be any greater privilege than that.

When I was growing up, I thought the greatest privilege I could possibly have, would be to caddy for Bobby Jones. I was playing golf every day, morning, noon, and night. I was living for golf. If I could have caddied for Bobby Jones—even though I had caddies—that would have been all I

wanted. But to have the opportunity of the ministry of the gos—the gospel of a God who reconciles men to himself through Jesus Christ, and who as a result of that reconciliation, enjoy the blessing of God for eternity, no greater privilege could be given to men. No greater privilege can be given to you as an individual Christian than to be the link between the Lord and eternal life for your friends, for your family members, for the people with whom you come in contact with.

The apostle continues. He says, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we beg you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” This is the mode of life of the New Covenant ministry—minister. His work is to be an ambassador. What is an ambassador? An ambassador—ambassador is a personal representative of a king or a president. Ambassadors are representatives in foreign lands. Ambassadors are responsible for the exact transmission of the message of the one whom they represent. Ambassadors are responsible for returning signals of who—or ambassadors return, I should say, signals broken relations. To think, to be an ambassador. A personal representative. Personal representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. Personal representative in a foreign land, for our citizenship is in heaven. Responsible for the exact transmission of the message of God; the gospel in its accuracy. Gospel is important. How we express the gospel is important. Now of course, when we are rejected, it’s not much—not so much we who are rejected, it’s the one whom we represent. That’s why the apostles, when they left a community that had rejected them, they wiped the dust off of their feet. Relations were broken. Relations are broken between the Lord and the world.

Well, the witness that he gives is given in verse 21. Our time is just about up. I just want to make a couple of comments about this. The apostle, of course, is making a plea. He’s saying the kind of message that he preaches—and he preaches this to everybody incidentally, know—though he knows that only the elect will respond. He says, “We beg you in Christ’s stead, we beseech you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.” And then he gives one of his most significant theological statements. He says, “He hath made him who knew no sin to be sin for us.” Notice he does not say, “made sinful, nor a sinner,” but “he has made him to be sin.” The reference is to the sacrifice of the

Lord Jesus Christ. He’s talking about penal substitution. He’s talking also ultimately, of what it cost the holy Son of God to be our substitute. He made him to be a sin sacrifice. “None of the ransom ever knew how deep were the waters crossed, nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through, ere he found his sheep that were lost.” He made him, the holy Son of God, to be sin. “For us.” Substitution. Us, the ones he’s been speaking about up here. The world. The world of the believers, in order that we might have the righteousness of God, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. Not “made righteous,” but made the righteousness of God in him, possessing the perfect standing before the Lord God.

Old Puritans use to say, “Justified means, just as if I had never sinned. Just as if I’d never sinned.” But it means more. It means just as if I’d never sinned, and just as if I’d always done everything right. That’s what it is to have the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ.

Well, the apostle, in verses 1 through 10 of chapter 6 here, just speaks about the fact, that he’s a coworker with God. He doesn’t give any offense, and he speaks of himself as “approving themselves before the Corinthians, and therefore, he beseeches them that they receive not the grace of God in vain.” Magnificent statement of the strategy of New Covenant ministry. The proclamation of the ministry of a God who has reconciled men to himself, and we the links, in the accomplishment of the divine purpose. May God help us to appreciate what a tremendous ministry he has given to us, and may God enable us to carry it out by his help and strength. Let’s bow together in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the ministry of reconciliation committed to the apostles and by them, to us. And we ask, Lord, that the center of our life in Christ may be the place from which we minister the truth that has been conveyed to us. Deliver us from the cowardice of keeping our mouths quiet when we know we should speak. Deliver us from the fear of identifying ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. Give us boldness. Give us the willingness to follow Thee. Give us a sense of the true center of our lives in the Son of God. Enable us, Lord, not to be Joseph of

Arimatheases and Nicodemuses before the time of the cross, but after, when those two wonderful men finally came out of their fear and boldly took their stand, identifying themselves with Christ.

Give us Lord, a whole church of Josephs.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.