



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Paul and the Ministry

2 Cor. 5:11 – 6:10

“The Strategy of the New Covenant Ministry, part II”

TRANSCRIPT

... 6, verse 10 for our study, and tonight it is really a continuation and review -- or review and continuation of the study of last Tuesday night, which I was unable to finish, and our title is “The Strategy of New Covenant Ministry.” Is that a little too loud for you? We need to get it turned down a bit. He did. He heard. We’re counting on you, Richard. Let’s open our class with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of Thy Word, and we ask that it...

[Message] We’re looking at 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 11 through verse 21 primarily, but the Scripture reading will actually cover part of chapter 6. Remember last week in our discussion of the strategy of New Covenant ministry, I made reference to the fact in the beginning, that this is the final stanza in the great hymn of the ministry. It is the product of the apostle’s explanation of his ministry to the Corinthians. There had been some disagreements and misunderstandings on the part of the Corinthians with Paul and with others who were followers of the apostle, and so this is written in order to

clarify his stand and also his ministry. One might entitle it, “The Glorious Gospel of Christ,” for that expression is found here in chapter 4, verse 4.

We have, in our studies of Paul and the ministry, considered the solemnity of the ministry, then the supremacy of the ministry, the sufferings of the ministry and its supports, and so now we turn to the strategy of the ministry. This afternoon, I was looking again into Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. I imagine that most of you in this room have read the *Pilgrim’s Progress*. It’s one of those things that you don’t read just once, at least not for me. I find that it is magnificent allegory, which when you read it, you get something new almost every time you read it. I guess it is really one of the things that is closest to the character of holy Scripture among the books that I have.

You may remember that in the earlier part of Christian’s journey to the Holy City, he is told that he is to go to the house of “Interpreter.” And so he goes to the house of Interpreter, and there Bunyan has him saying, “Sir, I’m a man that am come from the city of destruction, and am going to Mount Zion, and was told by the man that stands at the gate at the head of the 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 speaks and says, “Come in. I will show thee that which will be profitable to thee.” So he commanded him to light the candle, and bad Christian follow him, and then when he had him into a private room -- Bunyan writes, “He had him into a private room, and bad his man open the door, the which when he had done, Christian saw a picture of a very grace person hanging 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. The world was behind his back. He stood as if he pleaded with men, and a crown of gold did hang over his head.” Then Christian said, “What meaneth this?” And Interpreter says, “The man whose picture this is, is one of a thousand. He can beget children.”

1 Corinthians 4:15. That’s the text where Paul says that, “He had begotten them, the Corinthians, by the word of truth. Travail in birth with children.” And he writes there

in parentheses, “Galatians 4:19,” where Paul says that, “He has travailed in birth over his Galatians, and un -- is able to nurse them himself when they are born.” And he refers to another text in which the apostle speaks of himself as a nurse, and as a worker, with reference to the children of God. And Interpreter continues and says, “Where as thou seest 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 is to show thee that his work is to know and unfold dark things to sinners. Even as he -- even as also thou seest him stand as if he pleaded with men. And where as thou seest the world as cast behind him, and that a crown hangs over his head, that is 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 have showed thee this wo -- 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 in all difficult places thou mayest meet with in the way. Wherefore take good heed to what thou hast seen, lest in thy journey thou meet with some that pretend to lead thee a right, but their way goes down to death.”

Well, that’s John Bunyan’s picture of a Christian minister. He’s a person with his eyes lifted up toward heaven. He has the best of books in his hand. He has the law of truth written upon his lips, and he has the world cast behind his back, and also, he has a crown over his head. I think a guess -- I guess I -- I would have to say that the one person who best epitomizes this is the Apostle Paul. But in a sense, every one of us is a minister, as we’ve been saying, of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is the attitude that we too are to have with the gospel of the Lord Jesus which has been committed to us.

The apostle speaks of the motives of his ministry, and he says, “One of the motives of the ministry, is the terror of the Lord.” Now, we explained that in our last study. It’s not so much terror, in the sense in which we understand terror, but a sense of

responsibility in the light of the fact, that we must all appear at the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. So he speaks, and he ministers in full awareness of the fact that he and those to whom he ministers to, must stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ. He also says that he labors with a desire to be a help to the Corinthians. He wants to give them a rejoinder for his enemies. Evidently, there were those in Corinth who thought that they too were apostles; claimed the same kind of apostleship that the Apostle Paul did. In the latter part of the epistle, he calls them “false apostles.” They are the legalists, the Judaists. They act as if they are servants of Jesus Christ, but they are not, and so he wants to give the Corinthians some means by which he may reply -- they may reply to those false apostles. And so he appeals to them to examine his life and to notice that there is a selflessness manifest in his life. In the twelfth verse he wrote,

“For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye 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.”

And we spoke last time about the fanaticism; the kind of charge that is usually laid against the servants of Jesus Christ. Paul wasn't the first, nor as a matter of fact, was our Lord of whom they said, “He's mad.” But the prophets of the Old Testament were also charged with madness. Hosea wrote about that when he says, “The prophet is a fool. The man of the spirit has gone mad.” So the idea of madness, of fanaticism is something that is unmistakably associated with the servants of Jesus Christ. And it's not just the preachers too. As you know, if you've come to know Jesus Christ as your Savior, and you've given a forthright testimony for him, well you can be pretty sure that somebody's going to say, “he is a fanatic” or “he's unbalanced” or “he's carrying things too far” or “he's just strange.”

There was a young boy, knocked on my door this afternoon, and had some cleanser in his hand. He wanted to sell some cleanser; claimed it would clean anything. Clean the oil off concrete, clean your windows, clean the blinds on the house, just clean everything. Well, he left himself open. I said, “By the way, I have something that will clean not only outside, but the inside of you.” And he looked kind of strange at me when I said that. He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Well, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that will clean you on the outside and the inside. It’s better than that stuff you have in your hand.” Well, he didn’t take too well to that. We had a -- I don’t mean that he’s -- we had a nice friendly conversation, but he forgot for a moment what he was trying to do there, when he was there to sell me, and I was trying to put him off. I just said, “Wait till my wife comes. She knows all about cleansers.” But that was a better way. Anyway, as he walked off I said, “Remember that cleanser that will cleanse both the outside and the inside.” And he said, “Oh, yes sir.” Well, we had a nice little conversation. He actually said that he had at one time, made a profession of faith. But I’m sure that, as soon as he met one of his friends he said, “Well, you better pass that house by.” I told him Martha would be back in thirty minutes, but he didn’t come back, and I -- I think I know why.

Well, you see, the apostles were accused of being mad. Our Lord was accused of being mad. Paul himself specifically, was accused of being mad. In fact, the whole Christian movement was said to be “a movement which has turned the world upside down,” Luke says in chapter 17 of the Book of Acts.

The third motive that the apostle speaks about is the love of Christ, and of course, that is of tremendous significance. And incidentally, this is not our love for Christ, but Christ’s love for us. That expression in verse 14, “For the love of Christ constraineth us” may be -- just by grammar -- it may be the love which Jesus Christ has for us, in which case the “us” would be grammatically, an objective genitive, or it may be subjective. The love of Christ -- I’m -- I’m sorry. That -- that would be subjective genitive, or it may be the love of Christ, in the sense of “love for Christ” in which case, the Christ would be an

objective genitive. But in the light of the context in which the apostle goes on to speak of the fact that, “Christ has died for all, and all were dead, and he’s died for them that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves,” it seems plain that, what he has in mind is the Lord’s love for us. And so that is the third of the motives for his Christian service. He has said in chapter 4, verse 1, “Therefore seeing we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we faint not.” So it is not our love for Christ that is the motive, it’s his love for us that is upon the apostle’s mind. And he says, “This love of Christ hems him in on both sides.” It constrains him. It actually controls him. “Because we thus judge, if one died for all, then all died.”

Now, I have forgotten where the last time I made reference to the fact that, the Authorized Version says here, “then were all dead,” as if to suggest they were dead in trespasses and sins. But that is not the meaning of the text. It really is to be translated, “If one died for all, then the all died.” He refers not to the fact that we were dead in sin. He refers to the fact that the event of the Lord’s death is the death of each of us who believe. So that if one died for all, as their representative and substitute, then all died in their representative and substitute.

So the apostle is making a very important statement here. He’s saying in effect, that every believer died in Christ when Christ died. Now, the only way in which that could be true is if he is our representative, our substitute. I like the word “representative” here. He represents us, so when he dies under the judgment of sin, and he dies for all, they are regarded as having died in him. Now, it is important for us to know -- notice two things. If we have died in him, then we have borne our judgment in him. He has borne our judgment. When he expired, we were regarded as having expired in him. So that the judgment that God metes out upon sinners was meted out upon Jesus Christ as the representative of the people of God. So the people of God are reckoned to have died in Christ.

Now if that is so, then when the apostle says, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all,” then the “all” of “one died for all” must refer only to believers, because the unbelievers did not die in Christ. Only the believers died in Christ. For if the unbelievers died in Christ, and bore their judgment, then unbelievers would be delivered too. But the Bible teaches us, that unbelievers are ultimately, to find their way into the lake of fire. Their judgment has not been borne by the substitute. So when the text says that, “one died for all,” the “all” is defined as those who died in him.

Now, occasionally people say, “How can you believe that Jesus Christ came to die for the people of God?” Well, this is one reason how you can believe that. If it is true, he came to die for all in the universal sense, then all would be saved. So the text here is one of those many, many texts of the Bible that teach that Jesus Christ came to die for the people of God. Listen. “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, if one died for all, then the all died.” So the “all” for whom he died, they are the ones who died. “And that he died for all, that they who live.” They are the ones who have died. “They who live shall not live -- shall not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again.” It’s one of those magnificent passages which tell us plainly, the purpose and the intent of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He represented all, and all whom he represented died in him. All who are represented by him and died in him also live. Believers live. He must, therefore, have died for believers. It’s very plain and very clear. I -- I’m amazed that people do not see the apostle’s plain teaching.

Now, then having said that, we turn to the message of the New Covenant ministry, and the apostle speaks of the new relationship which is grounded in the reconciliation of man to God. In the sixteenth verse he says, “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.” Great deal of discussion has been given to this verse, and it has been thought to teach by some, that the apostle had known Jesus Christ before he was

converted, and that when he writes here, “henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh,” that the apostle is indicating that he was acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ before he was saved.

That’s an unlikely interpretation. There is no other indication of that in the Book of Acts, or in any other statement that Paul made, and since “to know Christ after the flesh” may mean simply, to know him in a carnal way, that is, to know of him as a Jew who went about the land of Palestine purportedly forming miracles and purportedly giving great teaching, purportedly speaking occasionally against the Law of Moses as they interpreted it; speaking about a Temple that would be built again, and so on. It’s more likely that that is what Paul means. He means, “Yes, I had heard of Jesus Christ. I had heard of the things that he had said, but I judged him according to the flesh. I judged him as a -- according to the flesh, and therefore, I thought of him as a false teacher. I thought of him as one who misled our Jewish people. I thought of him as one who spoke against Moses, and against the Law, and against the Temple, as Stephen his servant did. So that’s probably what Paul has in mind. “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh.” He’s now been raised up in Christ. He now lives, because he has died and been resurrected in his representative, so he does not know men after the flesh now, even though he’s “known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.” He’s living in a new sphere of life. “Therefore,” he writes, “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation -- or, there is a new creation. Old things are passed away; behold, things have become new.”

And I mentioned last time that this “behold” that the apostle writes, someone has called “spontaneous jubilation.” “Behold, the things have become new.” Joat -- Denny, the great Scottish theologian said, “This is one throb of that glad surprise that we come to know when we have come to believe in Christ.”

Now, Paul goes on and speaks of the ministry of reconciliation. In the eighteenth verse he writes, “And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus

Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” I mentioned last time, that this text “all things are of God” in effect says, “The theme of my ministry is the objective act of God in Christ, and the Father is the ultimate cause of all of the good news of Jesus Christ.” “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and he has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” What is the ministry of reconciliation? Well, it is the ministry of telling people that though they are at enmity with God and do not care to speak of him, do not care to have relationship with him, through the Lord Jesus Christ, it is possible for us to enter into a relationship of amity or friendship with him.

Reconciliation. It's a position and a change of attitude.

We are all the enemies of God. That was manifested in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sinned, and God came walking down into the Garden as he usually did, and what did Adam and Eve do? Did they say, “Well, here comes the Lord. Let's go out and have a little fellowship with him?” No, of course, we all know they ran. They hid themselves. That's what man has been doing ever since. The Bible is such a beautiful book of psychology, isn't it? It so beautifully unfolds the nature of the heart of man. He doesn't like to have intercourse with God, and you know, even after we become Christians, often that same attitude intrudes. Just sin. Do something that you know is contrary to the word of God. What is the feeling that comes over you? Well, of remorse and shame sometimes, ultimately always. But at the beginning, there will be often, the same kind of “wanting to hide ourselves from the Lord God.” We don't want to talk about it. We don't want to talk to him about it, until finally we're miserable, and then we come, make confession, and are restored to fellowship with him; the communion with him that, it would seem that sinners who've been redeemed ought to want to enjoy.

Paul says, “He has reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ. He has given to us the ministry of reconciliation.” Now, I want you to notice another thing here. Many people read this as if God has made reconciliation potential for all men, but actual for those that believe.

Now, there is a sense in which there is truth in that comment, but I like for you to notice that the apostle does not speak potentially. He speaks in the language of reality. He does not say, “And all things are of God who has made it possible for us to be reconciled.” He says, “All things are of God who has reconciled us to himself, and he has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” So the theme of his ministry is the objective act of God in Christ in which the Lord Jesus acts as the representative of the people of God; the Father being the ultimate cause. Now, that’s very important. All things are of him, and this is what he’s done.

There’s a story -- an old story about a young man who, just like the prodigal son, went off and wasted his substance in riotous living. And finally, he came to the place where he was really troubled about his own life, and he was ill and despondent. And he wrote very tremblingly and fearfully to his father, as if to ask whether there was any hope. And his father is said to have sent a telegram to him, and the telegram consisted of one word. It was the word “home,” and it was signed “Father.” Now, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is addressed to the wandering sheep in the same way. The ministry of reconciliation; Jesus Christ did not come in order that we -- that men might love God -- that -- in order that God might love men. Jesus Christ came because God loved men. He loved sinners. He loved the sinners of the people of God, and that is our ministry of reconciliation to convey to the world. We convey it to all sinners, and trust the Holy Spirit to work in the hearts of the people of God, and bring them to Jesus Christ. He has given us the responsibility of preaching the Gospel. He’s not given us the responsibility of saving individuals. He’s given us the responsibility of preaching the gospel. He saves, and he saves through this word.

So when he says, “All things are of God who has given us -- who hath -- who has reconciled us to himself,” he’s still talking about the people of God. And he’s committed to us, the ministry of reconciliation. Now, to show you that this is still a word that has to do with the people of God, did you notice the last part of verse 19? “Not imputing their

trespasses unto them.” “Not imputing their trespasses unto them.” God has reconciled unto us, unto himself, and he has given to us the ministry of reconciliation. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” Now, if a man’s trespasses are not imputed unto them, he’s justified. That’s what happens when we’re justified. Paul says that in Romans 4. He says, “The man who is justified is the man whose sins and iniquities are not reckoned to him.”

But now, there’s something else here. Not only is “all” in this context, a reference to believers, but now we have the term “world.” Did you notice it? “To wit,” verse 19, “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.” Not potentially. Not rendering the world savable, but he has reconciled the world, “not imputing their trespasses unto them.” What does “world” mean? Why, “world” means the same thing that these other words mean. “All, us, world.” Now, when he uses the term “world,” he refers to the kind of people that are reconciled; not everybody without exception, but everybody without distinction. Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, black and white, men and woman. That’s the kind of reconciliation that the apostle speaks about. He speaks of it as having taken place in the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. So -- I wish that everybody here had had Greek, because you would sense as you read through these words that, it’s clear that the term “all” and “us” and “world” refer to the same thing. And furthermore, when he says here in verse 19, “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world,” there is no “the” in the original text. It’s simply reconciling such a thing as the world. In other words, great stress rests upon the nature, not the particularity of the object in view. He’s reconciled such a thing as the world. Imagine, the world.

Now, to a Jewish person, the world connoted the world of sinful individuals. So great stress rests upon the fact that the saving work of Jesus Christ is not directed simply to Jews. It’s directed to the world; the world of wicked men. Gentiles may be saved. Now to us, we don’t see any need for that, but if you’d lived among the Jews as the apostle did, and as so many of his listeners did, and furthermore, if you had known that

down through the centuries, God spoke only through the Jews, then you can see there would be reason to stress, “He has reconciled the world to himself.” That’s why we read in the Gospel of John, “The Lord Jesus is the Savior of the world,” in the chapter in which it is stated that men worship in Jerusalem. But he’s the savior of the world. Gentiles too may be saved. We may be saved, we Gentiles. So I like these texts. This is one of Paul’s great theological passages. There’s so much that you could say about it, that I haven’t even bothered to say, it’s so unusual and so rich in significance.

And if there is by chance, some person who has managed to slip into the auditorium, and thinks that Jesus Christ died for everyone without distinction -- now I don’t -- I don’t feel by the way, that you’re not a good Christian. It may be, you’re a better Christian than the rest of us. I know I lived with that kind of viewpoint myself for many years. I have great sympathy for those who hold that view, and find it difficult to think otherwise. I only ask you, “Keep studying the Bible.” But if it so happens that you have come in that way, and you’re still puzzling through this, and you’re not sure, I just ask you to remember, “not imputing their trespasses unto them.”

“God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” Occasionally someone will say, “Well, he did take all of their sins, but you have to believe.” Well, of course, my answer would be, “Is unbelief a sin?” “Well yes, unbelief is not only a sin, it’s the sin.” Well then, Jesus Christ evidently died for all sins but one. But the Bible says he died for all sin. So it is clear that we cannot explain the text that way. Why not just submit to what the Bible teaches? It’s a great comfort to know that God has so had his people in mind, that he has sent the Son of God to accomplish his purpose, and do you know, God is not a frustrated deity.

There is no confusion in the Godhead, with the Father working toward one goal; saving his elect ones: the Spirit working toward the same goal; saving the elect, and so bringing conviction and conversion to them, and the Son working at cross purposes; dying for everyone. No, the Father, Son, and the Spirit all work to one unified purpose;

to save the people of God, and they accomplish their task. They accomplish it. They are not frustrated, and when we get to heaven, we will find the gates of hell have not prevailed against the Church of God. He has accomplished his purpose. That's great comfort. That is great comfort for the people of God. And when they call you a fanatic or crazy or weird -- that's bad to bear that, isn't it? Weird. Just remember. If you belong to the Lord, you have heaven on your side, and ultimately, God's Word shall find fruition in his purposes.

Now, in the last two verses -- and really, through the tenth verse of the second chapter -- the apostle speaks about the mode of life of New Covenant ministries -- ministers. He says in verse 20, “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us.” Ambassadors. I mentioned last time, that the apostle speaks of us as being ambassadors, and he thinks of course, primarily of himself, but the application is plain. We are ambassadors, too. We represent that same kingdom. I think I mentioned just briefly the fact that an ambassador is a personal representative of the ruler. In Rome, they had two kinds of ambassadors, or two kinds of legates. The word *presbotes* incidentally, is the word in Greek which means an ambassador, and the Latin is the word *legatus*. *Legatus*. *Legatus* means “a legate.” We have the word in English. A legate is a personal representative. He's an ambassador.

Now in Rome, they had two kinds of provinces. They had those that were attached to the Senate, and they were -- they were provinces in which there was no problem; that is, there was no war going on. And then they had provinces that were personally under the juris -- jurisdiction of the Emperor, and he had sent his legate to them, and his legate was his contact with that particular province. In other words, he was the personal representative of the Emperor.

Now, Paul says here, “We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us.” So when I preach the Gospel, I conceive of my task, as being the preaching of the Gospel, but it is God who is pleading through me. Like Bunyan said, “His Christian

minister who stands with his eyes toward heaven, and the book of all books before him, and the law of truth on his lips, and the world behind his back,” he is an ambassador of the Lord God; personal representative of him. And remember, Bunyan said also, “And he stands as if he’s pleading.” Well, that is the picture that we have here.

The ambassador is the one who with -- through whom the Emperor has relationship with the people. The ambassador was responsible for bringing new peoples into the empire. It was he who handled all of the arrangements to make a new province a part of the Roman Empire. Their conquered territory, in which there was still troubling going on, ambassadors or legates were sent out there, and they arranged the terms by which that property that Rome had won by conflict, became a part of the Empire.

It is the purpose of God, through the gifted men who preach the Gospel, and through his servants who are ambassadors for him to, in effect, be responsible for the incorporation of new members into the body of Christ. The ambassador was a representative in a foreign land. Our citizenship is in heaven. This is not our country. Texas is not our home. Our home is in heaven.

An ambassador was responsible for the honor of the country. He represented the company -- the country. When we preach the Gospel, we are representatives of the Lord God. It is as if he did beseech men through us. Therefore, it is important -- not simply that the preacher be a man of the truth of God, whose life is characterized by a measure of purity, but every single person who represents the Lord Jesus Christ is a representative of this kingdom, and his impurities and sins bring reproach upon the people of whom he is a part, and particularly upon the god to whom he’s related. The ambassador was responsible to transmit messages exactly. He didn’t have any independent authority. I don’t have any independent authority.

I do not have the right to tell you the gospel in my own words, watering down one section of it, not watering down another section. I am responsible for the word of God, and to preach that word. I’m not to apologize for it, just to preach it, and the way

that the Holy Spirit illumines my mind is the way in which I must preach it. And so as an ambassador, I must transmit the message that was given to me to transmit. If it's unacceptable, and they send me home, well, you didn't have to become an ambassador. Ambassadors must use speed in the execution of their mission, and Paul will go on to say in the very next chapter that, “Now is the accepted time. Now is the day of salvation.” When an ambassador is sent home, it's the breaking of relations, and as I mentioned last time, the apostles when they left places, they didn't hesitate to get outside the city limits, and shake the dust off of their feet. I'm so glad I haven't had to do that in Believers Chapel, yet. But that was what they did. You know in the Book of Acts, that's what they did. They shook the dust from off their feet when individuals did not respond.

Well, how Christ is crucified constitutes the message of rec -- of reconciliation, and Paul doesn't finish this chapter without saying again, something about that, for he says, “He hath made him who knew no sin to be sin for us; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” So imputation constitutes the ground of the plea to come home. Sometimes we make too sharp a distinction between we -- between reconciliation -- God's work of bringing enemies into friendship with him, from justification, which is God's way of justifying sinners before his throne. As you can see, they are very closely related. He's talked about the ministry of reconciliation, and explaining further he says, “He's made him who knew no sin -- that's the Lord Jesus Christ, the sinless Savior. He's made him to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” And that is the heart of the message that we preach, in order that men might be reconciled to God. By the way he says, “He's made Christ to be sin.” Not sinners. A sinner. Not sinful, but sin. He's referring to the penal substitutionary sacrifice that Jesus became. He says also, “He has been made sin for us.” Now, substitution is involved in that, and the proof of it, is that just above he said, “If one died for all, then all died.” That's substitution, plain and clear. And then he says that, “The righteousness of God might be

given to us.” Notice, it’s not said that we are “made righteous,” but we are the possessors of God’s righteousness in him.

When I think of this, I think of the Epistle of Diognetus. In the Epistle of Diognetus, which was a book that labored on the edge of the apostolic fathers -- and is associated with them, but largely by tradition, and just by association. In that Epistle of Diognetus, dated probably in the second, possibly the third century, there are these words. I love these words, because it shows you that the saints of God have the same disposition, whether they lived fifteen hundred years ago, or live in 1981. The author writes, “In whom it was possible for us in our wickedness and impiety to be made just, except in the Son of God alone?” He’s asking a question.

“In whom was it possible for us to be made just, except in the Son of God alone? Oh, the sweet exchange. Oh, the inscrutable creation. Oh, the unexpected benefits that the wickedness of many, should be concealed in the one righteous, and the righteousness of the one, should make righteous many wicked.”

Now, the person who wrote that’s in heaven, because he’s trusting in Jesus Christ, and he says, “Oh, the sweet exchange, that our wickedness should be exchanged for his righteousness.”

Now, the apostle in chapter 6, as I mentioned last time, turns to consider his walk specifically. And he defines it with three participial clauses. He says in the first verse, “We then beseech you.” But he describes himself with these three participial phrases or clauses. He says, “We then, as workers together with him.” He saw himself as a fellow worker with the Lord God. Incidentally, that’s why we pray even though believe -- we believe in the sovereignty of God, he has determined in his sovereignty, that his will be accomplished through means; through the means of prayer; through the means of preaching; through the means of witnessing. So we are coworkers with God. He originates things. We are coworkers with God. We beseech you, as a worker together with him.

Furthermore, in the third verse he says, “Giving no offense in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.” The apostle felt very strongly, that the man who put the name of Christ upon his lips, should do it in lips that had the law of truth written upon them. If you’re a believer in Jesus Christ, and you go around talking about the Lord Jesus, but your life does not measure up at all to what is found in the Bible, don’t be surprised when people don’t pay any attention to you.

And then the third thing, “But in all things commending ourselves as the ministers of God.” And then the apostle writes, and I’ll just read through in closing. “In all things commending ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love un -- unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live as chastened and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” There is the real Christian life.

I read a story about a person who was talking with a very wealthy man, and this wealthy man had some lovely property. And the individual was talking to him and he said, “You know, you possess the land, but I possess the landscape.” He had a true appreciation for what was there. You can have a wonderful library and not know the truth or the wisdom that it contains. The apostle had these wonderful gospel truths in his mind, and he also had them in his life. So let me conclude with just the citing of a wonderful poem. “And so ye servants of God; your servants of God; ye servants of God; your Master proclaim; and publish abroad his wonderful name; the name all victorious of Jesus extol; his kingdom is glorious and rules over all; then let us adore and give him his right; all glory and power, all wisdom and might; all honor and blessing with angels

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above; and thanks never ceasing and infinite love.” Those are words from Charles Wesley in one of his great hymns. Let’s bow in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these wonderful words that the apostle has written concerning the ministry; the ministry that we all have, and, preeminently, that the gifted men and women have. Oh God, in our ministry, in our Christian service and worship, may our lives be such that the ministry be not blamed.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.