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BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

"Inconsistencies in Modified Calvinism, Part III"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well I think I would, since we're not expounding a particular passage of Scripture, I'd like to read two or three verses and then have a brief moment of prayer. And then we'll give the lecture on the "Fatal Flaws of Four Point Free Grace." [Laughter] Something like that. The passages that I would like to look at are various ones, Psalm 33, for example, and verse 11 is one with which I'm sure you are familiar. The Psalmist writes, "The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations." And then turn over a bit to Isaiah chapter 14 and verse 27. I'm sure that all of those who have been around people who believe in sovereign grace have become acquainted with verse 27, "For the Lord of Hosts has purposed and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back?" And then in Isaiah chapter 46 and verse 11, another similar passage, Isaiah writes, "Calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes my counsel from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it, I will also do it."

Let's bow in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the opportunity to study together. We thank Thee for the way in which the great truths of the Epistle to the Hebrews have been

opened up for us in the preceding hour. We thank Thee for the greatness of the Son of God and for the better things that have come to pass through the ministry that he has accomplished. We thank Thee for the confidence that we have that the things that Thou hast purposed to come to pass shall surely come to pass. And we pray now Lord, as we think about some of the questions that are theological and yet extremely important, that our minds may be allowed by Thy grace to understand. We commit our hour to Thee now in Jesus' name. Amen.

[Message] Charles Wesley wrote in one of his greatest hymns, "His mystery all the immortal dies, who can explore his strange design?" I think I would agree with Mr. Wesley, who with his Arminian leaning and often Calvinistic leaning, did find the subject of the atonement a puzzle, only to the extent that the subject has its difficulties and requires of us careful thinking. As for the struggle between universal redemptionists and particular redemptionist, I have no doubt that the redemption Christ accomplished is particular and is intended only for his own believing elect people. Further, I'm also convinced that the question of the design or extent of the atonement is really settled by an understanding of the nature of the atonement. If the atonement is a penal atonement, and by that I mean of course, Christ paying the penalty of our sins and rendering a satisfaction to the divine justice and holiness for our sins by the substitution of himself for his people as their mediatorial surety and head, then the redemption must be particular. Otherwise the substitution is no real substitution and our Father God would be frustrated in his purposes. And yet his word says, "The counsel of the Lord stands forever."

As for the pejorative term, limited atonement, used so effectively by our opponents on this issue as detracting from the sufficiency and worth of our Lord's sacrifice and presenting our Lord as a less than bounteous dispenser of gracious mercy and loving-kindness. This must be said firmly. Both Arminian and Calvinists believe in a limited atonement. Arminians limit the atonement's power by affirming a universal divine

intent, but by admitting that God is frustrated in the failure of the non-elect to receive. Incidentally I have in a paper that I have written a footnote at this point from John Owen, and I'd like to read it. I think it will underline what I have just said.

John Owen has cited several statements of the Arminian that confirm the fact that they accept the frustratability of God. God would have all men to be saved, but compiled with the stubborn malice of some he changes his purpose and will have them perish. That is a statement from Arminius himself. In the Remonstrant apology, which as you know was a statement of the Arminians who were objecting to reformed orthodoxy, it is said, "Men may make their election void and frustrate." In Augustine's *Enchiridion* that was one of his works. *Enchiridion* means something like "a handbook" from the Greek word chir, which means "the hand." And so an *Enchiridion* was a kind of handbook of theology which Augustine wrote, and in that he makes the Calvinist's point by saying of 1 Timothy 2:4 that we have a freedom to interpret the text in different ways, "so long as we are not impaled to believe that the omnipotent God has willed anything to be done which was not done. For setting aside all ambiguities, if he hath done all that he pleased in heaven and earth, as the Psalmist sings of him, he certainly did not will to do anything that he hath not done." That's from Augustine.

Calvinists limit the extent of the atonement or the purpose, contending that it has been accomplished for God's people alone. For the Arminians the limitation is traced to man. For the other it's traced to God's purpose. And personally, I'm persuaded that the latter position is more to the honor and glory of God.

Now, we are looking at our outline and we are at Roman number II, The Theological Failures of Amyraldianism and the Doctrine of Reformed Orthodoxy first as capital A. A common viewpoint of the Reform churches and theologians is that our Lord, by the good pleasure of the Father, was set apart and appointed as the surety and covenantal head of the people of God. That is, not all men without exception but of a definite number of individuals constituting his mystical body. They have contended that

for these alone our Lord fully and perfectly acquainted with the nature, extent, and purpose of his calling as mediator voluntarily came to accomplish the decree of election and the counsel of his Father. He offered himself up as an efficacious, substitutionary sacrifice in the place of the people of God with the special intention of acquiring for them faith and salvation. That is essentially the doctrinal statement and belief in simple form of orthodox theologians. And when I say orthodox I mean the orthodox of the Calvinistic persuasion.

Now capital B, The statement of the question. The issue of the design or intent or extent of the atonement is often misunderstood and clarification is therefore needed. First of all, I know that many of you in this audience, incidentally, don't need this review but some may, and so I hope that those of you who are well acquainted with what I'm going to say will bear with me for the sake of some of us who may be where some of us were not too long ago and need some of the fundamentals that we all now take for granted. First of all, the question does not relate to the value and sufficiency of the satisfaction that Christ has made. Its intrinsic work is sufficient for the redemption of all men. If God had willed that all men be saved, the one sacrifice being infinite in value would have sufficed for the sins of all persons. He wouldn't have had to do more than he did when he died on Calvary's cross. The distinction of the fathers and others namely that Christ died sufficiently for all, but efficiently for the elect only. Sefici inter pro omnibus sed, efficacitur tantum pro electives. I said that latter to clarify the matter for you. [Laughter] That's the Latin of the expression. That expression is true if understood of the dignity of Christ's death, but it's not accurate if it's referred to the will and purpose of Christ. The question concerns the purpose of the Father in sending the Son and the intention of the Son in dying. So when we talk about this question we're talking about intent, purpose, design. We're not talking about whether Christ's death is sufficient for the sins of all. All Calvinists, all Reform people believe that the death of Christ is sufficient for all, and it's stated in their doctrinal affirmations. And so that's not an issue. We made reference to

that last night. That is really the pivot of the question, as the Reformed said, *bicardo* questiones.

Secondly, question does not concern the provision in Christ's death for benefits for all men, including the reprobates. In other words, we can say that Christ died in certain respects for all men. There are certain benefits that all men derive from the saving work of Christ. But we don't want to say that in such a way that we confuse the point at issue. We can say Christ died for all. As a matter of fact we can say the words of Scripture, Christ died for all. But you always have to interpret the words of Scripture. It's very easy to use all and every, for example, in such a way as to confuse the issue. But we are not talking about that. He did die for benefits that pertain to all men, even for the reprobates. Many benefits, physical and moral and such as those of common grace are conferred upon all. They too, though not saving benefits flow from the death of Christ.

Third, the question does not pertain to the question of the applicability of the satisfaction to each man's need. We don't say that this question about the intent of the Lord's death is a question that suggests in any way that Christ's death is not applicable to every man's need. That's not the question.

And fourth, the question does not concern the actual application of the satisfaction or what Christ accomplished on the cross. Universal redemption, it's a lovely sounding name, universal redemption. After all its parade of its superior liberality fails to extend the benefits of redemption to one single soul beyond those embraced by particular redemption. The Reformed believe that Christ died with the intention of saving precisely those whom he does save. Our opponents, our adversaries, believe that the majority of those that he intended to save perish, thus significantly detracting from the value and the glory of the death of Christ.

Fifth, the question does not pertain to the universal offer in good faith of the salvation found in the gospel. Hodge comments, this is A.A. Hodge and not Charles Hodge, "In this sense we joyfully acknowledge that not only is the salvation of each and

every sinner rendered legally and morally possible to God if he wills. But the atonement of Christ is itself objectively, most certainly, and freely available to all and every sinner to whom it is offered upon condition that he believes. In a word, it does relate to it. It only relates to the intention of the Godhead in the saving work. Arminian universal redemption and also Amyraldian universal redemptionists, because in this they stand together, the man who says 'I am a Four Point Calvinist.' Since they acknowledge that no one can believe of themselves, offer a hypothetical universalism. Reformed definite redemptionists hold that he died to actually and certainly save his elect people. That is, for the purpose of saving those whom he does actually save."

And now to support the Reform view, let me suggest the following reasons. And if you have the outline, I'm going to try to go down the outline and say something about each of them. And first of all, the restriction of Christ's mission in death to many. The mission of Christ in redemption is restricted to a limited number, to his people, to his sheep, to his friends, to his church, his body. You have all of these statements in the word of God. We could stop and look at the texts of Scripture, but "His name shall be called Jesus, because he shall save his people from their sins." Ephesians chapter 5 verse 23, reference is made to the body of Christ. He loved the church and gave himself for her. John 10:15, John 15:13, he died for his friends. John 11:52, the people of God that were scattered abroad. Acts 20:28, Ephesians 5:25-26, all of these statements single out specific aspects of the object of the Lord's atoning work. If he had died for all, why should the Scriptures so often restrict his death to the fewer number?

Usually when that statement is made someone will say something like this, well it's true the death of Christ is restricted in these passages to some, but in other places he said he died for all. And so therefore, we really have no problem at all, since we have these universal texts. Now, of course you'll realize, as I'll point out in a moment, that there is a problem with that. But let me go on and say and put it down in clearer language. A common objection is this; the Scripture which in these passages limits the atonement and

in other passages extends it to all, this objection one of the older theologians has said is "more specious than solid." The universality eluded to is not absolute but limited; one which does not refer to all individuals of the human family to but to individuals of all nations.

Now, Hodge points out, many plausible reasons may be assigned why on the supposition of a personal and definite atonement general terms should be used on some occasions to illustrate the fact that the redemption is suited for all, sufficient for all, offered to all, that the elect are chosen out of every family, tribe, and nation under heaven and from every successive generation. And that finally the whole earth shall be redeemed from the curse. The gospel will triumph among all nations and the saints inherit the regenerated world. But we affirm that on the contrary hypothesis of a general and indefinite atonement no plausible pretext can be given for the use of the definite language above quoted. If Christ loved the whole world so as to die for it, why so say that the motive of his dying is that his sheep should be saved? It's unnecessary to say that. If you say that he died for all, you don't have to say he died for his sheep. Amyraldians contend that Christ died absolutely for some and conditionally for others. The Bible never states such a distinction. It always represents the application of the atonement as conditional, but the making of it never as conditional. Since God decreed all things by one simple act, I cannot think of God decreeing. In the passage of time you have a God who is like a finite being. So if God decreed all things by one simple act it's impossible to believe that he had two contrary intentions in the one act. Would it not mean that in the one decree Christ wills to die for the elect and the reprobate and in the same decree did not die for the reprobate? Amazing, amazing thing that in the eternal decree of God he should decree that Christ wills to die for the elect and the reprobate and in the same decree to not die for the reprobate; that's what we really come down to.

In objection to the particularists use of Matthew chapter 1 verse 21, it's been said that he might be called Savior, since he has obtained salvation for others than his people,

though they will never be partakers of the salvation. The term "to save" however, denotes the actual communication of salvation. One is not a savior because he has simply a desire to save, please remember that. In John 10:15 it's been objected that the sheep for whom Christ died are not said to be the elect only, but the context indicates plainly that they are. They know him. He knows them. Just as the Father knows him and he knows the Father. And other sheep of the same kind he shall bring in the flock and fold and they shall hear his voice. These sheep are elect sheep, as is evident.

Turretin comments, "He who dies for anyone that he may profit him intends that he for whom he dies shall be profited in reality. And he will in reality profit him if he can. Now, can anyone assign a reason why Christ gains the object which he had in view as to his sheep, but misses his aim as to the rest?" Incidentally, Turretin has a comment on 1 Timothy 4:10, and I'm not sure, I hope we are able to get as far as that in our study, but perhaps by saying this you'll understand what would be said and I can at least solve the question at this point. You remember that passages to the effect that Christ is the Savior of all men, especially of believers, do you remember the text? Savior of all men, especially of the believers. Turretin in this context responds to those who wish to use 1 Timothy 4:10 as proof of the use of the term Savior as one who obtains salvation for those who are never partakers of it, he argues, "I think correctly that the term here has the sense of preserver for all men. But the more limited sense when applied to believers as the especially chose." Now you must understand that the term "to save" sozo does have the sense of preservation. This is not something that is spun out of the mind of Turretin. Anyone looking at the term sozo in a Greek lexicon would see that it has the sense of preserve in numbers of context.

Then he goes on to say, "In what other sense then is the upholder of all men," he contends," can he be said to be the Savior of men who finally perish." How can you be the Savior of men who finally perish? Your salvation's not salvation. "One cannot say that he intends to save them. For we do not call a man a Savior who intends to save, but

one who does save in reality. Christ does in this life uphold men." He cites several passages to sow that. "Chrysostom and others say that he is the Savior of all in the present life, but only of the faithful in the life to come." And then to put the coup de grâce on this idea I want to cite an Amyraldian himself. Ralph Wardlaw says, "But in the sense in which he is Savior of them that believe, he's not the Savior of any others. He saves none but them that believe." And so the person, the Four Point Calvinist, who says that that text is a statement of the fact that Christ does come with the intent of saving all, but as a special intent for those who are his own or for the elect, you can see that even Wardlaw, one of the best of the Four Point Calvinists, admits that that text does not support that idea.

In objections to Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 25 and Titus 2:14 it is sometimes said that while these passages say that Christ died for the church, it's not said that he did not die for others. However, the passage in Ephesians as well as in Titus makes the love of Christ toward the church as his spouse the dominating motive in his death. And does not the love for ones spouse rule out the same kind of love for others? You see what I'm trying to get at is, a person says in answer to the question Christ loved the church and gave himself for it, well in other places it says that he died for all, and that's all that we are to understand by this. So I want to try to point out that when he says that he loves the church, that he is really talking about a special group of people. Can we say to the words "husbands love your wives" that since he didn't say love should be confined to the wives, the husband may also love others? Who would hear without indignation? One says the adulterer plead thus in vindication of his crime. It's indeed said, "Husbands love your wives," but it's not said "Love those alone." Can you just imagine the wife when she hears her husband defend his adultery in that way? The text itself makes it very plain that we're talking about the church as the spouse of Christ.

As far as Matthew chapter 20 verse 28, and 26:28, and Hebrews 9:28, a concern, we may say this. The term many may be opposed to one or a few it is true. And it

sometimes means all; but that sense cannot be given to the texts in these passages for these texts say he actually substituted himself for the many in these texts. He said he shed his blood for the remission of their sins. But if they do mean all, in other words if we are to take it in the sense of all, then it must be in the sense of all without distinction not all without exception. In other words, it's perfectly all right to use the term all, and we'll argue this this evening, it's perfectly all right to use the term, because the term all may be ambiguous unless we explain what we mean. The particularity of these passages in enhanced by the fact that they refer to the new covenant which refers in its Old Testament context to an efficacious work of God having to do with a particular people, with Israel. The condition inferred in the application of the benefits of the covenantal sacrifice is here said to be absolutely promised. Further, this new covenant is only a further unfolding of the promises of the Protoevangelium in Genesis 3:15, particularly in their first announcement.

Now, we're talking about the first statement made in Genesis 3:15 with reference to "the seed of the woman shall crush the serpent's head," but the seed of the woman shall be crushed in response. As John Owen so eloquently puts it, "Yes, that first distinction between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is enough to overthrow the pretended universality of the covenant of grace. For who dares affirm that God entered into a covenant of grace with the seed of the serpent. In other words, right in the beginning, in Genesis 3:15, we have particularlism set forth. So when we read the Bible we are called upon to think. We're called upon to think, isn't that strange? [Laughter]

Secondly, the limitation of the Father's gift to Christ; all men were not given to Christ by the Father but the elect only. John 17:2, John 17:6, John 6:37. If we include the gift of Christ to the elect we may speak of a two fold donation, the elect to the Son, the son to the elect. Or the given, we read in the word of God, come to him. Thus it's plain that not all without exception were given to him by the Father, but those that come to

him. It's *patitio principae*, sometimes Latin expressions are used simply to impress, but this one is intended to say that "we beg the question." In other words, we assume what we're trying to prove when we claim that the gift of the Father of Christ was conditional, for no Scripture supports that. The reception is conditional, but the giving of him is not.

Thirdly, the connection between the atonement and the intercession of Christ.

The fact that the atonement and the intercession of both parts of the priestly office means that they must be of the same extent; the object of his propitiation, that is of his death, and of his appearance in the presence of God, are one. He came to offer a propitiation for his people. He is at the right hand of the Father, as Randy's been telling us, in his work as high priest for the people for whom he died. We talked about that here in a conference several years ago, and I gave one of the lectures on that point. And the object, therefore, is one since the apostles in John represent their connection as indissoluble. And the two passages that particularly set this forth are Romans 8:34, where we've just had, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give them all things." And then just in almost the same sentence he says, "He's ascended to the right hand of the Father, who ever lives to make intercession for us." So we have his death and his intercession in the same context.

1 John 2:1-2, a passage we'll look at, says the same thing. He's the propitiation for our sins and he's the advocate that we have with the Father. So our Lord's words in John 17 confirm the point, for there he says he doesn't pray for the world, he prays for his sheep.

Fourth, the inseparable connection between the gift of Christ and the gift of the Spirit. The gift of the Lord Jesus Christ and the gift of the Spirit are in Scripture joined together as cause and effect. John chapter 16, verse 7; Galatians chapter 4 verse 4 and verse 6; Romans 8:9; 1 John 3:24; don't you see what high regard for your understanding of Scripture? I don't have to turn to these passages and read them; you understand the passages, surely, don't you? Since the Holy Spirit is given only to the elect, there is no

reason that can be given why the Son should be more extensive than the gift of the Spirit. In fact, the harmony between the work of the Son and the Spirit, demands their work be co-extensive, as Romans 8:32 plainly says. Let's say the text again, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" What are the things that we need besides the gift of the Son? Well we need regeneration. We need the gift of faith and so on. But let's just begin there.

If it is true that he delivered himself up for all, Paul said, "How then shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" So in other words, all things go to those for whom Christ died. You see what you have; you either have universalism or particularism. And there are so many texts in Scripture that point out that universalism is not the word of God. It can only be particularism. "He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" How can you respond to that? We'll say something about it later on, too. So this argument, incidentally the inseparable connection between the gift of Christ and the gift of the Spirit is part of what John Murray meant when he spoke of the "inter-Trinitarian economy of salvation." We must presume that the persons of the trinity work in harmony in their redemptive work. And so we say the Father elected, the Son offered a satisfaction for the elected ones; the Spirit applies the work to the elected one. We do not have the trinity working in this way, the Father elected the people of God but the Son in an effusive display of overabundance died for everyone, but the Spirit passed all of that by and applied the work to the elect. As some of the boys out in the country like to say, "In the trinity there was a vote and two voted one way and the other voted the other, and the two won; the Father and the Spirit." [Laughter] That's so ridiculous, it seems to me. Pardon me, but my mind is very simple. That just seems ridiculous, for the Father to elect a certain people, the Son to die for all, and the Spirit only to apply it to the elect. There is no such confusion in the trinity. That's why Mr. Murray talked about the "Inter-Trinitarian economy of salvation."

Five, the nature of Christ's surety-ship. In his exercise of surety-ship he died in our room in stead as a penal substitute. In his office he assumes to himself all our debts and liquidates them completely, just as if we had done it in our own persons. How then can those whose debts been liquidated be subjected to the punishment again? On what grounds, since heaven has been satisfied by his work? When the Lord Jesus said, "It is finished," it was accomplished. The truth of substitution, which I think belongs here under this topic, demands a particular of definite atonement. For is Jesus took my penal obligation as a sinner, then the cross was decisive for my salvation, not only as it meritorious ground, but also as that which guarantees faith, for faith is part of the gift of salvation. That is what we are told, for example, when we are told in Philippians 1 and verse 29, "It is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but to suffer for his sake," for example. It is given, faith is given. The same thing is true in John 6:44 and verse 45, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets and they shall be taught by God." That is, for whom he dies and whom he will raise up are those taught by God, "Therefore everyone that has heard and learned from the Father comes to me." And incidentally, he's going to raise them up in the last day, those of whom he speaks.

If Christ died for all men without exception, that is if he was their substitute in bearing their penalty, then we shut up to the two alternatives, all men without exception are to be saved, or all men without exception are savable. Since universalism cannot be entertained, then we must say that all men are saved if they believe. But then in that case, some thwart God's purpose by unbelief. Or if we affirm that faith is the gift of God to the elect, we must redefine substitution. We must deny Augusts Toplady's stanza, "Payment God cannot twice demand, first from my bleeding surety's hand and then again at mine." Thus then some whose debt was paid by Christ must pay the debt again. So if we say Christ died for all without except, we must either decide for universalism or deny the saving efficacy for anyone. If we affirm substitution, we must either decide for

universalism, or else to escape this false doctrine restrict the scope of the substitution making it a substitution that is effectual for all without distinction. That is for Jew and Gentile, but not for all without exception. The latter we can accept, for it delivers us from a God who can be frustrated within his purposed by man. And it establishes Christ's substitutionary work as a true and effectual substitution in which he truly bore our debt.

Sixth, the inviolable connection between acquiring and applying of salvation. Now, this is a little bit of a question, and it may never have occurred to you. But one of the reasons it is a question is because Amyrault tried to make the distinction and suggest there was no connection between the acquiring of salvation and the application of it. In other words, Christ did not in his saving work acquire salvation and also acquire or purchase the faith by which we come to the possession of salvation. Christ died only for those for whom he procured salvation and those to whom he applies it. Two reasons come to mind, the divinely determined object of his death was to procure salvation. And second, the procuring cannot be separated from the applying of it. Salvation is procured that it may be applied, and it is procured in vain if it is never applied. Thus, if salvation is procured for all, as Amyraldians say, it must be applied to all. If it's applied only to the elect, then it was procured only for the elect as the Reformed particularists say.

But some object, Christ's death was not intended so much to procure salvation as to remove the obstacles which divine justice and holiness raised against a sinner's salvation. I can enter so existentially into this, because my theological professor would occasionally say that. He would say, "When Christ died on the cross he removed the obstacles which divine justice and holiness raised against the sinners' salvation." And then he would go on to say that "Faith is a second instrument of salvation." In other words, we are not saved simply through the cross, the apostle's statements in Colossians and other places which he talks about being saved by the death of Christ, those statements really don't say it all. You have two instruments of salvation. You have the cross and you also have the necessary faith of the believer. So Christ procured only the possibility

of salvation rather than salvation itself. He removed the obstacles for salvation. That sounds pretty good. It really does sound pretty good, particularly if you're at a certain stage and you really have not had an opportunity yet to think a bit more about it. And I confess, it sounded reasonable to me.

But what obstacle stands in the way of the salvation of sinners except just their sins? And if this obstacle, that is their sin, is removed are they not saved? I thank Mr. Warfield for clarifying my mind. We cannot talk about Christ removing obstacles and then say the individuals for whom he removed these obstacles are not saved, because the sin is an obstacle. It's wiped clean. They are saved. These Amyraldian novelties and they are novelties [Laughter], only serve to do injury to the saving power of Christ's cross and the efficacy of his mediation.

And seven, Christ did not purchase faith for all men. If he had purchased faith, repentance, and the graces of the Holy Spirit for all men, then all would be saved. They were procured for the elect only. Therefore he died for the elect alone. That he did purchase by his death the blessing is indicated by such passages as the passage I quoted, Philippians chapter 1 and verse 29, "It is given in the behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but to suffer for his sake." Acts 5:31 where repentance is described as a gift, and John chapter 16 and verse 7. The giving of the Spirit is one of the fruits of his death. And it is he who brings us to repentance and faith. "Hence the venerable divines of the Synod of Dordrecht and their exhibition of the doctrines of truth," Turretin points out, "say Christ by his death purchased for us faith and all the other saving graces of the Spirit." In fact, all of the spiritual blessings that exist in the economy of God are blessings that come to us...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]