

A Boisterously Reformed Polemic Against
Limited Atonement

ALSO BY AUSTIN BROWN

Walking with the Mailman

*Satan's Awful Idea: A Biblical Theology of Satan's Fall
and its Implications on the Unfolding Human Drama*

*The Case for Utter Hopelessness: Why Atheism Leads to
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The XY Dot

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(forthcoming)*

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Austin C. Brown Pensacola
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Austin Brown's *A Boisterously Reformed Polemic Against Limited Atonement* takes the predictability of all the limitarian arguments and turns them into a Tinker to Evers to Chance double play that ends the inning of every high Calvinist who comes to the plate. Rarely do I read any work that treats me to sound biblical interpretation, sound logic, sound research, and a scintillating writing style. The resulting clever concoction is a fun read that is bound to irritate the detailed imprecision and the blinkered vision of the limitarian argument. High Calvinists have held the high ground in this debate mostly by constant repetition that has hardened falsehoods into facts. Enter Austin Brown, a Classical Calvinist himself, who with a David-like theological acumen and practical savvy faces down the limitarian Goliath. With dash and wit, Brown's monograph sheds light on the long career of limited atonement's specialty—being wrong.

—Dr. David Allen

Calling this book an extraordinary publication would be a flat insult. If ever there was a much-needed breath of fresh air in today's sultry Reformed theological atmosphere, this is it. Indeed, while many might find scholarly tomes on the extent of the atonement too long and too tedious, the sheer vitality of the author's approach grabs the reader from the word go. At the risk of belittling the book's serious substance, an element of 'fun' permeates the text to great effect. Accordingly, mere academics will be annoyed with it; hypercalvinists will hate it; high Calvinist Owenites will be unhappy with it; evangelistic preachers (with the exception of extreme Arminians) will be excited with it; Amyraldians like myself cannot but admire it. Of this I am more sure, the Saviour of sinners smiles on it!

Challenging the received wisdom of confessionally-correct Reformed scholarship, the author is an unashamed, unapologetic and undaunted Amyraldian. In targeting the dogmas of High Calvinism alias Owenism, the author leaves no stone unturned. For all the brevity of his treatment, nothing is left unsaid. No author of significance is ignored. His engagement with the sources and analysis of the issues, are impressively impeccable.

With brilliant and often humorous turns of phrase, he blows away the usual anti-Amyraldian prejudice found in standard works on this ever-contentious subject.

The author's knockabout humour is not confined to doctrinal and conceptual discussion either. He challenges the seminarian gurus of traditional orthodoxy over more than their defective doctrinal integrity. Borne of his own personal struggles, the practical and personal impact of their dubious methodology is laid bare and scrutinized with irresistible and impassioned verve.

I cannot recommend Austin Brown's work too highly. We are hugely in his debt. Gospel truth shines in its glory with clarity and pardonable pugnacity. The authentic Bible-based converted will be confirmed in their convictions. Whatever the intelligentsia make of it, pastors will be delighted with the book. Those who prefer the cosy undisturbed comfort of their scholastic hideouts are advised to avoid the book. Should they venture forth into the sunshine with suitable penitence, they will in due course enjoy clear, comfortable heads and vibrantly happy hearts. They will join us in singing and dancing. SOLI DEO GLORIA!

—Dr. Alan Clifford

(Note: In the UK Sovereign Grace Union periodical *Peace and Truth* (2021:4), Clifford Parsons describes me as 'unashamedly, unequivocally and unapologetically Amyraldian' in my views. My endorsement reflects this perspective.)

Delightfully uncomfortable! Part of genuine inquiry is the willingness to wrestle with answers, and when questions become taboo, we lose the ability to respond. Austin C. Brown enters the ring with determination, grace, and a spoonful of humor to make the medicine go down. Anyone who sincerely encounters this small but robust offering is awarded—at the very least—knowledge, aptitude, and a medal for valor. Only by refusing to engage do you stand to gain nothing.

—Pastor Jonathan Sargent

“Of making many books, there is no end”—this sentiment rings true with the topic of limited atonement. And yet, I find myself commending one more book to you on the subject. *A Boisterously Reformed Polemic Against Limited Atonement* is a different kind of book on limited atonement and well worth the time for those who affirm limited atonement. As a side note to my limited atonement brothers and sisters, read chapter seven before you attempt to brand Austin a heretic and burn him at the Facebook/Twitter/Amazon review/reformed chat boards stake!

—Pastor Dennis Louis

Irving Kristol once quipped, “When we lack the will to see things as they really are, there is nothing so mystifying as the obvious.” When people go against *prima facie* readings and act contrary to correct intuition, it can both perplex *and also entertain* onlookers. No one reading the New Testament as a new believer comes away thinking that Christ died *only* for the sins of some people, and not for the whole human race. Such a view is counter intuitive, to say the least, and new eyes reading the New Testament sense this, given the universal terms used in scripture when describing Christ’s death. A new Christian has to be “trained” into a narrow or constricted way of thinking about these broad-sounding terms through a series of logical assumptions that most often go unexamined. Austin’s book, in a clever, witty, and insightful way—which is a rare combination for a book on theology—examines these seemingly logical assumptions, weighs them, and finds them wanting, exegetically and systematically. A bit of the historical naïvety among the stricter sort of Calvinists is exposed as well. In fact, the reasoning processes of strict particularists is sometimes so bad that one cannot help but poke fun at it, since they are disinclined to admit that *any* of their arguments are weak. While they may not themselves find the interpretive maneuvers funny, the rest of us (especially those of us who used to be in their position) do. Even some strict particularists today smile with embarrassment that some in their camp in the past took the “world” in John 3:16 to be all of the elect *qua* elect, but they still end up taking it to be the *believing* elect, such as B. B. Warfield,

whose view many of them remain confused about. Austin's book serves as a good *and even entertaining* introduction to many of the problems among the Owenists, as they are sometimes called, and for that reason I heartily recommend it.

—Tony Byrne

Austin Brown's polemic against High Calvinism is no yawner. Writing in a style that's pithy, punchy, and persuasive, he'll keep every reader on his toes and put others back on their heels. Particularlists, prepare to be challenged! As a moderate Calvinist myself, I welcome Austin's contribution to this debate.

—Robert Gonzales, *Dean*
Reformed Baptist Seminary

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Hearty appreciation goes out as well to David Ponter for his invaluable website; and to Pastor Dennis Louis, a faithful friend who is a model of charity and quite possibly generous to a fault.

Dedicated to my father
who has always believed in me,
and to my father-in-law,
a forerunner.

A
Boisterously
Reformed
Polemic
Against
Limited
Atonement

Let It Begin

And now for a statement: Christ died for the sins of all men.

Among the controversial things one might dare utter in the halls of Christendom, this isn't one. Unless, of course, you hail from that little chamber in castle Christendom known as Reformedom. In that case, you're the fiery guy stumbling out of the basement with a concerned look smeared across his face.

"Who said that?"

Just everyone. That's all.

The idiosyncrasy of the Reformed on this point is an awkward fact of history. But as long as a man believes that the better angels are on his side, no amount of cajoling or eye-rolling will unsettle him. With his chin raised high, chest taut with air, he will declare with all the conviction of Luther, "Here I stand, I can do no other."

It's a noble declaration, so long as you're right. Otherwise, you play the dolt.

But we're not here to hand out the dunce caps just yet. They are being held in storage until the end. What must come first is a reason, or series of reasons, why many of the Reformed err on this point.

Notice that I didn't say *all* the Reformed err on this point. While it is something of a fad of the modern era to conveniently forget or ignore uncomfortable historical facts, the truth is that various stalwarts of the Reformed tradition happily embraced universal satisfaction: Calvin, Luther, Edwards, Baxter, Davenant, Charles Hodge, Dabney.

The list goes on. And I count these as delightful exceptions.

As for the rest, they can count me among their warmest detractors.



Since this is an introduction, let's make some introductory remarks.

Countless gallons of ink have been spilled debating the extent of the atonement in recent centuries. There has also been a resurgence of interest as of late, and more than a few fantastically laudable volumes have made their way into circulation. But given the ever-increasing store

of books, it's only fair to ask why another should be added to the already towering stack.

My answer is twofold.

I have an itch to write on the subject, and I believe I have something a tad unique to offer.

Allow me to expand upon both.

Once upon a time, there was a bright-eyed, young Calvinist named yours truly. My father-in-law fed me various Reformed classics, and I gorged myself on them, reading what they had to say with delight and wonder. The Reformed bug had firmly latched onto me, and the old three-volume set of Calvin's *Institutes* felt good in my hands; I even liked the smell of it. I named my firstborn son Calvin, and I teasingly joked that I would name my second born Van Til, or Cornelius, or just swing for the fences and call him Cornelius Van Til.

Now the funny thing about my father-in-law was that while he loved to smell tulips as much as the next guy, he was never convinced of the L. And honestly, it didn't sway me either, enamored that I was with the whole Westminsterian affair. Intrigued by my own rebellion, I read broadly—the big names, small names, no names. I bumbled around online forums, listening to both the erudite and boisterous, the weird and downright insane. I listened to frothy-mouthed Arminians rail against Reformedom's state flower. I watched Calvinists bludgeon their opponents with theological clubs. I listened to countless podcasts, lectures, sermons, debates.

You know the drill.

None of it cured me. The more I thought about the L, the more I saw it plastered on the foreheads of its advocates.

Something else happened along the way. I believe I first noticed it while reading Charles Hodge. Right there on the pages of his systematic theology, I found myself reading and re-reading what he had to say about the extent of the atonement. To my green ears, it sounded like he was saying something subtly, but significantly different than, say, John Owen, or Warfield. It definitely wasn't Arminianism, and it was certainly many clicks to the left of James White.

I had no precise category for it.

In an attempt to figure it out, I began asking around, and in so doing, I received from the hands of Calvinists suspicious stares, confident hand waving, and not a few accusations. Various boogeymen from ages past were exhumed for the sake of name-calling.

“You sound like you’re flirting with Amyraldianism.”

“You’re one of those four-point Calvinists!”

“Nay, he’s a closet Arminian!”

Since the Canons of Dort are tattooed on my back (not really), and since I was trying to sincerely discern the apparent disparities between Reformed thinkers, the reaction of these Calvinists perplexed me greatly. The black and white data was right there for our viewing pleasure. And yet, strangely enough, few were willing to consider it—*very few*.

Fast forward a couple decades. I now know that I wasn’t crazy and that many Calvinists espouse oddly reductionistic views, having little awareness of historical nuance while harboring supreme confidence that they do. The sober truth is that black coffee Calvinists can maintain with all alacrity that Christ paid an objective price for the sins of all men, and they can do so without being banished from the Reformed table. Or at least they ought not be. Unfortunately, there’s a big difference between what ought to be and what is.

The amount of vitriol I have suffered from the hands of my fellow kinsmen is legion, and it explains why my tone is rather cheeky, if not mildly tart. The question of the extent of the atonement is a full-contact sport, and I’m not going to act like it isn’t.

So, the reason I have an itch to enter this bloody arena is because I want to change your mind. If perchance you are a High Calvinist, or a Hyper-Calvinist, or a strict particularist, or whatever other kind of Calvinist might exist that is terrified of saying Christ paid an objective price for the sins of all men, then this book is for you.¹ I want you to see that there is another position, a better position, one that doesn’t require us to torture various, sundry texts. You can keep your colors, your sword.

This brings us to the second reason why I am writing this little volume. While all of these issues have been hashed out at various times and in various ways, leaving little room for original thought, I

¹ For the purposes of this work, I’m going to largely use the label “strict particularist” to refer to those who believe that only the sins of the elect were imputed to Christ. This is to say that when asked for whom, or for whose sins, did God intend for Christ to merit, satisfy, or pay, an objectively sufficient price for sin, strict particularists respond: the elect alone. As for the precision of the latter statement, see Michael Lynch, “Early Modern Hypothetical Universalism: Reflections on the *Status Quaestionis* and Modern Scholarship,” delivered at the Junius Institute Colloquium, Junius Institute, Grand Rapids, MI, Sept 12, 2014.

nevertheless believe that I can offer an interesting take on a number of points. Let's just say that during my years of sparring, I've learned a few moves that are particularly disarming. There are serious chinks in the strict particularist's armor, and the blade of exegesis is sharp enough to slide through to the heart. As such, I want to frame the arguments in a few fresh ways, tackle them from different angles, add a splash of color.

In order to do this, I'm going to adopt a decidedly polemical approach. The attack will focus largely on the theological impropriety of limited satisfaction and the larger mindset inexorably connected to the viewpoint. This issue isn't about a single text. It's a whole program. A fleet of interconnected ideas. Taking down one ship might cause a momentary concussion of doubt, but the real need is a wholesale take down.

Call me crazy, but that's my goal.

Since most Calvinists have beards and beer and prize the intellect, as well as a good fight, I trust that the challenge will be taken up with all joy. All that is left is to see who is David and who is Goliath in this story.



Just a few brief points about the format.

My overriding assumption is that you, the reader, are already acquainted with the basic contours of this debate. There will be no grammar school here. You know the Scriptural hot spots, the usual arguments, the resounding report of iron striking iron. This will allow us to quickly advance to the meat of the discussion.

The chapters will be divided into relatively short segments—tackling a particular text, or thought, or argument. Others have written door stoppers already. There's no need for another.

Finally, there's the matter of my own view. Since most modern Calvinists naturally tend towards reductionism, collapsing opposing views into the simple bifurcation of Arminianism and Calvinism, as if both represent monolithic schools of thought, it is likely needful that I detail my position at the start. That is well and right. But I have also learned that half of the battle is waged on this very point. In the case of certain strict particularists, it seems well nigh impossible to get them to express the moderate or classically Calvinist position to our own

satisfaction. A kind of unmitigated bias, or at times hostility, controls their ability to adequately parse nuanced ideas.

As has already been intimated, I land squarely in the classically moderate camp. Some will want to label me a Hypothetical Universalist, and while that moniker would be broadly correct, the two words combined prove less than desirable, really. But I'm not going to throw a tantrum. The key thing here is that I, along with other classically moderate Calvinists, maintain that Christ did in fact pay an objective price for the sins of humanity. In combination with this, we also hold that Christ did not die with an equal intent for all men. He died effectually for the elect as their federal head. To use a fifty-dollar word, Christ impetrated all the would-be saving benefits for the elect. Their salvation is sure.²

If you're wondering what kind of quotes excite me, I'll provide two from Charles Hodge. If perchance these citations give you indigestion, or confound you, or irritate you, then I have good news. This is exactly the right book for you.

Out of special love to his people, and with the design of securing their salvation, He has sent His Son to do what justifies the offer of salvation to all who choose to accept it. Christ, therefore, did not die equally for all men. He laid down his life for his sheep; He gave Himself for his Church. But in perfect consistency with all this, He did all that was necessary, so far as a satisfaction to justice is concerned, all that is required for the salvation of all men. So that all Augustinians can join with the Synod of Dort in saying, 'No man perishes for want of an atonement.'³

And again,

It may be remarked in the first place that Augustinians do not deny that Christ died for all men. What they deny is that He

2 Tony Byrne has produced an eminently helpful chart demarcating the relevant viewpoints of Arminianism, Classically Moderate Calvinism, High Calvinism, and Hyper-Calvinism. If there is any doubt as to how I understand these terms, and how they'll be utilized here, I commend it for your reading pleasure. See Appendix A.

3 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. Eerdmans, 1977), 2:556.

died equally, and with the same design, for all men. He died for all, that He might arrest the immediate execution of the penalty of the law upon the whole of our apostate race; that He might secure for men the innumerable blessings attending their state on earth, which, in one important sense, is a state of probation; and that He might lay the foundation of the offer of pardon and reconciliation with God, on condition of faith and repentance.⁴

4 Ibid, 558.

CHAPTER

1

Sufficient For All?

A long time ago, in a country far, far away, a theologian by the name of Peter Lombard penned what would famously become known as the Lombardian formula. It goes like this:

Christ is the priest, as he is also the victim and the price of our reconciliation. He offered himself on the altar of the cross not to the devil, but to the triune God, and he did so for all with regard to the sufficiency of the price, but only for the elect with regard to its efficacy, because he brought about salvation only for the predestined.⁵

As history would have it, this statement would be abbreviated into a bite-sized version. In its most pithy form, it states that Christ's death is sufficient for all, but efficient for the elect. Odds are good you're familiar with the saying. Ever since its conception, the formula has enjoyed a good measure of success. Even our friends, the strict particularists, have utilized the phrase, cheerfully citing it as an apt summary. Naturally, there have been a few cranky detractors, such as Piscator and Beza,⁶ but on balance, most strict particularists happily

5 Peter Lombard, *The Sentences*, 4 vols., trans. G. Silano, ed. J. Goering and G. Silano, *Medieval Sources in Translation* 45 (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), 3:86; B. 3, Dist. XX, c. 5.

6 Historian Michael Lynch, while outlining various Reformed approaches to sufficiency, wrote, "Piscator understood that the Lombardian formula presumed an ordained sufficiency in the death of Christ: 'It cannot be said that Christ died for all sufficiently, because it would follow that he died for all.' In fact, Piscator followed Theodore Beza's own reasoning: 'The little word FOR [in 'Christ sufficiently died FOR all'] here denotes the end or scope of Christ dying, and by consequence the

affirm that Christ died sufficiently for all.

Since classically moderate Calvinists enthusiastically embrace the formula, this shared commonality with their Reformed brethren might be thought an occasion for celebration. Sadly, this would be quite incorrect. Through what can only be described as a kind of theological sleight of hand, strict particularists subtly redefine the formula in order to suit their newfangled beliefs. In so doing, they not only mar the original meaning but adopt a clumsy substitute.

Let's look at this more closely. We'll begin by amplifying the formula in order to get at its intended meaning:

Christ's death is sufficient for all.

Amplification

Christ's sacrificial death is able to meet the needs of the elect and non-elect's sin problem.

Everyone should happily accept this amplification. When it states that Christ's death is sufficient "for all," it means all men. And by all men, it means all men.

Are we agreed?

Ok, good.

Next up, the term "sufficient." When it states that Christ's death is "sufficient" for all, it intends to communicate, by virtue of the word "sufficient," that Christ's death is able to meet the needs of a situation. It's enough, adequate, has as much as is needed. And since it's referencing Christ's death in relation to sinful men, it's saying that Christ's death is able to meet the needs of humanity's sin problem.

Everyone should be nodding in agreement.

If we are on the same page, and we should be, a simple question emerges when this term bumps up against the strict particularists' view of the extent of the atonement. The question might go something like this: How is Christ's sacrificial death able to meet the needs of the non-

efficacy of his death." Michael J. Lynch, *John Davenant's Hypothetical Universalism: A Defense of Catholic and Reformed Orthodoxy*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 104.

elect's sin problem? Because if Christ didn't die in any provisional or expiatory sense for the sins of the non-elect, how can his atoning death be sufficient for them? Or to state it differently, how could Christ's death be *at all* sufficient outside of his dying for their sins in some sense?

See the problem?



Two things need to be noted at this juncture.

First, a strict particularist could simply bite the bullet and give up the formula. Just say that Christ's death isn't sufficient for all. Some do that.⁷ Most are Hyper-Calvinists. I'm not a fan of that option.

This brings us to the other escape hatch. Many strict particularists will gesticulate wildly and declare that they proudly uphold the infinite value of Christ's death. With intense eyes and a firm chin, they will remind us that Christ didn't need to suffer one ounce more to forgive the sins of a trillion other souls, if he chose to do so. Because of the infinite worth of his sacrifice, Christ's death is more than sufficient to cover the sins of the non-elect, had that been his intent.

In sum,

Infinite intrinsic value = universal sufficiency

This is all fine and good, except for one little thing. The sleight of hand.

Let's look at the shell game more closely.

When the strict particularist speaks of the infinite value of Christ's death for the non-elect, they have only in mind *what could have been if Christ had in fact died for their sins*. The infinite value has no bearing upon their sin problem, because the infinite value doesn't extend to it. It could have, but it didn't. It's hypothetical.

Let's say it one more time just to make sure we're on the same page.

⁷ Arthur Pink flatly stated, "The atonement, therefore, is in no sense sufficient for a man, unless the Lord Jesus died for that man." Cited in Jeffrey D. Johnson, *He Died for Me: Limited Atonement and the Universal Gospel*, rev. ed. (Greenbrier, AR: Free Grace Press, 2018), 75–76.

The sins of the non-elect could have fallen within the purview of Christ's death, but in point of fact, their sins didn't. Christ didn't do anything for their sins. Therefore (and here is the rub), what he didn't accomplish on their behalf is allegedly sufficient to deal with their sin.

See the problem?

The question that is begging to be answered is: Since Christ didn't die in any sense for the sins of the non-elect, how is his death *presently* sufficient for them?

Answer: it isn't.

It could have been, but it isn't.



Here's the upshot. When strict particularists say that Christ's death is sufficient for all, what they really mean is that Christ's death could have met the needs of the non-elect, but in point of fact, given their non-died-for status, Christ's death is not currently able to meet their needs. Not since their exclusion at the cross. The infinite value doesn't extend to, or encompass, or touch their sins.

Let's illustrate.

Suppose a rich man decides to write up a banknote forgiving your neighbor's debts. Suppose it's a one-time deal. Now imagine standing on your front lawn, hose in hand, watering your flowers, when your neighbor walks outside to chat. With a big grin, he proceeds to tell you that the rich man's total assets are sufficient to meet the needs of your current debt load.

"The rich man has tons of money!" exclaims the neighbor.

Suddenly excited, you ask, "Oh! So the rich man's one-time provision included me?"

Still smiling, the neighbor says, "Well, no, it could have included you."

"Oh... I see..."

"Don't fret though. His bank account is sufficiently large enough for your needs."

You brighten again and say, "Wait, so it is available for me?"

"It could have been."

"It could have been?"

"Yeah. It could have been, but isn't. But don't worry, the value of all

his cash is sufficient to cover all our debts.”

“Um...”



The Lombardian formula isn't concerned about what could have been, but what is actually so. In this respect, note that the formula roots the sufficiency in what Christ accomplished. Stare at the two words “died for.” As a glorious result, Christ's death *is* sufficient for all. Present tense. This means that Christ did in fact pay a satisfactory price on behalf of humanity. The infinite value isn't restricted to a portion of sin. It encompasses all of it.

Since strict particularists cannot accept this simple truth, yet still want to be part of the Lombardian party, they have to resort to fanciful redefinition. They enthusiastically point at the infinite value of Christ's death, thinking that if they keep jabbing their finger at the concept, it will mask the fact that they're talking about what could have been accomplished, rather than what was accomplished.⁸ Not only does this redefinition butcher the long-held meaning of the Lombardian formula, but it just isn't helpful. Either Christ's death provided a remedy sufficient to meet the sin needs of the non-elect, or it didn't.

If it did, then Christ died for their sins in some sense. If it didn't, then he could have died for their sins in some sufficiently provisional sense, but chose not to. And if he chose not to, then his death is not

⁸ A number of Reformed thinkers were transparent on this point. Francis Turretin, for example, wrote, “It is not asked with respect to the value of the sufficiency of the death of Christ—whether it was in itself sufficient for the salvation of all men. For it is confessed by all that since its value is infinite, it would have been entirely sufficient for the redemption of each and every one, *if God had seen fit to extend it to the whole world.*” Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:458-459, emphasis mine. Herman Witsius likewise expressed the same idea, “We therefore conclude, 1st. That the obedience and sufferings of Christ, considered in themselves, are, on the account of the infinite dignity of the person, of that value, as to have been sufficient for redeeming not only all and every man in particular, but many myriads besides, *had it so pleased God and Christ, that he should have undertaken and satisfied for them.*” Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, 1:256, emphasis mine. And lastly, John Owen stated, “It was in itself of infinite value and sufficiency to have been made a price to have bought and purchased all and every man in the world.” John Owen, “Death of Death,” in *Works*, 10:297, emphasis mine. Owen explicates this idea at length, stressing the point repeatedly (see 10:295–297; 10:337–338).

sufficient for the non-elect today.

Here's how we might summarize the sleight of hand.

Lombardian formula rightly understood:

Since Christ did in fact make satisfaction for the sins of all men, his death is sufficient for all.

VS

Butchered Lombardian formula:

The infinite value of Christ's sacrificial death could have been extended to include the sins of the non-elect, and as such, it would have been more than capable of dealing with their sin problem. However, their sins were excluded from Christ's atoning work. Therefore, the infinite value of Christ's death is not sufficient for the non-died-fors after his once-for-all-time sacrifice—but it could have been, if he did things differently.

For some strict particularists this realization will give them pause. Having labored under the misunderstanding that their view of limited atonement really does speak to the sin problem of all men, this epiphany will likely illuminate a cascade of foreboding problems. Chief among them, perhaps, would be the universal gospel offer. For if Christ's death isn't sufficient for all, then it is hard, if not impossible, to conceive of a ground for the universal offer.

In a word, it creates a quandary.

We'll look at this further in the next chapter.

In the meantime, a brief observation is in order. While lecturing on the extent of the atonement, strict particularists often appeal to the universal sufficiency of Christ's death as a kind of reassurance to their audience that its intrinsic value establishes more than enough merit for all men, right now. In their minds, there is no disconnect between Christ not dying for the sins of all men and its universal sufficiency to

save all men. This signals to me, and others, that they really aren't thinking about the implications of their view, but are rather parroting what has been handed down to them. A person might happily persist in this will-o'-the-wisp, but to outsiders, it undermines our trust in their ability to see things aright.

In the case of those select few who do see it and who do reject the old formula, this sets them on a clear trajectory towards Hyper-Calvinism. To my eyes, this is weirdness yielding further weirdness. It's a kind of *contra mundum* gone wild; for if there are only a few hundred enlightened strict particularists running around in the dungeons of castle Christendom, surely their confidence has reason to falter. This isn't to say that the total number of adherents is everything, but it's almost always telling.

If you happen to be one of these strictly strict particularists, I'd like you to pause and take a fresh look at your odd little group. Notice your obsession with defending this historically fraught view. Notice the obsession of the sweaty guys around you. Festus once told Paul that all his great learning was driving him insane. We can feel altogether sanguine about being called insane by the world. But things are surely a little different with the church. For hundreds and hundreds of years, the church maintained that Christ's death is sufficient for all. Essentially all of the early Reformers held it. Only a thin slice of an already thin slice of a slice bucked against the formula. There now remains the thinnest of trickles. A remnant of a remnant of a remnant.

There's a better way.

We are standing outside your little chamber, knocking, asking you to come up to the courtyards. The sun is much brighter up here. Birds are singing.

CHAPTER

2

The Not So Universal Gospel Offer

Speaking of magic tricks, let's talk about the universal gospel offer. In his "A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith," Robert L. Reymond, a strict particularist if there ever was one, asserted the following:

Christ's atoning death, by virtue of its universal saving sufficiency, ground(s) the legitimacy of preaching the gospel to *every* man, woman, and child without discrimination.⁹

With all the craft of a magician, the rabbit of universal saving sufficiency is wondrously pulled out of a theological hat. One might say that this is a prime example of what we were talking about in the previous chapter. With one hand, the breadth of expiation is strenuously restricted to the elect, thereby tightening the circle of satisfaction to a subset of humanity. But with the other hand, it is functionally ignored in order to maintain a semblance of sanity.

Don't get me wrong. I'm glad Dr. Reymond said what he said. I just wish he would explain how universal saving sufficiency can be divorced from universal expiation. The one entails the other.



Let's think about this.

Let's start by imagining an alternate reality. Imagine that Christ

⁹ Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 673.

wasn't in fact sent to procure salvation for anyone. There's no vicarious death, no atoning sacrifice, nothing. Not now, nor ever. The people in this imaginary world run around hating God and one another robustly, having no future prospect of grace purchased through Christ.

Given the absence of the cross, would it be correct to say that there is no gospel in this imaginary scenario? Of course. If Christ didn't die for the sins of anyone, then it follows that there is no good news concerning salvation. Zilch, zero, nada.

Let's ask a follow-up question. In light of this hopeless situation, would it also be correct to say that it would be absurd for someone to come along and say to these folks, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved"?

Yes, of course.

Since nothing has been done on their behalf, so far as Christ's vicarious death is concerned, there is no good news on offer. In other words, in order for the gospel to be truly offered, there has to be a reality behind it that legitimizes the offer.

If you're scratching your head trying to understand the point, just imagine that you're suddenly transported into Satan's burning palace. Feeling a tad overwhelmed, you nevertheless muster the courage to offer the gospel of Jesus Christ to the watching demons. You say, "If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, your sins will be forgiven."

Since most of us believe that Christ hasn't provided a means by which the demons can be saved, it wouldn't make sense for us to offer them a means of escape. It doesn't exist. Someone might say the words, but the words are groundless.

So far so good?

If so, what can we say by way of conclusion up to this point?

Two things.

Firstly, the good news is inexorably bound up with Christ's sacrificial death.

No sacrificial death = No gospel

Secondly, if there is no gospel, a legitimate gospel offer is impossible.

No gospel = No legitimate gospel offer

With this in mind, let's return to the imaginary world inhabited with only non-died-fors. In the case of this wretched group, no gospel is available and no gospel can be offered, since it doesn't exist. As has been noted, it would be more than a little odd for us to offer something that doesn't exist.

Glad we're agreed.

Now let's tweak the thought experiment and bring it home. Suppose that Christ did in fact come, and that he did in fact die for the sins of half the people. For the sake of simplicity, let's say there are a total of one hundred people on the planet. Of these one hundred, Christ died for fifty. The other fifty fall into the category of the non-died-fors.

In this scenario, would it be correct to say that there are grounds for a legitimate, universal gospel offer?

The answer is no. A gospel offer is legitimately grounded for the died-fors, but not the non-died-fors. Therefore, a legitimate, universal gospel offer is not possible.

The logic is wickedly simple. For as soon as we establish that it would be absurd to offer the gospel to a world of non-died-fors, it necessarily follows that there is no gospel for the non-died-fors, as a matter of course. Adding a handful of died-fors into the mix doesn't alter the situation, so far as the non-died-fors are concerned. They are, go figure, a non-died-for.

In sum,

No sacrificial death = no gospel.

No gospel = no legitimate gospel offer for the non-died-fors.

A legitimate, universal gospel offer requires a universal grounding.

As soon as there is a mix of non-died-fors and died-fors, the idea of a legitimate, universal gospel offer goes out the window.

My guess is that there are some strict particularists jumping up and

down, all blubber faced, wanting to interject an all too common retort at this point. The retort centers on the evangelist's ignorance. It goes something like this: since we don't know who is elect and who isn't, and since God commanded us to preach the gospel indiscriminately, we share the gospel with everyone. That's the gist of the rejoinder.

If one listens carefully, the sound of moderate Calvinists groaning can be heard echoing across the plains of middle America as we speak. The reason is simple. The failure of strict particularists to grasp this argument never ceases to amaze. It's as if there's an internal defense mechanism that snaps into action, clouding their otherwise reasonable judgment.

I only partially jest.

At the risk of condescension, in the hopes that it will elicit serious reflection, I'm going to state as plainly as possible why the argument doesn't work:

The ignorance of the preacher has no bearing on the *logical* problem; for the logical problem emerges as soon as one maintains limited expiation with a legitimate, universal gospel offer.

Or, to say it differently:

In order for a universal gospel offer to be legitimately universal, certain priors have to be true. Those don't exist in a world partially full of non-died-fors. Our ignorance of who is elect and who isn't has zero bearing on the logical incongruity that immediately obtains when a person posits universal saving sufficiency in combination with limited atonement.

And,

An appeal to God's command to indiscriminately preach the gospel to all men doesn't rectify the problem. Believing God's command doesn't tell you anything about the veracity of your belief in limited atonement. The command either comports with the belief or it doesn't. How you know if it doesn't

depends on other factors. Like the ones being pointed out in this chapter.

However one might try to slice this pie, the thought experiment about the world of non-died-fors is decisive. If what is true about the gospel for them is accurate in the imaginary world, then it is true in our world. The presence of some died-fors changes nothing. There is no good news for the non-died-fors. Not potentially, not theoretically, not in point of fact, not at all. Without the shedding of blood there can be no remission of sins. Therefore, it simply doesn't make sense for us to say—and say with a straight face—that the universal saving sufficiency of Christ's death grounds and legitimizes a universal gospel offer, given strict particularism. If it is universal, it is true only with respect to the elect—but of course, that's not what is meant by the universal gospel offer.



Let's summarize the argument:

- 1) Where there is no sacrifice for sins by Christ, there is no way of salvation made available for sinners.
- 2) Christ only paid an objective price for the sins of the elect.
- 3) Conversely, the sins of the non-elect have not been paid for by Christ. They are the non-died-fors.
- 4) Therefore, there is no way of salvation made available for the non-died-fors.
- 5) The way of salvation is intimately bound up with the gospel; the two are inseparable.
- 6) Therefore, in the case of those whose sins have not been paid for, there is no gospel.

7) Since the non-elect's sins have not been paid for, there is no gospel for the non-elect.

—

A) God offers a way of salvation to all those who hear the gospel.

B) Some of the non-elect comprise “all men who hear the gospel.”

C) Therefore, some of the non-elect are offered a way of salvation through the gospel by God.

—

(4, 6, 7) contradicts (C)¹⁰

¹⁰ For a more technical version of this argument, see David Ponter's excellent essay "Limited Atonement and the Falsification of the Sincere Offer of the Gospel," *Calvin and Calvinism: An Elenchus for Classic-Moderate Calvinism* (blog), March 27th, 2012; <http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=11670>.

CHAPTER

3

Thrusting Aside Eternal Life

Let's check the math. In the previous chapter, I made a simple observation. A thought experiment was conducted in order to highlight a logical inconsistency: limited satisfaction doesn't play well with a universal gospel offer. Moderate Calvinists have long shouted about this, and strict particularists have long been hard of hearing. The aim of this chapter, therefore, will be to press home the logical problem by heightening the tension through a brief survey of biblical texts.

Here's how it will work.

If it can be shown that the gospel is truly offered to the non-elect, and if it can be shown that the non-elect truly reject the gospel, then the logical problem facing strict particularists is underlined. The reason why should be obvious. If Christ didn't die for the non-elect, there's no gospel for them. It doesn't exist. But if it can be shown that the Scriptures routinely portray the non-elect as being offered the gospel, and rejecting the gospel, we have ourselves a data point that begs to be understood in a different light.

Think of it this way.

If it can be shown that the non-elect reject offers of eternal life, then it is reasonable to ask how eternal life can be offered to them apart from Christ's atoning death. Eternal life is predicated upon Christ's death; it is a fruit of it. It would be akin to finding a verse where the non-elect reject Christ's propitiatory death for their sins. Everyone would look at a verse like that and say, "Well, there you have it. Clearly, Christ died for their sins. Their rejection of it presupposes its reality."

In view of this, this chapter will explore a number of passages where the gospel, or forgiveness, or eternal life is offered and rejected

by the non-elect. A few comments will be made along the way.

2 Thessalonians 2:9-12, “The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

Here a counter factual reality is plainly laid out. These individuals refused to love the truth and so be saved. Given God’s judicial abandonment, resulting in their hardened unbelief and ensuing condemnation, we know they are numbered among the non-elect. Nevertheless, these individuals truly refused Christ’s medicine, which would have saved them, had they but taken it. This can only be true if Christ did in fact accomplish something on behalf of their sins. Otherwise, the counter factual statement is rooted in a mirage.

Let’s be crystal clear about this.

If I offer you an iPhone, and I don’t in fact have an iPhone, and have no way of obtaining one, my offer is rooted in a fiction. It is a groundless offer. You might decline my offer, thinking that I do in fact have an iPhone, but that is neither here nor there, so far as the validity of my offer is concerned. If I don’t have an iPhone, then I can’t honestly say that you would have received one, had you accepted my offer. Therefore, for Paul to say that these men would have been saved had they received the truth, the underlying reality grounding that counter-factual had to be in fact true. Christ had to have done something on their behalf such that their sins could have been forgiven.¹¹

Acts 13:38-39, 46, “Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from

¹¹ It is of no help to say that if they would have believed then Christ would have died for them. Since Christ had already died on the cross thereby establishing the extent of the atonement (given strict particularism), the non-elect in 2 Thessalonians necessarily fall outside of Christ’s sacrificial death, yet are nevertheless said to have been savable.

which you could not be freed by the law of Moses— “And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, ‘It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.’”

By thrusting aside the word of God, which was essentially the gospel in this context, a number of Jews thrust aside eternal life. If we imagine a plate of food being slid in front of a person, and they thrust it aside, flinging it off the table onto the floor, we would be correct to say that they truly rejected the meal. Something was actually brushed aside. And it’s all over the floor. Right there for all to see.

If we adopt this analogy and apply it to the passage cited above, we might say that some of the Jews knocked the gospel away from them. If the gospel was a sirloin steak, they flung it aside. Had they eaten it, they would have been full and happy. But as it was, they did not, and so they weren’t filled, nor happy. In this analogy, the steak is Christ’s death. And it is offered. The million-dollar question facing strict particularists is this: Is there actually a steak on the plate?

I trust we know by now what I think.

2 Thess 1:7b-8, “When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”

John 3:18, “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

Act 28:27-28, “‘For this people’s heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed; lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.’ Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen.”

Gen 4:6, “The LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted?’

And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

Act 3:26, “God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness.”

Mat 22:2-3, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come.”

Act 2:38, “And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Romans 2:4-5, “Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?”

John 5:34b, “I say these things so that you may be saved.”¹²

John 5:40, “Yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

Unless we are woefully predisposed towards saying that Christ didn’t intend his words for the non-elect, these statements speak to what is actually forfeited when the non-elect reject Christ. They forfeit salvation.

Hebrews 2:3, 4:1-2, “How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard— Therefore, while the

12 Strict Particularist, Sam Waldron, laudably defends the well-meant offer, arguing that “It is plain that the unavoidable implication of John 5:34 is that Jesus speaking on behalf of God the Father expressed a desire and intention for the salvation of men who were finally lost. It was Jesus who said to the Jews, ‘I say these things to you that you may be saved,’ and he said this as God’s Son, God’s Word, and in perfect expression of God the Father’s will.” Waldron, Sam. *The Crux of the Free Offer: A Biblical, Confessional, and Theological Explanation and Defense of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel* (p. 16). Free Grace Press. Kindle Edition.

promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.”

Regarding this, John Davenant wrote,

From the whole of this discourse of the Apostle, it appears, in the first place, that in the Gospel, salvation is offered promiscuously to all those to whom it is preached; for on this very account it is called *salvation*. Then it appears, that this salvation which is laid up in Christ, and offered to men in the Gospel, is neglected and repelled by many, namely, by all unbelievers who have not faith in the promises of the Gospel. Lastly, it also appears, that this neglect and unbelief is the true cause which prevents the ungodly from obtaining the rest of the Lord, that is, which deprives them of eternal life offered them in Christ. But none of these things can be said truly and seriously unless it is presupposed that salvation through the death of Christ is applicable to all men, according to the appointment of God.¹³

Given the evidence noted above, it is entirely fitting to say that:

- 1) God calls all men everywhere to repent. The non-elect inhabit the category of “all men.” So God commands the non-elect to repent.
- 2) The non-elect actually reject the gospel, forgiveness, eternal life, etc.
- 3) The non-elect are presented with a bona fide gospel offer; all legal obstacles have been removed such that God can forgive the sins of any human being.

13 John Davenant, “*A Dissertation on the Death of Christ*,” in *An Exposition of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians*, 2 vols., trans. J. Allport (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co.; Birmingham: Beilby, Knott and Beilb, 1832), 2:350.

These points create problems for the strict particularist. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, these three observations, in combination with limited satisfaction and a universal gospel offer, result in theological malpractice.

Edward Polhill, a 17th century Calvinist, brilliantly summarized the matter with a certain flair of pen and ink,

(5) [That Christ died for the sins of all men] I argue from the unbelief of men, which is wonderfully aggravated in Scripture. Through Jesus Christ there is a real offer of grace made, but unbelief *receives it in vain*, 2 Cor. vi. 1.; great salvation is prepared, but unbelief *neglects it*, Heb. ii. 3.; eternal rest is promised, but unbelief *comes short of it*, Heb. iv. 1.; the kingdom of heaven comes nigh unto men, but unbelief saith “No” to it, and doth what it can *to make him a liar*, 1 John v. 10. Christ is set forth before our eyes as the great expiatory sacrifice, and evidently set forth as if he were crucified among us; his blood runs fresh in the veins of the gospel, but unbelief *re-crucifies the Son of God*, Heb. vi. 6., *tramples his precious blood under foot*, Heb. x. 29., and doth, as it were, nullify his glorious sacrifice; so that, as to final unbelievers, *there no more remaineth a sacrifice*, Heb. x. 26.; as to their salvation, it is as if there were no sacrifice at all for them. But if Christ died not for all men, how can these things be? How can those men receive grace in vain for whom it was never procured? or neglect salvation for whom it was never prepared? How can they fall short of eternal rest for whom it was never purchased? or draw back from the kingdom of heaven which never approached unto them? How can there be life in Christ for those for whom he never died? and if not, which way doth their unbelief give God the lie? How can they re-crucify the Son of God for whom he was never crucified? or trample on that precious blood which was never shed for them? The devils, as full of malice as they are against Christ, are never said to do it, and why are men charged with it? I take it because men have some share in him, and devils none at all.¹⁴

14 Edward Polhill, “Essay on the Extent of the Death of Christ,” from the *Treatise on the Divine Will* (Berwick: Published by Thomas Melrose, 1842), 7–8.



At this point, I would be remiss if I didn't address a few common retorts. Since these retorts don't have stock labels, let's call them "The inability analogy," "God's command is good enough for me view," and "The bare command theory."

The inability analogy goes something like this:

Hey, Davenant fanboy, yeah you. You believe in total inability, right? Well, look here. The non-elect cannot repent, and yet, God still calls them to repent. So ability isn't required for God to call them to obey him. Similarly, God can call the non-elect to repent and believe, even though Christ didn't die for them. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!

Um, yeah. So all that is exciting stuff, except that there is a difference between moral inability and natural inability.¹⁵ The non-elect are morally unable to believe because of how much they don't want to believe. It's their preference. And so the lateral move to the universal offer is a bad one. The question isn't whether or not the non-elect will accept the gospel offer, but whether or not the gospel offer is veridical, or grounded, can be fulfilled, etc. God's fidelity is at stake. Does God have sufficient goods to back the offer? The response of the non-elect has zero bearing upon the grounding question.

Let's return to a former illustration. Suppose you hate iPhones with all your heart. Your feelings, which will inevitably result in rejecting iPhone offers, has no bearing on the validity of my offering you an iPhone. That being said, I must have an iPhone, or have some way of getting an iPhone, for me to offer you an iPhone.

Simply put, this argument is predicated upon a category error.

Now in all fairness, one might question why I would offer an iPhone to a thorough-going iPhone hater, but this is merely to fall into the well-worn track of divine sovereignty versus human responsibility. None of us fully understand the math behind that.

¹⁵ For a brief discussion of the concepts, see Archibald Alexander, "The Inability of Sinners," in *Theological Essays* (New York & London: Wiley and Putnam, 1846), 265–268, 272–275, 277–280, and, 281–282; and perhaps as well, Andrew Fuller, "Miscellaneous Essays," in *The Works of Andrew Fuller* (Philadelphia: Printed by Anderson and Meehan, for William Collier, 1820), 8:255–258.



As for the “God’s command is good enough for me” approach, I’m excited to say that the practical sensibilities of the person who raises this objection exceed what their system would otherwise dictate.

What do I mean? Let’s illustrate it this way.

Have you ever had an Arminian friend (it’s ok, you can admit it) who prayed for his lost family members? With a slight head bobble and wry smile, you walk up to your friend and ask why he petitions God to do something decisive in the hearts of his lost family members. You say, “You believe that God cannot, or will not, decisively overcome unbelief, right?” And the Arminian says, “Yup.” And you say, “So why does your prayer sound like you’re asking God to do something decisive?” In response, the Arminian says, “Because God would have me pray that way. I’m obedient. That’s enough for me.”

While we can all be thankful that it is enough for him, it doesn’t say much about the veracity of his larger theological framework. We can obey God while being quite confused in our thinking.

As for my strict particularist friends, I’m saying that you’re the man. Your practical impulse is better than what your view of limited atonement entails. Unless, of course, you’re a Hyper-Calvinist. Then things get hairy in a hurry.



Lastly, we have “the bare command theory.” This is a fairly popular reply. And it comes in a variety of flavors.¹⁶ In essence, it argues that the statement “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” is perfectly compatible with limited expiation, since it is a promise of salvation for *believers*. It’s predicated upon a simple statement of fact. In this respect, the gospel offer functions as a kind of truism. Anyone who believes will be saved. Those who don’t won’t be saved.

16 See Roger Nicole’s article “Covenant, Universal Call and Definite Atonement,” *JETS* 38:3 (Sept 1995); Sam Waldron, *The Crux of the Free Offer: A Biblical, Confessional, and Theological Explanation and Defense of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel* (Free Grace Press. Kindle Edition), 102; as well as Turretin’s rather torturous rejoinder in *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1994), 476–482.

Background issues like limited atonement don't undermine *the fact* of this statement. All a man needs to know is that if he believes, Christ will prove sufficient for him. What more does a man need to know?

In one sense, an unbeliever doesn't need to know more than this. But that isn't the point. The point is whether or not the statement is true with respect to the non-died-fors. Can we logically evaluate the proposition in relation to them? The answer is yes. And when we evaluate the promise in relation to them it becomes evident that the promise cannot be fulfilled. The requisite conditions don't exist for it to be true in the abstract.

David Ponter helpfully illustrated the problem as follows:

John and Mary both suffer from the *same* terminal illness. The doctor, however, develops a cure which is genetically coded to John only. Could this doctor take this cure which was designed only for John, and sincerely "offer" it to Mary as a remedy *applicable* to her? No. What is more, any purported statement such as, "Mary, if you take this remedy, you will be cured" would be deemed false and dishonest. The pretended statement of fact must be deemed false irrespective of whether or not Mary takes the "remedy." It is *antecedently* false regardless of what Mary does or does not do with the remedy.¹⁷

It bears repeating with a certain enthusiasm that the antecedent conditions play an indispensable role in the viability of an offer tendered in good faith. If I offer you a drink of water, the genuineness of the offer hangs on my having water to give. This should be as obvious as the day is long.

Consider again the antecedent problem with limited atonement: God *cannot* confer forgiveness on any human being given limited imputation. The reason why:

- (1) Only those sins imputed to Christ are forgivable.
- (2) Only the sins of the elect are imputed to Christ.
- (3) Therefore only the sins of the elect are forgivable.

17 Ponter, "Limited Atonement and the Falsification of the Sincere Offer of the Gospel."

Turning an offer into a mere statement of fact doesn't remove the logical sting. It merely attempts to mask the underlying problem by throwing up horse blinders. Either we can evaluate the veracity of the promise with respect to a non-died-for, or we cannot. And last I checked, we can.

Let's hit this from a slightly different angle. Our ability to discern whether an offer is sincere can be ascertained before the offeree discovers the offer is groundless. Suppose, for example, that Jack has a box of candies. He extends the box out to Samuel and offers Samuel a piece of candy. Samuel takes the box, lifts off the lid, only to find the box empty. Here we might ask: At what point was the offer insincere?

It isn't as if the insincerity began when Jack's inability to confer the proffered candy was *discovered*. The insincerity was only *exposed*. Conversely, if Samuel had never opened the box and discovered Jack's insincerity, Samuel's ignorance wouldn't have altered the true state of affairs—that Jack's offer was groundless.¹⁸

18 I am indebted to David Ponter's insight here and have essentially copied an illustration from his article. See Ponter, "Limited Atonement and the Falsification of the Sincere Offer of the Gospel."

CHAPTER

4

Thankful For... ?

Let us suppose that there is a non-died-for and that his name is Ted. Ted is a happy-go-lucky kind of guy with a happy-go-lucky personality. One day he shows up at a church wondering what this whole Christianity thing is about. It just so happens to be First High Calvinist Presbyterian. It's a nice little church. White, high steeple, flowers at the entrance. About a hundred people.

Ted walks in through a pair of carved wooden doors and plops down in a pew near the back. After the usual preambles, the liturgy swings into motion, and somewhere near the end, a man in a suit adorns a large pulpit and begins preaching on limited atonement.

Ted is both fascinated and bewildered by what he is hearing. He's been exposed to a dash of theology over the years, but nothing like this. When the service is over, he's invited to stay for fellowship lunch. Since Ted is a happy-go-lucky kind of guy, and now rather hungry, he accepts the offer.

Descending into the bowels of the church building, he sits at a round table in the basement with a group of longtime church members who are more than eager to field his questions.

Let's listen in.

Ted: So, uh, I have always been under the impression that Christ died for everyone. Am I right to say that I heard something different today?

Deacon Bill (wiping his mouth): Well, um, yes. You did hear something different today. We call it limited atonement. Or particular redemption.

Ted: And that means that Christ died only for a certain number of people, right?

Deacon Bill: That's right. Christ's death is so effective that it infallibly saves all those for whom he died.

Ted (nodding thoughtfully, trying to formulate something in his mind): So, here's the thing. I'm not a Christian. Does that mean, then, that Christ did not die for me?

Deacon Bill: Christ promises to save you, if you will but believe. That's the important thing to keep in view. You can know the answer. Just turn and trust in him. He perfectly saves all who turn to him.

Ted: But if I don't believe, like ever, then it means that he did not die for me?

Deacon Bill: That is right.

Ted (now chewing): The macaroni in the crockpot is really delicious. It's so creamy!

Deacon Bill: Betty made that. She's a pro.

(Betty smiles from across the table)

Ted: So, Bill, I was thinking about your prayer. You were talking about how we are to be thankful for everything, even for the things we eat and drink.

(Bill nods)

Ted: And during your prayer, you especially thanked God for sending Christ, and for his dying on the cross for your sins, and loving you so dearly by suffering in your stead.

(Bill nods again)

Ted: So, um... how do I say this? Let's suppose that I never become a Christian, and that I'm one of the, uh, I think the pastor called them the non-elect? Yeah, one of the non-elect. So, um, let's say I am one of the non-elect. Does God expect me to be thankful for sending Christ into the world? I mean, I can see why the elect would be thankful for Christ, but why should the non-elect be thankful? Does God expect them to be thankful for Christ's death? If they are called to be thankful to God, and it's sinful for people to be unthankful, are the non-elect held accountable for not being thankful for Christ's death?

If you ask me, I think Ted raises a fascinating question, one that uncomfortably presses against Deacon Bill's belief system.

When the non-elect hear God's amazing offer of forgiveness through Christ, should they feel smitten? Or astonished that the Creator of the universe would do such a thing for lost men like themselves? Should they feel overwhelmed at such a display of divine mercy? Thankful? Humbled?

Naturally, we're not asking whether or not the non-elect will in fact feel a need to do such things, let alone express it. They won't. The key thing here is whether they *should* feel smitten, astonished, thankful, and so on. Ought they be inclined to do so? Is there no obligation?

For the life of me, I cannot see why they shouldn't be thankful. In fact, it is precisely their brazen dismissal and ingratitude that serves to highlight the depths of their sinfulness.

If the King of the universe took on flesh and was tortured so that Ted could find forgiveness, and Ted rejects it, feeling not even a little thankful for what God had done, is this not scandalous? Of course, it is! And yet, it is surely fair to ask why the non-elect should feel thankful. Should they express gratitude to God for sending a Savior to die for the elect alone? Or is it that they should only be thankful for the common grace that flows out of the cross? Or perhaps it is something else altogether odd. Maybe they should be thankful, because, from their limited perspective, they just don't know if Christ died for them.

These are all very strange. The problem should point us toward a far more elegant solution: just say that Christ did in fact die for the sins of the whole world.

Not only does such an overflow of divine love startle the world, it

magnifies the extent of man's depravity when they spurn God's astounding display of love. There is really something the non-elect should be thankful for, with respect to John 3:16, and there is really something awful about their spurning Christ's universally sufficient death.

With his usual sagacity, Calvin wrote concerning such ingratitude,

And indeed, our Lord Jesus was offered to all the world... Our Lord Jesus suffered for all and there is neither great nor small who is not inexcusable today, for we can obtain salvation in Him. Unbelievers who turn away from Him and who deprive themselves of Him by their malice are today doubly culpable. For how will they excuse their ingratitude in not receiving the blessing in which they could share by faith? And let us realize that if we come flocking to our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall not hinder one another and prevent Him being sufficient for each of us... Let us not fear to come to Him in great numbers, and each one of us bring his neighbors, seeing that He is sufficient to save us all.¹⁹

The great Jonathan Edwards likewise exhorted unbelievers with the following remarkable words,

We should count it horrible ingratitude in a poor, necessitous creature, to refuse our help and kindness when we, out of mere pity to him, offer to relieve and help him. If you should see a man in extremity of distress, and in a perishing necessity of help and relief, and you should lay out yourself, with much labor and cost, out of compassion to him, that he might be relieved, how would you take it of him, if he should proudly and spitefully refuse it and snuff at it, instead of thanking you for it? Would you not look upon it as a very ungrateful, unreasonable, base thing? And why has not God a thousand times the cause, to look upon you as base and ungrateful, if you refuse his glorious grace in the gospel, that he offers you? When God saw mankind in a most necessitous condition, in the greatest and extremest distress, being exposed to hellfire

19 John Calvin, *Sermons on Isaiah 53*, trans T.H.L. Parker (London: Clarke, 1956), 141. Italics added.

and eternal death, from which it was impossible he should ever deliver himself, or that ever he should be delivered by any other means, He took pity on them, and brought them from the jaws of destruction by His own blood. Now what great ingratitude is it for them to refuse such grace as this?²⁰



Speaking of spurning Christ's sacrifice. One can't but wonder how the final judgment will adjudicate the non-died-fors' rejection of Christ. If we assume that it is a sin to reject the gospel, then are the non-died-fors held accountable for rejecting something that was never really available to them?

That seems strange.

It would be just as strange as one of the demons being held accountable for rejecting an offer of salvation through Christ. It just doesn't compute. They can be judged for rejecting Christ's authority, and for indulging in manifold sins, but it would seem they won't be judged for rejecting Christ's offer of forgiveness. The same goes for human non-died-fors.

To my mind, one could either say that rejecting the gospel isn't a sin, or one might say that the non-died-fors are held accountable for merely disobeying God's command to trust in Christ. The former is totally unpersuasive to me, and the latter fares only slightly better. For in the case of the latter, we have to squint at the logic with one eye squeezed

20 Jonathan Edwards [1720], *Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723* (WJE Online Vol. 10), Ed. Wilson H. Kimnach, pp. 397. Regarding the atonement, Edwards immediately went on to proclaim, "But so it is: multitudes will not accept a free gift at the hands of the King of the World. They have the daring, horrible presumption as [to] refuse a kindness offered by God himself, and not to accept a gift at the hands of Jehovah, nor not his own Son, his own Son equal with himself. Yea, they'll not accept of him, though he dies for them; yea, though he dies a most tormenting death, though he dies that they may be delivered from hell, and that they may have heaven, they'll not accept of this gift, though they are in such necessity of it, that they must be miserable forever without it. Yea, although God the Father invites and importunes them, they'll not accept of it, though the Son of God himself knocks and calls at their door till his head is wet with the dew, and his locks with the drops of the night, arguing and pleading with them to accept of him for their own sakes, though he makes so many glorious promises, though he holds forth so many precious benefits to tempt them to happiness, perhaps for many years together, yet they obstinately refuse all. Was ever such ingratitude heard of, or can greater be conceived of?"

shut in order to imagine that God's command is wildly disconnected from the reality it purports to express. If we would scrunch our face at someone asking a demon to trust in Christ's propitiatory sacrifice for salvation, then the point is made.

The "silver-tongued" Presbyterian preacher, William Bates (1625–1699), is without equal when he wrote about such culpability. It seems entirely fitting to end with his arresting words:

What an high provocation is it to despise Redeeming Mercy, and to defeat that infinite Goodness which hath been at such Expense for our Recovery? The Son of God hath emptied all the Treasures of his Love, to purchase Deliverance for guilty and wretched Captives; He hath past through so many Pains and Thorns to come and offer it to them; He sollicites them to receive Pardon and Liberty, upon the conditions of Acceptance and Amendment, which are absolutely necessary to qualifie them for Felicity: Now if they slight the Benefit, and renounce their Redemption; if they fell themselves again under the Servitude of Sin, and gratifie the Devil with a new Conquest over them; what a bloody Cruelty is this to their own Souls, and a vile Indignity to the Lord of Glory? And are there any Servile Spirits so charm'd with their Misery, and so in love with their Chains, who will stoop under their cruel Captivity, to be reserved for eternal Punishment? Who can believe it? But alas, Examples are numerous and ordinary: The most by a Folly is prodigious as their Ingratitude, prefer their Sins before their Saviour, and love that which as the only just Object of Hatred, and hate Him who is the most worthy Object of Love. Tis a most astonishing Consideration, that Love should perswade Christ to die for Men, and that they should Trample upon his Blood, and choose rather to die by themselves, than to live by Him. That God should be so easie to forgive, and Man so hard to be forgiven. This is a Sin of that transcendent height, that all the Abominations of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, are not equal to it. This exasperates Mercy, that dear and tender Attribute; the only Advocate in God's Bosom for us. This make the Judge irreconcilable. The rejecting of Life upon the gracious terms of the Gospel, makes the

Condemnation of Men most just, certain, and heavy.²¹

21 William Bates, "The Harmony of the Divine Attributes in Contriving Man's Redemption," in *The Works of the Late Reverend and Learned William Bates* (London: Printed for B. Aylmer, at the Three Pigeons, against the Royal Exchange in Cornhill: And J. Robinson, at the Golden Lion in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1700), 170.

CHAPTER

5

A Brief Rant

Strict particularists suffer from no want of confidence, and because of this, they tend to think their arguments are automatically born of noble birth and sealed with the Reformed imprimatur. If an objection is raised against the credibility of limited atonement, a calm assurance sweeps over them as they regurgitate well-worn mottoes. If there is a grounding problem, merely square the circle of limited atonement by positing universal sufficiency. When asked about the viability of this sufficiency, reassert the effulgence of particularity. It's a merry-go-round that may or may not stop with a claim of mystery.

Once a person sees the game for what it is, and especially the sleight of hand, the trick doesn't excite in quite the same way. And yet, the trick has been sorely impressive, due in large part to the sheer power of assertion. Combine this with the fact that competing Reformed paradigms have been relegated to the naughty corner by a powerful minority in the camp, and essentially tucked away from sight, thereby producing a vacuum of historical knowledge amongst the Reformed community, and it is somewhat understandable why things have turned out the way they have.

There's an old guard that will scarcely entertain a book like this, or others like it. Never mind the arguments, just call it hypothetical universalism, or Amyraldianism, or four-point Calvinism. Offer up pat answers and feel supremely felicitous for having eradicated a growing mold problem.

Rinse and repeat, rinse and repeat.

CHAPTER

6

Contours of the Debate

While a laudable theologian, and frankly a giant in our neck of the woods, John Murray offers up the usual response while addressing the objection that limited atonement undermines a universal gospel offer. Here's what he wrote:

The criticism that the doctrine of limited atonement prevents the free offer of the gospel rests upon a profound misapprehension as to what the warrant for preaching the gospel and even of the primary act of faith itself really is. This warrant is not that Christ died for all men but the universal invitation, demand and promise of the gospel united with the perfect sufficiency and suitability of Christ as Saviour and Redeemer.²²

As a newlywed in the Reformed tradition, I can still remember feeling perplexed about this. In my mind, “the perfect sufficiency and suitability” of Christ as Redeemer sounded good, but I couldn't help but wonder how this perfect sufficiency existed apart from Christ's dying for sin. Dr. Murray grounds the warrant, in part, upon Christ's death. But if it is strenuously asserted that Christ did not in fact die for the non-elect, as he does, then how is Christ's death perfectly sufficient for the non-elect? This is the question we've been belaboring for a while now.

It's a strange thing. On the one hand, Dr. Murray's conception of perfect sufficiency and suitability, regarding the non-elect, is to be taken as a reasonable and justifiable statement, but when classically moderate

22 John Murray, “The Reformed Faith and Modern Substitutes—Part IV: Limited Atonement,” *The Presbyterian Guardian*, vol. 1, no. 12 (March 16, 1936): 201.

Calvinists make the same claim and root it in Christ's dying for the sins of mankind in some satisfactory sense, sirens start blowing. The rules of the game seem to be stacked tendentiously in their favor. They can declare something to be so, but we can't since we say the obvious part out loud.

Why is that?

We know why. In the minds of strict particularists, the phrase "Christ died for X" necessarily requires X to be saved. That is the hill they die on. So if anyone comes along stating that Christ died for the sins of the world, they immediately cry, "Then universalism!"

Fine. Let's say for the sake of argument that it does entail that. Then what is the mechanism that secures a real and perfect sufficiency for the non-elect? What do we call that?

Whatever combination of sounds is uttered at this point, let's say that we agree with the concept, sanctioning the nomenclature with a big rubber stamp. Next, we want to know what term best describes Christ's infallibly purchasing salvation for the elect. Whatever sound is uttered at this point, let's say we adopt it with bright, joyful faces.

Given this grand ecumenical experiment in semantics, it would seem we are on the same page. There is a universal aspect to Christ's atonement that secures a "perfect sufficiency and suitability" for all, and there is an effectual component that infallibly secures the salvation of the elect. Given the rabid response of strict particularists over the use of the phrase "Christ died for all," it would seem that this rather innocuous phrase is not innocuous in their minds.

Seeing how we're both feeling good about our progress, let's see if we can't rummage around history for a sentence that adequately captures this bifurcation. Oh, look here! The Lombardian formula. Let's use that! Let's agree that the phrase "sufficient for all" has something to do with Christ's universal saving sufficiency, and let's say that the phrase "efficient for the elect" has something to do with Christ infallibly securing the salvation of the elect.

At this point, all that is needed is but a dash of understanding and sanity to close the deal. Since classically moderate Calvinists believe with all their hearts that universal sufficiency cannot be divorced from Christ paying an objective price for the sins of all men, and since High Calvinists strenuously believe that Christ's substitution for sin cannot be divorced from efficacy, it's worth asking how this apparent impasse can be successfully navigated.

I know, let's make a distinction, one that understands "Christ's dying for sins" in two distinct ways. Let's say there is a sense in which Christ died for the sins of all, and there is a sense in which Christ died especially for the elect.

Wait a minute, this sure sounds like the old Lombardian formula again, doesn't it? So why are we freaking out over the phrase "Christ died for all?"



If we boil this debate down to a bare assertion, strict particularists harbor a natural allergy to the phrase "Christ died for all." But if that generic phrase can be understood in two senses, which is what High Calvinists are basically forced to say in some roundabout way, then it is hard to see why they don't just recognize this fact for what it is and stop the silliness. Or at least stop shooting their Reformed brethren.

I'm not so naive as to think the debate is as simple as this, but it is for some, and it should be pointed out. The path forward is to moderate slightly. This means coming over to the classically moderate side of things.²³ The waters are warm, and I think you would enjoy it.

23 It bears repeating that certain strict particularists recognize the intimate connection between the phrase "sufficient for all" and universal satisfaction, and as a result, willingly tumble further into particularism, decrying the formula with feverish consistency. Jim Ellis wrote, "To say that Christ's death on the cross provided an atonement sufficient for all is to specifically suggest that He has atoned for the sins of all men, which is essentially a universal atonement. This is a false conception and makes us, along with those who hold to a universal atonement, say the opposite of what we mean." Earlier, after saying that the phrase "sufficient for all" is unnecessary, he added, "In fact it is not only unnecessary but dangerous." See *Reformed Perspectives Magazine*, Volume 9, Number 17, April 22 to April 28, 2007. Similarly, Dr. C. Matthew McMahon wrote, "To say the atonement of Jesus Christ is 'sufficient for all, but efficient for the elect' is really saying only half a truth. The atonement is only sufficient and efficient for the elect. It is sufficient to do exactly what God designed it to do – that is – atone for all the sins of the elect. Could God have decreed something different? Let's speculate! Sure He could have. He could have decreed that trees grow upside down, that men are born with wings to fly around and live in giant green pea-pods that float in the sky..." And again, "To say that the atonement of Jesus is 'sufficient for all, efficient for the elect' is to say the same thing as the crazy statement – the atonement of Jesus Christ is 'sufficient to save aliens on planet Zeno, efficient for the elect,' or any other wild construction you would like to place in the beginning of the statement." McMahon "Jesus Died for Aliens on Planet Zeno," *T.U.L.I.P. - The Doctrines of Grace* (website)

So come! Consider this a formal invitation.

As for those still scowling, the essential components of this debate revolve around a conglomeration of related issues. At the risk of leaving something out, let's boil it down to a few heads of concern. There's the whole "Christ died for person X's sin requires person X to be saved," the "double jeopardy problem," and the "confusion in the Trinity argument." If someone believes that these three objections are sound, then that person will feel compelled to provide an alternative explanation to the more universalistic sounding passages. Texts like 1 Timothy 2:1-6, or 1 John 2:2, for example, cannot have the non-elect specifically in view.

This means that there is an exegetical difference between classically moderate Calvinists and strict particularists. The former feel comfortable with a plain reading of these texts, the latter do not, so they labor toward alternate explanations.

The heart of this debate turns, therefore, on what proves most constraining. The classically moderate Calvinist believes that the three objections noted above do not have teeth. Meanwhile, they do think the universal grounding problem, along with a handful of other issues facing strict particularists, prove insurmountable. Add to this the fact that they feel exegetically constrained by the universalistic texts, and it is easy to see why they land where they do.

Conversely, strict particularists believe that the aforementioned objections prove insurmountable. Additionally, they do not think that the grounding problem, nor any of the other issues raised by moderates, have teeth. Given these beliefs, along with what they view as reasonable counter interpretations to the universalistic texts, and it's easy to see why they land where they do.

With this basic taxonomy of the debate in mind, I believe we've shown that the grounding problem facing strict particularists is a genuinely nasty problem. Is it an insoluble defeater demanding immediate repentance?

I believe so.

But as has been pointed out just now, the contours of this debate involve a host of other issues. Until those issues are resolved, the grip of theological compulsion will likely remain tight, at least for certain people.

<https://www.apuritansmind.com/tulip/jesus-died-for-aliens-on-planet-zeno-by-dr-c-matthew-mcmahon/>

There's an old adage that says it's easier to fool someone than to convince them that they have been fooled. One, or both of us, are suffering from this psychological ailment. As we press forward, I'd like to state for the record that I think the interpretations offered by strict particularists, regarding the universalistic passages, are not convincing, and that you've been fooled into adopting a strained approach.

Naturally, bold assertions are manufactured cheaply. So let's see if we can't say a thing or two about it in the chapters to come.

CHAPTER

7

Truths (A) and (B)

Theology is wildly concerned with collating competing truths. Merely consider the divinity and humanity of Christ. There are a host of passages that clearly speak to Christ's humanity. Let's call these (A). On the other hand, there are a host of passages that clearly speak of Christ's divinity. Let's call these (B).

Theologians labor to discern how (A) and (B) relate to one another. With respect to the divinity and humanity of Christ, orthodoxy has worked out this relationship. It isn't either (A) or (B), but both (A) and (B).

When it comes to other issues more generally, a common tendency emerges among competing parties. Almost without variance, one side champions truth (A), while another side champions truth (B). Both marshal as many proof texts as they can muster and sling them at their opponent, offering various counter interpretations and arguments, and all with a certain thumping fierceness.

Just take the debate over eternal security. One side piles up a long list of warning passages (A), and the other piles up a long list of preservation passages (B). Various tangential issues will invariably creep into the discussion, such as election. But this too will have its own competing set of truths (A) and (B). And so when the debate shifts to that aspect of the discussion, the disputants will find themselves arguing over election, ultimately relating it back to eternal security with a broad, reinforcing circularity.

This is all fine and dandy. The thing I'm looking to highlight is the all too common tendency of collapsing (A) into (B), or (B) into (A) in order to eliminate tension. If we relate this back to the two natures of Christ, some have argued so fervently in favor of the humanity

passages, they've essentially negated the divinity passages. Basically, (B) is swept under the rug of (A). It's subsumed, swallowed up. Conversely, some have maintained, in light of the divinity passages (B), that Christ wasn't actually a man. In this instance, (A) is swept under the rug of (B). It's subsumed, swallowed up. The net result is a stark either/or whereby one set of truths is viewed entirely through the lens of the other. Either (A) reigns supreme or (B) reigns supreme, and the distinctive truth of the other is gobbled up.

One might summarize the situation in the following manner:

When faced with truths (A) and (B), theologians tend
to either:

Subsume (A) under (B)

Subsume (B) under (A)

Hold both (A) and (B) in tension

Hold both (A) and (B) by joining explanatory concepts
(X), (Y), or (Z)

I'm sure someone could come up with an exception or two, but in my experience, when a theological view is built upon (A) or (B) being subsumed into the other, chances are very good the viewpoint is wrong. There's a straightforward reason why. If there are a host of passages supporting a concept, and they can be taken at face value, then odds are very good that they're meant to be taken seriously as they stand; they function as one of several tent pegs that must be used to nail down our theological tent. Discarding them, or interpreting them away, is a bad idea. The tent will start flapping in the wind.

My deep concern with strict particularism is that the entire enterprise is built on removing the sting of the universalistic passages. When you read or listen to presentations on the subject by strict particularists, they'll spend a good deal of time convincing their audience that the particularistic passages are nonnegotiable. Tent peg (A). They then turn around and devote a significant amount of time to

convincing the audience that the universalistic passages don't say what they seem to be saying. Tent peg (B).

From where I'm standing, this is more than a little precarious. Time and time again, those who labor at diminishing the import of an obvious text engage in hermeneutical gymnastics. The sheer deftness and creativity of "tent-peg-dodgers" are a marvel of human ingenuity. The only problem is that they suffer the unfortunate byproduct of being dead wrong. This is exactly how the interpretive strategies employed by strict particularists strike me. Me thinks they protest a little too much.



What is often good for the goose is good for the gander. Arminians engage in the same project as strict particularists, except in reverse. Instead of gobbling up the universalistic passages, they exalt them to the place of highest honor; they reign supreme in their scheme. Conversely, the particularistic passages are devoted to reinterpretive destruction. As a result, their presentations spend a good bit of time convincing audiences that John 6 or Romans 8 don't mean what they sound like they mean.

This is all quite concerning. Hermeneutics can easily turn into the science and art of making the bible say what we want it to say. Let's face it, the vast proliferation of competing views across all areas of theology says something about us. Or the Bible. Or both.

I'm of the opinion that it's both. Some things in the Scriptures are hard to understand, and people are biased and kooky.

Of course, it would be entirely wrong to suggest that this is a peculiarly Christian problem. It's a human problem. Reality is hard to understand, and we are finite, sinful people plodding along a rock shooting through a big universe.

That's partly why I think it's a good idea to err on the side of (A) plus (B). We might scratch our heads at how (A) relates to (B), or we might utilize the wrong glue in combining (A) with (B), but that doesn't fundamentally undermine the general approach. It's a splendid methodology.



Let's swing this back around to strict particularism. The overriding desire of strict particularists is to robustly uphold the particularistic passages. We can all cheer about that. However, this ought not be done at the cost of the universalistic passages. Most don't cheer about that.

Naturally, strict particularists don't feel like they're engaging in eisegesis. Who does? But as it often turns out, theological distinctives are those peculiar articles of doctrine that a group holds with great conviction but which everyone else can see is patently false. Sinless perfectionism. Exclusive Psalm singing without instruments. The papacy. Second Blessing theology. KJV onlyism. And so on and so forth.

If I were a betting man, I'd say chances are good that limited atonement is wrongheaded, because, to quote Sesame Street, they're one of those kids doing their own thing. I'm not saying this proves it's wrong. I'm just saying that it should give a person serious pause. You've got to be darn sure you know what you're doing out there on that high wire between buildings. And from where I'm sitting, there's a lot of bodies on the pavement.

CHAPTER

8

The Scope of John 3:16

Strict particularists are largely of two minds when it comes to John 3:16. Some overtly constrict it to the elect, others play the gentile inclusion card. The former go full ham particularism, the latter, all men without distinction. The one is more obviously aligned with their doctrinal commitments, the other aims for something more modest, while still underscoring their doctrinal commitments. At root, both eagerly want to maintain that the non-elect are not principally in view; because if the non-elect fall within the purview of the world, then it follows that God gave his Son for them. And once you say that, things get dicey, since the giving is clearly connected with the provision of eternal life—there would have to be a sense in which Christ died for them.

One might say, therefore, that the principle issue dividing classically moderate Calvinists from strict particularists, regarding their understanding of John 3:16, boils down to a fairly simple question:

Do the non-elect fall within the scope of the term “world”
in John 3:16?

If the question is answered in the negative, it means that only the elect are ultimately in view. Thus, the general approach, as has been intimated, will be to understand the term “world” as indicating the inclusion of Gentiles in all their ethnic variety, which amounts to saying, theologically speaking, the elect scattered throughout the globe from every tribe, tongue and language.²⁴ It’s all people without

24 With a dash of Postmillennial panache, B. B. Warfield adopts a broader conception, arguing that the text largely has in view the consummate world in the

distinction, not exception.

Thus, one might dynamically paraphrase their theological view of John 3:16 in the following way:

For God so loved the elect scattered throughout the world,
that He gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him
should not perish but have eternal life.

If the question is answered in the affirmative, then it means that God's love in sending Christ is directed not only towards the elect, but to the non-elect as well. And since the giving of Christ is intimately connected to his sacrificial death, whereby the offer of eternal life is bound up with the atonement, then the passage would have something to say about universal sufficiency, since eternal life doesn't exist in a vacuum.

Thus, one might dynamically paraphrase this understanding of John 3:16 as follows:

For God so loved the totality of sinful humanity (all
people without exception), that he gave his only Son, that
whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal
life.

With these two competing visions of John 3:16 set before us, the issue instantly becomes an exegetical one. Which one better accords with the data?

Now there's often no end to exegetical squabbles, especially when

plan of God, and as such, he attempts to (somewhat) distance the text from the extent of the atonement question (see "God's Immeasurable Love" in *The Savior of the World*). While it would be correct to note various eschatological themes that touch upon the cosmic effects of Christ's sacrifice (Col 1:20; Eph 1:10; Rev 21–22, etc.), these are not in the foreground of John 3:16. Whatever one might say about the eschatological vision of the world, the mass of sinful humanity stands principally in view, predominating Christ's words. Try as one might, the non-elect fall within the scope of the world. Kenneth Gentry takes this further, latching onto Warfield's idea with particular zeal (see "World Gradualism," lecture 9, *A Course on Postmillennialism*). The net result is a strange, all-encompassing lens that is used to circumnavigate universal satisfaction. By way of reply, I would simply quote a line from Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*: "Elinor agreed to it all, for she did not think he deserved the compliment of rational opposition."

something cherished is on the line. This means that, for some, everything I'm about to say will make zero difference. As long as there is a possible escape route found somewhere, somehow, they'll take it. Perhaps it's a lexical ambiguity; or perhaps it's an unrelated topic smuggled into the discussion; or some discursive link on which to hang a thematic hat. Whatever the tactic, the thing I want to stress is that John 3:16, in its surrounding context, and larger context, is surprisingly clear. Multiple lines of evidence point to the usual understanding, and they don't require any shenanigans.

Let's take a look at several of these.



John's prologue establishes a theme that profoundly informs the meaning of John 3:16. It's found in 1:4-13. Christ is the true light (1:9a), and as the true light, he shines in the darkness (1:5), providing light to everyone (1:9). John the Baptist bore witness to the light, so that all might believe through him (1:7). Yet for all this light, we read:

“He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.”

Throughout John's Gospel, this sad reality is unpacked time and time again. A bright Light entered the world, calling men to repent and believe, and yet, the world of ungodly men, along with the Jews, largely refused to come to the Light. They loved the darkness (3:19). Of course, it is also true that some did believe (1:12-13), and John is keen on developing this as well. But the salient point here is that we cannot escape the fact that the world of men, to which Christ came and offered himself, was unequivocally comprised of the non-elect. It was part of his mission (see 5:33-36; 37-40, 6:27, 28-29, 32-33; 8:12; 12:35-36, 46-47).

Therefore, as John unfolds his narrative, Christ's response to Nicodemus further highlights this theme.²⁵ God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through

²⁵ Actually, the reverse is true. Christ's words informed John, and John structured his prologue with this, and other examples, in mind.

him (3:17). Following on the heels of this statement, there is an immediate juxtaposition of responses. Even though God lovingly sent Christ to be a light to the world, many rejected him (vs 19). Given the variety of responses, “the world” of John 3:16 has to include the non-elect. There’s no way around it.

For some strange reason, certain Calvinists point to verse 17 as proof that the world cannot include the non-elect, since it says that God did not send Christ to condemn the world. But this is quite wrongheaded. Christ’s first advent was one of mercifully offering life to all. Christ’s second coming will be marked by judgment. That’s the point. Christ was sent as a lamb the first time. His mission was an exceedingly gracious mission. One might even dare say (get ready for it) that God *so loved* the world that he gave his Son.²⁶



Then there’s also the illustration of the bronze serpent. Drawing on the incident recorded in Numbers 21:8-9, Christ draws a parallel between the lifting up of the serpent and his mission. Here’s the original text:

And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and *everyone* who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit *anyone*, he would look at the bronze serpent and live. [emphasis added]

Graciously, God had established a means of healing for “everyone” and “anyone” who had been bitten. There wasn’t a single bitten Jew excluded from the scope of God’s established source of healing. It was sufficient for the “bitten elect” and “bitten non-elect,” as it were. If someone bitten by a snake refused to look at the serpent and died as a result, they would have been healed had they looked. An actual provision with sufficient healing power for everyone had been

26 The “For” of verse 16 is followed by another “For” in verse 17, thereby connecting the passages conceptually. Love motivated the Father, and it is this love that marks Christ’s ministry—it isn’t aimed toward condemnation.

erected.²⁷

Given Christ's own comparison, it is more than reasonable to understand the sufficiency of the cross as extending to everyone. This is further buttressed by the connecting term "for" in John 3:16, along with the universality of the term "world" in combination with the term "whosoever." The parallel is meant to explicate the universalizing breadth of God's astonishing love toward the world.



Speaking of the term "whosoever," is there anyone who falls outside of its scope? Could you bump into someone and say, "Ah, yes, here is someone who doesn't fall within its parameters? You, sir, aren't a 'whosoever!'" It would be a strange twist of logic to suggest that the term "world" is more restrictive than the corollary "whosoever." The one informs us about the range of the other.²⁸

27 Article VI under the Second Head of Doctrine of Dort helpfully reminds us, "And, whereas many who are called by the gospel do not repent nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief; this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves." Similarly, Thomas Boston rightly noted, "The context also, to us, puts it beyond controversy: the brazen serpent was given, and lifted up as a common good to the whole camp of Israel, that whosoever in all the camp, being stung by the fiery serpents, looked thereunto, might not die, but live. So here Christ is given to a lost world, in the word, 'that whosoever believer in him should not perish,' &c. And in this respect, we think, Christ is a common Saviour, and his salvation is a common salvation; and it is 'glad tidings of great joy unto all people,' that unto us (not to angels that fell,) this Son is given, and this Child is born, whose name is called Wonderful, &c. Isa. ix. 6." Thomas Boston, "The Marrow of Modern Divinity: Appendix," in *Works* 7:486.

28 On October 22nd, 1645, Edmund Calamy, a Westminster divine, was recorded in the minutes of the sessions of Westminster as summarily stating, "I argue from the iii. of Joh[n] 16, In which words a ground of God's intention of giving Christ, God's love to the world, a philanthropy the world of elect and reprobate, and not of elect only; It cannot be meant of the elect, because of that 'whosoever believeth'... xvi. Mark, 15. 'Go preach the gospel to every creature.' If the covenant of grace be to be preached to all, then Christ redeemed, in some sense, all—both elect and reprobate; but it is to be preached to all; there is a warrant for it. ...For the minor, if the universal redemption be the ground of the universal promulgation, then... the minor, else there is no verity in promulgation. All God's promulgations are serious and true." Alex Mitchell and John Struthers, *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), 154.

Naturally, a few wild-eyed enthusiasts will want to barge in with a Greek primer tucked under their arm and declare with supreme confidence that the vast majority of English translations don't quite get it right. With endless gesticulation, they'll assure us that a better rendition would be:

God sent his one and only Son in order that every believer in him would not perish but have everlasting life.²⁹

This construction allows them to fancifully imagine that Christ was sent only for believers. They point and say, "See! Christ was sent for those who believe. So he was sent for believers!"

I'm no Greek scholar. In fact, I know next to nothing about Greek. But I do know that when men start appealing to the Greek to justify their views, especially when said appeals run counter to mainstream translations, there's more than a slight chance that they're riding the wonky train.

Whatever one might say about the Greek,³⁰ the attempt to avoid the force of the passage can only be described as a strange inversion of logic; and you don't need a PhD in Greek in order to see its folly. Let's listen to how John Hendryx frames the argument. It's illustrative of the general sentiment. He wrote,

It is not quite apparent to me why the text of John 3:16 should be an argument against limited atonement. The passage does not say Jesus died for everyone, but only that the

29 See James N Anderson, "John 3:16 Teaches Limited Atonement," *Analogical Thoughts* (blog), April 2, 2018, <https://www.proginosko.com/2018/04/john-316-teaches-limited-atonement/>. Dr. Anderson has provided the Christian community with some truly laudable works in the area of apologetics. That being said, his doctrinal bias unduly controls the text in this instance causing him to err.

30 See Bill Mounce's, "Does John 3:16 say 'Whoever?'" May 28, 2018 (blog); <https://www.billmounce.com/monday-with-mounce/does-john-3-16-say-whoever.>

He wrote, "Contextually, John is asserting a relatively unusual notion that God not only loves those who follow him (John's normal usage) but he actually loves the entire world, hence requiring an indefinite construction. To limit the meaning of the statement to a subgroup of people, 'those among you who believe,' is to read in a theology not supported by the Greek (and I am Reformed). And, 'Can you translate the verse without 'whoever'? Sure, as long as you choose words that are not limiting. 'God loved the world so he gave his only Son, that every one who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.'"

Father gave his Son for all those who would believe. It says, “Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Right? Don’t we all believe this? That is why the consistent biblical Calvinists, when presenting the gospel to unbelievers, simply teach that Christ died for ‘all who would believe...’³¹

This is exegetical sleight of hand in the highest. The text doesn’t say that God gave his Son for all those who will believe. Rather, it was God’s love for the world that led him to give his Son.

An illustration will make this crystal clear.

Suppose a football coach invites his team over to his house for dinner. Everyone is there. Imagine the coach saying to them, “Because of my great love for the team, I have prepared the very best steaks for whoever wants them. Whosoever eats shall be full indeed!”

Now imagine someone suggesting that the coach only loves those who eat the steaks; or that he only offers the food to those who actually eat the steaks. That would be absurd. If someone on the team doesn’t eat the food, it doesn’t negate the coach’s love, nor offer. He loves the entire team. And it was his love that moved him to get the food and offer it to them.



In the end, the fair-minded interpreter will note that essentially every line of evidence naturally supports the common understanding of the text;³² meanwhile, the evidence that can be marshaled in favor of

31 John Hendryx, “God’s Love, the World, the Extent of the Atonement and John 3:16,” Monergism (blog);

<https://www.monergism.com/threshold/articles/onsite/world316.html>.

32 John MacArthur agrees when he wrote, “Those who approach John 3:16 determined to suggest that it limits God’s love miss the entire point of the verse’s context. No delimiting language is anywhere in the context. Nothing relates to how God’s love is distributed between the elect and the rest of the world. It is a statement about God’s demeanor toward mankind in general... Biblically, it is an inescapable conclusion that God’s benevolent, merciful love is unlimited in extent. He loves the whole world of humanity. This love extends to all people in all times. It is what Tit 3:4 refers to ‘the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind.’ God’s singular love for the elect quite simply does not rule out a universal love of sincere compassion—and a sincere desire on God’s part to see every sinner turn to Christ.”

the strict particularists' understanding invariably appears tendentious and strained.

Calvin agrees. Commenting on the verse, he wrote,

It is a remarkable commendation of faith, that it frees us from everlasting destruction. For he intended expressly to state that, though we appear to have been born to death, undoubted deliverance is offered to us by the faith of Christ; and, therefore, that we ought not to fear death, which otherwise hangs over us. And he has employed the universal term whosoever, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also the import of the term World, which he formerly used; for though nothing will be found in the world that is worthy of the favor of God, yet he shows himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when he invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ, which is nothing else than an entrance into life.³³

The great Southern theologian, R. L. Dabney, after contradicting the view of those who would say that the term “world” refers only to the body of the elect, shared his opinion of Calvin’s exegesis,

It is noticeable that Calvin is too sagacious an expositor to commit himself to the extreme exegesis.³⁴

John MacArthur “The Love of God for Humanity,” *MTJ* 07:1 (Spr 1996), 12, 20. For another line of evidence exploring how the rhetorical nature of John 3:16 causes it to function like a universal invitation, see Dr. Bob Gonzales’ brief essay *Look and Live! John 3:16 as a Universal Gospel Invitation* (found at: <https://bobgonzal.es/>)

33 John Calvin, “Harmony of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John 1–11,” in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 22 vols., trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 17:124–125.

34 R. L. Dabney, “God’s Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy, as Related to His Power, Wisdom, and Sincerity,” in *Discussions*, 5 vols. (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1982), 1:313.

CHAPTER

9

A Distinction Without a Difference

Strict particularists are ever fond of utilizing the phrase “all people without distinction.” Not all people without exception, but all people without distinction. This, mind you, provides the theologian with a wonderfully generic expansiveness that doesn’t commit him to saying that Christ died for, or desires the salvation of, every last person. The phrase has in mind “kinds” of people, not every single person. Not just Jews, but also Gentiles.

William Hendriksen, commenting on 1 Timothy 2:4, aptly summarized the sentiment when he wrote,

The expression “all men” here in verse 4 must have the same meaning as in verse 1; see the discussion there. In a sense, salvation is universal, that is, it is not limited to any one group. Churches must not begin to think that prayers must be made for subjects, not for rulers; for Jews, not for Gentiles. No, it is the intention of God our Savior that “all men without distinction of rank, race, or nationality” be saved.³⁵

There’s a reason why such a fuss is made over this distinction. The strict particularist cannot make any concessions on this point. If he says that Christ died for all men without exception, then the battle over limited atonement has been lost. Christ will have died for the non-elect. It doesn’t matter if it is one, or two, or millions. Everything rides on their exclusion from the cross.

Since the Scriptures present limitarians with the undesirable task of trying to understand what is otherwise plain—so far as the universality

35 William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Thessalonians, the Pastorals and Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 95.

of God's love, or desire, or Christ's sacrificial death is concerned—they have to acknowledge phrases like “all men” in some relevant but tertiary sense. In light of this, their interpretive strategy becomes basically twofold:

Point out texts where “all” cannot mean every last conceivable thing or person.

And,

Adopt the phrase “all men without distinction” in order to speak generically about classes of men (and by extension not any particular non-died-for).

Let's be candid. There are plenty of verses that can be brought forward establishing the first point. So there's no need to raise a trumpet of alarm over that. The heart of the debate, rather, focuses on the propriety of the second point.

As with all aspects of this subject, one can find themselves plummeting down an endlessly dark tunnel of exegetical arguments. The sound of hermeneutical canons and small arms fire thunder across the internet. If you're like me, you've stumbled upon an article, and then a counter article, and a rejoinder of a rejoinder, along with a bottomless pit of conflicting comments that string on, sometimes with strangely insightful erudition, sometimes maddening confusion. Soon you start getting that icky feeling and decide it's high time to go for a walk outside.

While I am not at all allergic to scholarship, or complicated, even tedious arguments, at my age I am growing all the more convinced that the truth often commends itself with a measure of simplicity. This hearkens back to our (A) and (B) discussion. If there's any hope of convincing simple people in this world, then a text that is stated simply ought to be taken with a certain simplicity. And so when a passage like 1 Timothy 2:4–6 is set before us, and the strict particularist urges that Paul doesn't have in mind any non-died-fors whatsoever, this ought to raise an eyebrow.

By adopting the phrase “all men without distinction,” they're essentially saying that the text means *some men* rather than *all men*. That's why stress is laid on the fact that it isn't primarily one group of people,

but all groups of people.

That's their game plan.

Do forgive my being dense, but last I checked, Jews and Gentiles comprise all of humanity—like every last person. If you add together all the Jews that have ever lived with all the Gentiles who have ever lived, you have all of humanity.

So,

Jews + Gentiles = Everyone

As it stands, noting the inclusion of the Gentiles doesn't entail or suggest anything by way of limitation. Everyone falls into one of the two categories.

Let's suppose that we shift the categories to males and females. Setting aside the current craziness of gender fluidity, if someone said that Christ died for all males and females without distinction, that would add up to pretty much everyone by my math. Or suppose that I said that Christ didn't just die for the Harper family but also the Smith family. Would we look at anyone in either of those families and say, "Well, sorry, but Christ didn't necessarily die for you"?

Of course not.

Groups of people are comprised of individuals. It would be more than a little strange to act like people groups are inexorably disconnected from the individuals making up the group. It's not like there is some Platonic ideal of "Germans" floating in the aether. It's a term used to describe a particular socio-ethnic slice of humanity, and it encompasses every last one of them.³⁶

So when Dr. Hendriksen says that "it is the intention of God our Savior that 'all men without distinction of rank, race, or nationality' be saved," the phrase "all men" is still leading the charge. Drawing attention to distinctions of rank, race, and nationality does nothing for the limitarian cause since noting such identifications subtracts nothing

36 Even Warfield, a strict limitarian, noted that, "Is there any such thing as the 'race' apart from the individuals which constitute the race? How could the Incarnation and the Atonement affect the 'race' and leave the individuals which constitute the race untouched?" Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 111, n. 62.

from the total. Is there a German baker anywhere that is excluded? Or an American congressman? South African runner? Roman guard? Non-elect individual?

What strict particularists really want us to believe is that the phrase “all men without distinction” is conceptually nebulous and ultimately divorced from concrete individuals. With this nebulous idea in hand, they imagine that nothing specific is being said about the people that comprise the group. Individuals are not necessarily in view. Or at least not all of them. This subtlety, we must note, is tantamount to saying “some men of all kinds.” That’s what they’re really driving after. An exclusionary note must be inserted into the text in order to evade the undesirable conclusion that the sins of the non-elect fall within the purview of Christ’s death.

So, “All men” becomes
-
“Some men of all kinds.”

It’s a fascinating trip they take us on. At first you think the text says something about “all men,” but by the end, you’re told that the passage only has in mind “some men of all kinds.” Not “all men of every kind.” But “some men of all kinds.”

That little word “all” dances away from the term “men” to “kinds,” thereby modifying a new, (supposedly) more congenial concept.³⁷ A limitation is subtly smuggled in. I don’t want to come right out and say that this is sleight of hand, but it’s sleight of hand.



Let’s look at the text of 1 Timothy 2:1–6. As you read through it, keep your eye trained on the “all-ness” running through the various verses.

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers,

³⁷ “Thus the phrase [“for all” in 1 Timothy 2:6] cannot be understood universally of the individuals of classes, but indiscriminately and indefinitely of classes of individuals (i.e., of some men, as Beza rightly translates *tous pantas* here by *quosvis* —‘some’ of whatever nation, state and condition they may be...” Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 473.

intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for **all people**, for kings and **all** who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires **all people** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God **and men**, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom **for all**, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

The strict particularist is running uphill from start to finish. For even if a person grants that there's a narrowing element to some of the categories (like kings and those in high places), the narrowing remains a universal subset. What the strict particularist is eager to assert is that the non-elect are *utterly* excluded from verses 4–6. But given the sheer repetition of Paul's inclusive language, along with the fact that the non-elect comprise the "all people" of verse 1, and it's basically impossible to imagine Paul intentionally excluding the non-elect.

This is further underscored by 1 Timothy 4:10. There we read that God is "the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe." If you draw a circle and write in that circle "all people," and then draw a circle inside that circle and write "those who believe," we have the totality of humanity. There are those who believe and those who don't; and Christ is said to be the Savior of both groups.

There's really no escaping the fact that Paul says Christ is the Savior of all men without exception in 4:10. As a result, certain particularists claim that the term "Savior," when it refers to "all men," connotes the idea of preservation. God preserves (saves) their lives.³⁸

38 Commenting on the passage, John Gill wrote, "*Who is the Saviour of all men; in a providential way, giving them being and breath, upholding them in their beings, preserving their lives, and indulging them with the blessings and mercies of life; for that he is the Saviour of all men, with a spiritual and everlasting salvation, is not true in fact.*" John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3 vols., The Baptist Commentary Series (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1809), 3:296. Dr. Baugh argued similarly that "Savior" here refers to "God's gracious benefactions to all of humanity." Steven M Baugh, "'Savior of All People': 1 Tim 4:10 in Context," *WTJ* 54 (1992): 333. See Dr. Thomas Schreiner's helpful critique of Dr. Baugh's argument in "'Problematic Texts' for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles" in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. D. Gibson and J.

Here one cannot help but wonder what it would take for a strict particularist to concede a point. That being said, I suppose it's technically true that the term Savior can be understood in the sense of preservation here. But is it likely, given what Paul had just penned in 2:1-6? Are we really going to restrict 2:5-6 to the elect, and then, when we turn the page and read that Christ is the Savior of all men without exception, suddenly abandon the soteriological ship and drift off into the sea of preservation? I mean, it's possible. But at what point does the whole enterprise feel like one grand kicking against the goads?³⁹

The only reason someone would jerk the hermeneutical wheel that hard is because their system doesn't allow them to distinguish between Christ's dying sufficiently for the sins of all men, and his dying effectually for the sins of the elect. Without those two categories, they have to jam a needle through the eye of a camel.



Dear reader, if you're dead set on this narrow view of particularism, can we at least agree that the whole pray through the phone book thing is dumb? I don't know who first started this meme, but strict particularists have grown fond of saying (when addressing 1 Timothy 2:1-2) that it would be absurd to understand the term "all" as referencing everyone without exception, because then we would have to grab a phone book and start praying for everyone on the planet.

Um, no.

No long prayer vigils with a phone book are needed.

The import of Paul's statement is that we should pray indiscriminately. No one is excluded, in principle. That's his point. You can't bump into some statesman, or governor, or Joe Schmo and say to yourself, "Well, I'm sure glad that there's absolutely no reason to put them on my prayer list."



While arguably a High Calvinist, the wisdom of Charles Spurgeon nevertheless shines with unmistakable sanity when he tackles 1 Timothy

Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 382-385.

³⁹ 1 Timothy 4:10 will be explored further in chapter nineteen.

2:4. It's worth citing him at length given the exceeding pertinence of his thoughts. He said,

What then? Shall we try to put another meaning into the text than that which it fairly bears? I trow not. You must, most of you, be acquainted with the general method in which our older Calvinistic friends deal with this text. "All men," say they,—“that is, *some men*”: as if the Holy Ghost could not have said “some men” if he had meant some men. “All men,” say they; “that is, some of all sorts of men”: as if the Lord could not have said “all sorts of men” if he had meant that. The Holy Ghost by the apostle has written “all men,” and unquestionably he means all men. I know how to get rid of the force of the “alls” according to that critical method which some time ago was very current, but I do not see how it can be applied here with due regard to truth. I was reading just now the exposition of a very able doctor who explains the text so as to explain it away; he applies grammatical gunpowder to it, and explodes it by way of expounding it. I thought when I read his exposition that it would have been a very capital comment upon the text if it had read, “Who *will not* have all men to be saved, nor come to a knowledge of the truth.” Had such been the inspired language every remark of the learned doctor would have been exactly in keeping, but as it happens to say, “Who *will* have all men to be saved,” his observations are more than a little out of place. My love of consistency with my own doctrinal views is not great enough to allow me knowingly to alter a single text of Scripture. I have great respect for orthodoxy, but my reverence for inspiration is far greater. I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent with the word of God. I never thought it to be any very great crime to seem to be inconsistent with myself; for who am I that I should everlastingly be consistent? But I do think it a great crime to be so inconsistent with the word of God that I should want to lop away a bough or even a twig from so much as a single tree of the forest of Scripture. God forbid that I should cut or shape, even in the least degree, any divine expression. So runs the text, and so we must read it, “God our

Savior; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”⁴⁰

40 C. H. Spurgeon, “Salvation by Knowing the Truth,” in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 57 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1881), 26:49–50.

CHAPTER

10

Not Willing That The Correct Interpretation Perish

Supposing 1 Timothy 2:4–6 was the only text of its kind, one might be willing to accept the brittle interpretation offered by strict particularists. But since the passage has various brothers and sisters running around the bible, swallowing the horse pill of limited atonement grows all the more difficult.

This means that if passages like 2 Peter 3:9 prove stubborn, forcing us to say that God does in fact desire the salvation of the non-elect, then we have reason to feel sanguine about God's desiring the salvation of the non-elect in 1 Timothy 2:4; for once the concept is granted, we should feel obliged to view parallel phraseology in a similar way. This is merely to say that 1 Timothy 2:4 sounds an awful lot like 2 Peter 3:9.

Ergo, if 2 Peter 3:9 says what it sounds like it's saying, thereby encouraging us to view 1 Timothy 2:4 in a similar fashion, then 1 Timothy 2:5–6 begs to be viewed through a more universal lens, since the preceding instances of "all" include the non-elect. Restricting the meaning of 2:5–6 to only the elect would feel arbitrary, if not tendentious. At the very least, outside concerns would be steering the interpretation.

So,

If 2 Peter 3:9 teaches what it sounds like it teaches,

Then,

2 Peter 3:9 + 1 Timothy 2:4 encourages us to view 1 Timothy 2:5–6 in a comprehensive fashion.

Let me be clear about something. There are plenty of High Calvinists who happily agree that God desires the salvation of the non-elect. Slew's of them. We'll talk more about them in a moment. The point is that it becomes difficult to evade the force of 1 Timothy 2:5-6 once you grant that God does in fact desire the salvation of the non-elect. As we'll see shortly, there's a natural counterpart to God's desiring their salvation, namely, universal satisfaction.

Now in the case of those who loathe the idea of God desiring the salvation of the non-elect, time needs to be spent making them feel uncomfortable. After that, we'll expand the argument.



When 2 Peter 3:9 is brought up, a wry smile will creep onto many a Calvinist's face. Clearing their throat, they'll stab the word "you" with the tip of their finger and ask, "Who is the 'you' here?"

R.C. Sproul offers us the usual remarks. While discussing 2 Peter 3:9 in a sermon, he said,

But even more importantly, what is the meaning of the word "any" here? God is not willing that any should perish. Any what? Giraffes? Platypuses? Greeks?... What's the antecedent of the "any," contextually? It's the word "us." So what is Peter saying? God is not willing that any of us should perish. Now who's the us? It's obviously the people he's talking to. Who are they? We have to go and look to see whom the letters of Peter are addressed, and who are they addressed to? Yes, you guessed it, the elect. So what Peter's clearly teaching in the text is that God is not willing that any of the elect should perish. So far from being an Arminian text, this text is as Calvinistic as you can get.⁴¹

I'm sorry, but that last little sentence of his has the unfortunate

41 Doctrinal Watchdog, "God is not willing that any (of the elect) should perish—RC Sproul on 2 Peter 3:9," YouTube video, 1:08 to 2:35, December 26, 2019; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hocyVqux6bA>.

power of throwing me into a rant. Truly, we have arrived at a strange and mysterious corner of the universe when Calvin himself—a Calvinist presumably—would take umbrage with Dr. Sproul’s words.⁴² It is a tad bizarre, and mildly astonishing, that Sproul would descend so precipitously into a false dichotomy. And yet, here we are.⁴³

Returning to the text of 2 Peter 3:9, and especially that little word “you,” the situation is far more complicated than merely pointing out its antecedent, which is, according to Peter, “those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ” (1:1). We know it’s more complicated than that because of what the need for repentance and ensuing perishing in 3:9 necessarily entails. God doesn’t want certain people in the congregation to perish but to come to repentance. Naturally, if they need to repent, in order to avoid perishing, then we know that some of the congregants are not born again. God is patiently giving them time to repent and so be saved (3:15).

The situation facing Peter’s audience is troubling. False teachers have crept in (2:1–17; they’re “feasting with them” vs 13) and are leading people into sin (2:18–21). Because of this, Peter is concerned about the saints, and he urges them to make their calling and election

42 “‘Not willing that any should perish.’ So wonderful is his love towards mankind, that he would have them all to be saved, and is of his own self prepared to bestow salvation on the lost. But the order is to be noticed, that God is ready to receive all to repentance, so that none may perish; for in these words the way and manner of obtaining salvation is pointed out. Every one of us, therefore, who is desirous of salvation, must learn to enter in by this way. But it may be asked, If God wishes none to perish, why is it that so many do perish? To this my answer is, that no mention is here made of the hidden purpose of God, according to which the reprobate are doomed to their own ruin, but only of his will as made known to us in the gospel. For God there stretches forth his hand without a difference to all, but lays hold only of those, to lead them to himself, whom he has chosen before the foundation of the world.” John Calvin, “Commentaries on the Second Epistle of Peter,” in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 22 vols., trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 22:419–20.

43 Lest I be charged with misunderstanding him, I should point out that the text, given his view of it, would be a Calvinistic text, insofar as it states that God is not willing that any born again Christians perish (contra Arminianism), and that there is a foreordained group called the elect who will be infallibly brought to, and kept in, salvation (again, contra Arminianism). But to the extent that he intimates that 2 Peter 3:9 cannot be Calvinistically read as God desiring the salvation of all men, and that that reading is tantamount to Arminianism, he is quite wrong and grossly misleading.

sure (1:5-10). Some are tottering on the edge of falling away, and some have tottered off the edge into a muddy pig pen (2:22). It might be the case that he has the false teachers in mind as well, though given his strong language, and his “they-them” “you-us” contrast, maybe not. Whatever the case, Peter calls on this troubled congregation to remember that God’s judgment is real, and that God’s patience toward them is meant to lead them to repentance, since he doesn’t want sinners to perish. In this we see the heart of God.⁴⁴

Conceptually, this is very similar to Romans 2:4-5. There we read,

Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.

One of the reasons why God doesn’t immediately intervene in judgment is because he’s being patient with unbelievers. He is showing mercy, giving them time to repent. As Romans 9:22 says, God endures “with *much patience* vessels of wrath prepared for destruction” (emphasis mine). The sunshine, the rain, and all the other good things of this world, along with the invitations to be forgiven, and invitations to partake of true life, are offered—sometimes extravagantly—to the unbelieving world. To ignore it, or spurn it, is a grievous thing.

Along these lines, God’s words in Ezekiel flare to life,

Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? (Ezekiel 18:23)

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord GOD, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ezekiel 33:11)

⁴⁴ Whether the “you” is comprised of the unbelieving elect (who will repent) and/or the unbelieving non-elect (who will not ultimately repent), is not discernible with absolute certainty, so far as I can tell. That being said, it seems most reasonable to imagine a mix, as is so often the case in church life.

Given the context of Peter's words in 3:9, along with the general tenor of Scripture, which supports the idea that God is patient with the reprobate, even urging and desiring their repentance, it is entirely reasonable to read 2 Peter 3:9 as supporting the notion that God doesn't want the members of Peter's audience to perish, but instead to repent and have life. While Peter may not specifically have all men in mind, the principle can be adduced.

If this is so, and I believe that it is, then this should pressure us to view 1 Timothy 2:4 in a similar light. God desires all men to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

But if that be so, then when we land on 1 Timothy 2:5-6, we ought to feel a needling compulsion to understand the word "men" in verse five as referencing all of humanity, and the phrase "who gave himself as a ransom for all" as equally extensive with humanity.

If we're honest, it's the most natural reading.

CHAPTER

11

God's Universal Saving Desire

Until just yesterday, it was normal for Calvinists to confess, without too many nervous ticks, that God desires the salvation of the non-elect. Today it seems strangely fashionable to eschew such sentiments as altogether unpalatable, or, bizarrely enough, to not even know it's a thing.

I have a story to share in this vein.

I was once a part of a membership class at a PCA church where the senior pastor was highlighting Calvinistic distinctives. Various "Arminian" proof texts were summoned and beaten into submission. Among them were 1 Timothy 2:4 and 2 Peter 3:9. In his mind, a dividing wall of hostility stood squarely between God desiring the salvation of all men and Calvinism; so much so that it seemed he didn't think *any* Reformed thinkers believed such a thing. Curious, I raised my hand and asked if he knew of any Reformed theologians who taught that God does in fact desire the salvation of the non-elect.

The reply: no.

Sadly, this isn't a one-off. Having spent the better part of two decades rubbing elbows with the Reformed community, I can testify that it's not *that* uncommon. Ruling elders, teaching elders, it makes no difference. Men from both groups have successfully performed Herculean feats of reductionism in public settings.

How we have arrived at this unfortunate juncture of history is a question I'll leave for others to explore. The point is that it exists and that it is frustratingly mistaken.



In 1948, a report of the committee on the free offer of the gospel

was presented to the general assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. In that document, they framed the central issue thusly:

It would appear that the real point in dispute in connection with the free offer of the gospel is whether it can properly be said that God desires the salvation of all men.

In response, the majority report penned the following:

God not only delights in the penitent but is also moved by the riches of his goodness and mercy to desire the repentance and salvation of the impenitent and reprobate.⁴⁵

Following on the heels of this statement, additional insight was provided into the meaning of the word “desire.” With a bright light and a loud horn, they chased away whatever doubts one might have regarding the term’s meaning:

In the free offer there is expressed not simply the bare preceptive will of God but the disposition of lovingkindness on the part of God pointing to the salvation to be gained through compliance with the overtures of gospel grace. In other words, the gospel is not simply an offer or invitation but also implies that God delights that those to whom the offer comes would enjoy what is offered in all its fullness. And the word “desire” has been used in order to express the thought epitomized in Ezekiel 33:11, which is to the effect that God has pleasure that the wicked turn from his evil way and live. It might as well have been said, “It pleases God that the wicked repent and be saved.”

The document is well written, even-handed, glorious. Relevant passages are expounded with care and insight, statements are clear; it’s a commendable piece, worthy of digestion.

Naturally, if there is a majority view, then there is also a minority one; and in the present case, detractors were afforded a brief

⁴⁵ Quoted in John Murray, “The Free Offer of the Gospel,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1976), 4:113; *Minutes*, p. 67.

opportunity to air their concerns at the end of the document. Apparently, the spoils of war go to the victor, losers are relegated to the back of the line.

Now the fascinating thing about the majority report is that the view it propounds isn't an oddity, historically speaking. It reflects what has been the dominant view of Reformed theology from the beginning. That being said, my sense is that the situation has shifted through what might be described as something like a fomenting *animus imponentis*. Mobs of extremists have managed to reinvigorate, as a newly established given, the minority view. *That* is often deemed sacrosanct now. Meanwhile, the majority view has been shot and tossed in the trunk. There might be a touch of hyperbole to that last statement, but only slightly.

Now in terms of our present discussion, an interesting line of argumentation can be made about the extent of the atonement in conjunction with God's universal saving will, but it proceeds upon the supposition that we share this common belief. If what I have said about the rise of the minority view is even remotely correct, then any arguments built on God's universal saving desire will be viewed by many as highly suspect, if not worthy of being thrown into the wood chipper.⁴⁶

This means that some groundwork needs to be laid. At the risk of dropping quotes out of the air like bombs, various esteemed Reformed figures will be cited who clearly teach God's universal saving desire. Quotes rarely dissuade detractors. Nevertheless, since it's fun to pepper opponents with tasty citations, I'll initiate the air strike. If for no other reason, it will validate what I'm saying and thereby insulate me from charges of insanity.

Jonathan Edwards:

It is objected against the absolute decrees respecting the

46 Commenting about recent trends regarding John 3:16, John MacArthur wrote, "[Arthur Pink] argued that 'world' in John 3:16 'refers to the world of believers' rather than 'the world of the ungodly.' This notion seems to have gained popularity in recent years. A friend recently gave me seven or eight articles that have circulated in recent months on the Internet. All of them, written and posted in various computer forums by Christians, deny that God loves everyone. It is frankly surprising how pervasive this idea has become among evangelicals." John MacArthur "The Love of God for Humanity," *MTJ* 7:1 (Spr 96) p. 10.

future actions of men, and especially the unbelief of sinners, and their rejection of the gospel, that this does not consist with the sincerity of God's calls and invitations to such sinners; as he has willed, in his eternal secret decree, that they should never accept of those invitations. To which I answer, that there is that in God, respecting the acceptance and compliance of sinners, which God knows will never be, and which he has decreed never to cause to be, in which, though it be not just the same with our desiring and wishing for that which will never come to pass, yet there is nothing wanting but what would imply imperfection in the case. There is all in God that is good, and perfect, and excellent in our desires and wishes for the conversion and salvation of wicked men. As, for instance, there is a love to holiness, absolutely considered, or an agreeableness of holiness to his nature and will; or, in other words, to his natural inclination. The holiness and happiness of the creature, absolutely considered, are things that he loves. These things are infinitely more agreeable to his nature than to ours. There is all in God that belongs to our desire of the holiness and happiness of unconverted men and reprobates, excepting what implies imperfection. All that is consistent with infinite knowledge, wisdom, power, self-sufficiency, infinite happiness and immutability. Therefore, there is no reason that his absolute prescience, or his wise determination and ordering what is future, should hinder his expressing this disposition of his nature, in like manner as we are wont to express such a disposition in ourselves, viz. by calls and invitations, and the like.

The disagreeableness of the wickedness and misery of the creature, absolutely considered, to the nature of God, is all that is good in pious and holy men's lamenting the past misery and wickedness of men. Their lamenting these, is good no farther than it proceeds from the disagreeableness of those things to their holy and good nature. This is also all that is good in wishing for the future holiness and happiness of men. And there is nothing wanting in God, in order to his having such desires and such lamentings, but imperfection; and nothing is in the way of his having them, but infinite

perfection; and therefore it properly, naturally, and necessarily came to pass, that when God, in the manner of existence, came down from his infinite perfection, and accommodated himself to our nature and manner, by being made man, as he was, in the person of Jesus Christ, he really desired the conversion and salvation of reprobates, and lamented their obstinacy and misery; as when he beheld the city Jerusalem, and wept over it, saying, “O Jerusalem,” &c. In the like manner, when he comes down from his infinite perfection, though not in the manner of being, but in the manner of manifestation, and accommodates himself to our nature and manner, in the manner of expression, it is equally natural and proper that he should express himself as though he desired the conversion and salvation of reprobates, and lamented their obstinacy and misery.⁴⁷

Louis Berkhof:

b. *It is a bona fide calling.* The external calling is a calling in good faith, a calling that is seriously meant. It is not an invitation coupled with the hope that it will not be accepted. When God calls the sinner to accept Christ by faith, He earnestly desires this; and when He promises those who repent and believe eternal life, His promise is dependable. This follows from the very nature, from the veracity, of God. It is blasphemous to think that God would be guilty of equivocation and deception, that He would say one thing and mean another, that He would earnestly plead with the sinner to repent and believe unto salvation, and at the same time not desire it in any sense of the word. The *bona fide* character of the external call is proved by the following passages of Scripture: Num. 23:19; Ps. 81:13–16; Prov. 1:24; Isa. 1:18–20; Ezek. 18:23,32; 33:11; Matt. 21:37; II Tim. 2:13. The Canons of Dort also assert it explicitly in III and IV, 8.⁴⁸

47 Jonathan Edwards, “Concerning the Divine Decrees in General and Election in Particular,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 2:528–529.

48 Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 462. Berkhof’s Matthew reference is likely meant to be 23:37; likewise, his 2 Timothy

R. B. Kuiper:

When the Reformed theology describes the universal offer of salvation as sincere, it does not merely mean that the human preacher, who obviously cannot distinguish with certainty between the elect and the non-elect, must for that reason issue to all men indiscriminately a most sincere offer of eternal life and an equally sincere invitation to accept that offer. It most assuredly means that, but it means incomparably more. The Reformed theology insists that God Himself, who has determined from eternity who are to be saved and who are not, and therefore distinguishes infallibly between the elect whom He designed to save by the death of Christ and the reprobate whom He did not design to save, makes on the ground of the universally suitable and sufficient atonement a most sincere, *bona fide*, offer of eternal life, not only to the elect but to all men, urgently invites them to life everlasting, and expresses the ardent desire that every person to whom this offer and this invitation come accept the offer and comply with the invitation.⁴⁹

John Piper:

Therefore I affirm with John 3:16 and 1 Timothy 2:4 that God loves the world with a deep compassion that desires the salvation of all men. Yet I also affirm that God has chosen from before the foundation of the world whom he will save from sin. Since not all people are saved we must choose whether we believe (with the Arminians) that God's will to save all people is restrained by his commitment to human self-determination or whether we believe (with the Calvinists) that God's will to save all people is restrained by his commitment to the glorification of his sovereign grace (Ephesians 1:6, 12,

2:13 reference is likely meant to be 1 Timothy 2:4.

49 R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), 86.

14; Romans 9:22–23).⁵⁰

D. A. Carson:

I argue, then, that both Arminians and Calvinists should rightly affirm that Christ died for all, in the sense that Christ's death was sufficient for all and that Scripture portrays God as inviting, commanding, and desiring the salvation of all, out of love (in the sense developed in the first chapter). Further all Christians ought also to confess that, in a slightly different sense, Christ Jesus, in the intent of God, died effectively for the elect alone, in line with the way the Bible speaks of God's special selecting love for the elect (in the fourth sense developed in the first chapter).⁵¹

Francis Turretin:

XXX. Although God is said to will the salvation of all (1 Tim. 2:4) and not to delight in the death of the sinner (E:k. 18:23), it does not on that account follow that he has reprobated no one because the same Scripture elsewhere testifies that God does not have mercy upon some and ordains them to condemnation. It is one thing, therefore, to will the salvation of men by the will *euarestius* (i.e., to be pleased with it); another to will it by the will *endokias* (i.e., to intend it). One thing to will the salvation of all indiscriminately; another to will the salvation of all and everyone universally. The latter is incompatible (*asystaton*) with reprobation, but not the former.⁵²

Zachary Ursinus

50 John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. T. R. Schreiner and B. A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 130.

51 D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000), 77.

52 Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. G. M. Giger, ed. J. T. Dennison, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1994), 1:389; 4.14.30.

God's mercy appears in this: 1. That he wills the salvation of all men. 2. That he defers punishment, and invites all to repentance. 3. That he accommodates himself to our infirmity. 4. That he redeems those who are called into his service. 5. That he gave and delivered up to death his only begotten Son. 6. That he promises and does all these things most freely out of his mercy. 7. That he confers benefits upon his enemies, and such as are unworthy of his regard.⁵³

John Calvin:

'If any man hears my words.' After having spoken concerning his grace, and exhorted his disciples to steady faith, he now begins to strike the rebellious, though even here he mitigates the severity due to the wickedness of those who deliberately—as it were—reject God; for he delays to pronounce judgment on them, because, on the contrary, he has come for the salvation of all. In the first place, we ought to understand that he does not speak here of all unbelievers without distinction, but of those who, knowingly and willingly, reject the doctrine of the Gospel which has been exhibited to them. Why then does Christ not choose to condemn them? It is because he lays aside for a time the office of a judge, and offers salvation to all without reserve, and stretches out his arms to embrace all, that all may be the more encouraged to repent. And yet there is a circumstance of no small moment, by which he points out the aggravation of the crime, if they reject an invitation so kind and gracious, for it is as if he had said, "Lo, I am here to invite all, and, forgetting the character of a judge, I have this as my single object, to persuade all, and to rescue from destruction those who are already twice ruined." No man, therefore, is condemned on account of having despised the Gospel, except he who, disdainful of the lovely message of salvation, has chosen of his own accord to draw down

⁵³ Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 4th ed., trans. G. W. Williard (Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Co., 1888), 127.

destruction on himself.⁵⁴

John Davenant:

We grant, therefore, that in the second acception of the word *will* God truly wills, likes, desires the repentance, faith, perseverance, and salvation of all to whom the Gospel is preached and Christ offered. But in the last and most proper acception, God wills the perseverance and salvation only of his elect, in whom he never ceases working till the happy effect is produced.⁵⁵

W. G. T. Shedd:

The universal offer of the gospel is consistent with the divine purpose of predestination because (1) Christ's atonement is a sufficient satisfaction for the sins of all men and (2) God sincerely desires that every man to whom the atonement is offered would trust in it. His sincerity is evinced by the fact that, in addition to his offer, he encourages and assists man to believe by the aids of his providence—such as the written and spoken word, parental teaching and example, favoring social influences, etc.—and by the operation of the common grace of the Holy Spirit. The fact that God does not in the case of the nonelect bestow special grace to overcome the resisting self-will that renders the gifts of providence and common grace ineffectual does not prove that he is insincere in his desire that man would believe under the influence of common grace any more than the fact that a benevolent man declines to double the amount of his gift, after the gift already offered has been spurned, proves that he did not sincerely desire that the person would take the sum first offered.⁵⁶

54 John Calvin, "Commentary on the Gospel of John," in *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols., trans. W. Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 18:50–51.

55 "John Davenant, *Animadversions Written by the Right Reverend Father in God, John Lord Bishop of Sarisbury, upon the Treatise intituled, Gods love to Mankinde* (London: Printed for John Partridge, 1641), 306–307; emphasis original.

56 William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), 1:457.

To this list could be added such luminaries as Wolfgang Musculus, George Whitefield, John Bunyan, Richard Baxter, Robert Dabney, Charles Hodge, Herman Bavinck, Stephen Charnock, Charles Spurgeon, John Murray, Matthew Henry, and others.

Whatever one thinks of the phrase “God desires the salvation of all men,” the sheer volume and pedigree of the aforementioned names should satisfactorily establish beyond any reasonable doubt the majority view proffered by the OPC committee.

It’s Reformed dogma.



For some, consensus means little. Like certain dogs, they’ll loudly bark at anything.

Enter John Gerstner.

With all the muster of a frustrated prophet, he railed against the majority view in the forward to David Engelsma’s book “Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel.” While purportedly renouncing Hyper-Calvinism, Engelsma’s fervent denial of the well-meant offer lands him squarely in the bulls-eye. Following in his train, John Gerstner, by all relevant calculations, followed suit.

It’s worth reading a portion of his forward to get a taste. He wrote,

Herman Hoeksema, the Protestant Reformed denomination, and our author David Engelsma in this book emphatically reject the ‘well-meant offer’ *as including God’s desire and intention to save reprobates.*

As a Calvinist, not associated ecclesiastically with the tiny Protestant Reformed denomination and sharply divergent from some of her doctrinal positions, I feel it absolutely necessary to hold with her here where she stands, almost alone today, and suffers massive vituperation and ridicule from Calvinists (no less) for her faithfulness at this point to the gospel of God.

I had the incomparable privilege of being a student of

Professor Murray and Stonehouse. With tears in my heart, I nevertheless confidently assert that they erred profoundly in *The Free Offer of the Gospel* and died before they seem to have realized their error, which because of their justifiably high reputations for Reformed excellence generally, still does incalculable damage to the cause of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of His gospel.

It is absolutely essential to the nature of the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom He has sent that whatever His sovereign majesty desires or intends most certainly—without conceivability of failure in one iota thereof—*must come to pass! Soli Deo Gloria! Amen and amen forevermore! God can never, ever desire or intend anything that does not come to pass, or He is not the living, happy God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but an eternally miserable being weeping tears of frustration that He was unable to prevent hell and can never end it thus destroying Himself and heaven in the process.*⁵⁷

If that doesn't raise an eyebrow, consider the following by way of follow-up:

One may sadly say that Westminster Theological Seminary stands for this misunderstanding of the Reformed doctrine since not only John Murray and Ned Stonehouse but also Cornelius Van Til, R. B. Kuiper, John Frame, and, so far as we know, all of the faculty have favored it. The Christian Reformed Church had already in 1920 taken this sad step away from Reformed orthodoxy and has been declining ever since. The Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. had even earlier, though somewhat ambiguously, departed and the present mainline Presbyterian church affirms that "The risen Christ is the savior for all men."

The Presbyterian Church in the United States (now part of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.) is not far behind, and the

⁵⁷ John Gerstner, "Foreward," in David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel: An Examination of the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel*, 3rd ed. (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2014), xi–xii; emphasis original.

separatist Presbyterians such as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America are following in this train. Only the Protestant Reformed Church seems willing to hold to the whole counsel of God on this doctrine.⁵⁸

My guess is that history only has room for one Athanasius, not two, Dr. Gerstner—especially when centuries of near unanimity have passed concerning the subject of God’s saving desire. As I was saying earlier, the courtyards are bright and sunny, birds are singing. It’s time to get some vitamin D.

Truth be told, there’s a fairly bright line separating Calvinism from Hyper-Calvinism, and it’s God’s universal saving desire. But since large swaths of Reformedom is overrun with extremes, thereby creating a sense of normalcy, or sense of security through numbers, most quickly dismiss the suggestion that a denial of God’s universal saving desire is the *sine qua non* of Hyper-Calvinism.

Since this point is critical to the overall project of this volume, another chapter will be devoted to exploring the constituent elements of Hyper-Calvinism. After that, we’ll return to Christ’s universal saving sufficiency.

58 John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*, ed. by Don Kistler, 2nd edition (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 142.

CHAPTER

12

The Controlling Principle of Hyper-Calvinism and its Various Lesser Shades

The term Hyper-Calvinism has become something of a phantom eluding definition and substance, as if the creature were essentially extinct and not clomping about in modern-day Reformedom. It's easy to think this way, so long as one pulls the right definitional levers to suit their theological tastes.

“Simply preach to all men and you'll be safe and sound,” says the man clutching Owen's trilemma. “Don't restrict gospel preaching to only those who show signs of conviction. That is the essence of Hyper-Calvinism!”

I get it. People don't go around with a shimmering smile, declaring, “Ah, yes, I am a Hyper-Calvinist.” Ding! But is that really where the line should be drawn—at the practical extremes of Hyper-Calvinism? Wouldn't it be better to identify the key assumptions, to trace the mental steps preceding such dire conclusions and regard those as problematic?

Of course. But in so doing, it might reveal how many Calvinists today, while, perhaps, not card-carrying Hyper-Calvinists, are nevertheless sitting at the end of the dock with their feet in the water.



The road to a truncated gospel offer is paved with reductionistic Calvinism. In order to get there, all that needs to happen is for someone to uphold unconditional election in a way that maintains a logically strict bifurcation in the face of complementary biblical evidence, such that everything is flattened to accommodate the narrow

paradigm. Here's how it works:

Step One: Affirm the following: "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated."

Step Two: Make this truth the absolute, controlling element whereby all seemingly contrary evidence is brought into submission to this fundamental point.

Step Three: Work the logic out consistently across the board.

That's the essence. It operates under the assumption that since God elected some and not others, then it would be absurd to say that God desires the salvation of the non-elect in some sense, or that He seriously loves them, or that He would send Christ for them, or that there really is a gospel available for such dead sinners, etc.

Let's look at how the logic specifically plays out. We'll begin with the love of God.

Martyn McGeown, a pastor in the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), succinctly stated the usual rationale. He wrote,

If the omnipotent God loves someone, He saves him. How could He not? What kind of love permits one's beloved to perish, when it is in his power to save him?⁵⁹

If we adopt this Hyper-Calvinistic gem, any talk of God loving the non-elect won't make sense. It's an effectual, omnipotent, unidirectional love that runs along a single track. Thus, when we come to a passage like John 3:16, we *know* that the term "world" cannot include within its scope the non-elect. Therefore, interpretive strategies must be employed in order to keep the passage from stepping on our tidy system.

God's desire must operate in a similar fashion. Since God is absolutely sovereign and has only chosen the elect for salvation, it would be entirely absurd to suggest that he wants, or desires, or wishes any of the reprobate to be saved. His purposes are clear and undivided.

59 Martyn McGeown, "A Response to 'The Free Offer of the Gospel,'" in the Puritan Reformed Journal," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, 51.2 (April 2018): 57.

Therefore, any effort exerted toward “nuance” proves to be scholastic trickery and makes God double-minded, unstable, eternally frustrated, or impotent. With his usual flair, Gerstner developed the idea,

The question facing us here is whether God could “desire” that which He does not bring to pass. There is no question at all that He can desire certain things, and these things which He desires He possesses and enjoys in Himself eternally. Otherwise, He would not be the ever-blessed God. The Godhead desires each Person in the Godhead and enjoys each eternally. The Godhead also desires to create, and He (though He creates in time) by creating enjoys so doing eternally. Otherwise He would be eternally bereft of a joy He presently possesses and would have increased in joy if He later possessed it—both of which notions are impossible. He would thereby have changed (which is also impossible) and would have grown in the wisdom of a new experience (which is blasphemous to imagine).

If God’s very blessedness means the oneness of His desire and His experience, is not our question (whether He could desire what He does not desire) rhetorical? Not only would He otherwise be bereft of some blessedness which would reduce Him to finitude, but He would be possessed of some frustration which would not only bereave Him of some blessedness, but would manifestly destroy all blessedness. This is clearly the case because His blessedness would be mixed with infinite regret. Our God would be the ever-miserable, ever-blessed God. His torment in the eternal damnation of sinners would be as exquisite as it is everlasting. He would actually suffer infinitely more than the wicked. Indeed, He would Himself be wicked because He would have sinfully desired what His omniscience would have told Him He could never have.

But why continue to torture ourselves? God, if He could be frustrated in His desires, simply would not be God. When, therefore, we read of God’s “desiring” what He does not bring to pass, let us not “grieve” His Spirit by taking this

literally, but recognize therein an anthropomorphic expression.⁶⁰

Next up, we have the gospel call. Much is made about the difference between an offer and a call. The reasons why are variegated, yet unified around a simple orbit of ideas. Building on what we have already established, someone like Mr. McGeown believes it's absurd to imagine God offering the gospel to the non-elect, since "an offer is an expression of readiness to do or give something to someone; or it assumes a kind of desire that someone accept it. Moreover, an offer implies some kind of receptivity and ability in the one to whom the offer is made—one does not offer a cup of coffee to a corpse!"⁶¹

Mr. McGeown's rationale is standard fare. Herman Hoeksema, a zealous defender of such ideas, similarly rejected the notion of an offer, because, to quote De Jong,

First of all, the term [offer] contains the idea of an honest and sincere desire on the part of the offerer to give something. Without such an earnest will and desire on the part of him who makes the offer, the offer would not be honest or upright. Second, there is included in the idea of offer the fact that the offerer possesses that which he extends to some person(s). In the event of acceptance the offerer must be in a position to impart that which is offered. Third, the offerer reveals by his offer the desire that it be accepted.. Fourth, the one who offers something does so either conditionally, or upon the condition that he is aware that the recipients of the offer are able to fulfill the condition. If any one of these elements is eliminated from the concept, the idea of offer is no longer retained.⁶²

Dr. Daniel went on to say, regarding Hoeksema,

60 John H. Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*, ed. by Don Kistler, 2nd edition (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 2000), 145–146.

61 McGeown, "A Response to 'The Free Offer of the Gospel,'" 60.

62 Alexander C. De Jong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer: The Views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder* (Franeker, The Netherlands: T. Weaver, 1954), 43.

Furthermore, Hoeksema rejected offers on the basis of the second quality. Granted, God's grace is infinite but it is not universal. To be more to the point, God does not have salvation to give to all men, for it was not provided for all in the eternal Covenant (call it what you will) nor did Christ purchase it for all men. One must be very careful not to preach 'All things are ready' so as to imply that God has all things relating to salvation ready to give to all men. This is just not so.⁶³

The grand summation of such things might be found on the lips of John Gill, when he wrote,

That there are universal offers of grace and salvation made to all men, I utterly deny; nay I deny that they are made to any; no not to God's elect: grace and salvation are promised for them in the everlasting covenant, procured for them by Christ, published and revealed in the gospel, and applied by the Spirit.⁶⁴

If God did not elect the reprobate, and has no intention of saving the reprobate, nor desires to save the reprobate, nor loves the reprobate, and hasn't sent Christ for the reprobate, nor died for them in any provisional sense, then there is, properly speaking, no good news for such a sinner. As such, it would be preposterous to imagine God sincerely offering salvation to such a soul. The gospel is not in the cards. All that one can and should do is indiscriminately proclaim the facts of the gospel and call men to repent.



With these dictums in place, the move towards a denial of duty-faith (on the part of some Hypers-Calvinists), and by extension, a truncation of the gospel call's universality (on the part of some), and a denial of

63 Curt Daniel, *Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill* (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983), 403.

64 John Gill, *The Doctrine of Predestination Stated* [...] (London: Printed, and sold by G. Keith; J. Robinson; Mr. Edwards, Halifax; Mr. Akenhead, Newcastle; and Mr. Taylor Berwick, 1752), 29.

common grace (on the part of some), does not require a grand logical leap. It's the natural and systematic progression of a few key assumptions.

Here's the progression.

Since God harbors no real goodwill toward the non-elect, it is absurd to talk about common grace. God might preserve the reprobate and allow them to persist in order to accomplish His purposes, but this should not be confused with grace. They are objects of wrath whose hearts God will harden. Moreover, if sinners are incapable of faith apart from God's enabling grace, then the gospel cannot be an invitation for them to exercise faith. And if that is so, then it cannot be the sinner's *duty* to evangelistically believe—hence, their denial of duty-faith.

When these theological nuggets are tossed together and shaken thoroughly, a Hyper-Calvinistic creed is ready to blossom.

Enter *The Gospel Standard Articles of Faith*:

ARTICLE 24, GOSPEL INVITATIONS: We believe that the invitations of the Gospel, being spirit and life, are intended only for those who have been made by the blessed Spirit to feel their lost state as sinners and their need of Christ as their Saviour, and to repent of and forsake their sins.

Article 26: Duty Faith and Duty Repentance Denied: We deny duty faith and duty repentance – these terms signifying that it is every man's duty to spiritually and savingly repent and believe. We deny also that there is any capability in man by nature to any spiritual good whatever. So that we reject the doctrine that men in a state of nature should be exhorted to believe in or turn to God.

Article 33: PREACHING TO THE UNCONVERTED: Therefore, that for ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them to savingly repent, believe, and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature power, and, on the other, to deny the

doctrine of special redemption.⁶⁵

This is how one moves from reductionistic Calvinism to full throttle Hyper-Calvinism.



The fundamental problem here is an unwillingness to allow biblical data to nuance the flattening effect of the logically strict bifurcation, and as such, allow for a greater breadth of paradox and mystery.

It really is that simple.

Hyper-Calvinism is, if nothing else, reductionistic and rationalistic. It begins with certain fundamental tenets and seeks to be consistent at the expense of other controlling data points. It fails to recognize, at root, the fundamental divide between the Creator and creature, and by extension, archetypal and ectypal theology,⁶⁶ a crucial biblical teaching in Reformed theology.

Another way of approaching this is to ask: What is acceptable mystery, dear Christian, and what is not acceptable mystery, and why?

In the case of the Arminian, he cannot accept the idea that God chooses some and not others. This (it is thought) inevitably undermines human responsibility and makes God a terrible monster. But as hard as the truth of unconditional election might appear to us, the Scriptures are surprisingly clear. We must uphold it while also affirming God's deep goodness and love, along with genuine human freedom. Conversely, if a person determines *a priori* that God cannot desire the salvation of the non-elect in a real sense, in spite of clear Scriptural revelation, saying that it cannot exist alongside election, then they are traveling the same road as the Arminian, but in merely another direction.

In order to escape this theological morass, we have to hold together seemingly competing truths, allowing each to speak with clarity and force. It is (A) + (B). If we aren't going to be controlled by our own

65 *Articles of Faith and Rules* (Harpden, UK: Gospel Standard Trust Publications, 2008), 34, 35, 40.

66 For more on this point, see R. Scott Clark, "Janus, the Well-Meant Offer of the Gospel and Westminster Theology," in David VanDrunen, ed., *The Pattern of Sound Doctrine: A Festschrift for Robert B. Strimple* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2004), 149–80.

subjective presuppositions, and if we are going to humbly accept divine realities that stretch beyond our limited understanding, this is the path we have to take.



So Hyper-Calvinism is a mindset. And to the degree that the mindset controls countervailing data, and to the degree that the mindset affects one's personal actions, to that same degree the bulb of Hyper-Calvinism glows all the brighter.

Let it be said, then, that Hyper-Calvinism exists along a continuum.

In many ways, it's all about consistency, or perceived consistency. How far will a person travel before they think the Scriptures are calling them to halt? There are plenty in the Reformed camp who are theologically constrained by the same incipient reductionism undergirding Hyper-Calvinism. This is to say that the strict bifurcation is alive and well in their thinking, and it functions as a deep control on the data of Scripture, even though it doesn't bleed into practical extremes. In their case, the spirit of Hyper-Calvinism is bumping about, though not in full form.

In all of this, Hyper-Calvinism is a tricky term. No one welcomes the appellation because it is a dirty word amongst the Reformed. And rightly so. But if we are going to honestly recognize extremes, especially the controlling element energizing the whole program, then we must be ready to cast a dubious eye toward those who handle the "problematic texts" like a Hyper-Calvinist, or argue like a Hyper-Calvinist, or harbor those modes of thought that comport nicely with the substructure of the view.

In the end, if we don't call people sitting on the cliff's edge Hyper-Calvinists, so be it. But we should be prepared to say that a person who denies God's universal saving desire (or balks at the word "offer" or is afraid to say to the unconverted that God loves them) is wading out into the unbiblical waters of reductionistic Calvinism. And they should stop. It carries the notable scent of Hyper-Calvinism.

CHAPTER

13

Harmony, Not Confusion

Speaking of desires, I'd like to make a simple argument. And just to be clear, I really do want you to accept it.

The argument is rooted in an observation. The observation is that there's often a general and particular aspect to the ways of God. If there is a general call, there's a special call. If there's common grace, there's special grace. If there's general revelation, there's special revelation. If there's providence, there's miraculous intervention. And so on.

Let's set a few on display:

God's Will

Revealed/Prescriptive will ----- Secret/Decretive Will

God's Grace

Common Grace ----- Special Grace

God's Call

General Call ----- Effectual Call

God's Love

General Love ----- Special Love

God's Salvific Desire

General Desire ----- Special Desire

If this pattern touches the atonement, one would expect to discern a general aspect (touching the totality of humanity) and a particular component (accomplished on behalf of the elect). In other words, one would expect to detect a universal provision (one rooted in God's general love and desire and will) and a particular aspect (one rooted in God's special love and desire and decretive will).

Naturally, strict particularists are happy to acknowledge certain generalities connected with the atonement, so long as these generalities don't encroach upon the sacred ground of limited expiation. This is to say that they'll happily confess, with a certain effulgence of charity, that the non-died-fors receive manifold goods associated with common grace.⁶⁷

But this is surely not enough. Given the preponderance of passages that *at least sound like* Christ was given for all, the most natural conclusion would be to recognize that Christ died provisionally for the sins of humanity (universal satisfaction) and particularly for the elect (Christ as federal head impetrated all the to-be-applied benefits of salvation). This cheerful duality fits the usual pattern.

Christ's Atonement

General (sufficient for all)

Particular (efficacious for the elect)

This couplet rather nicely closes a much needed loop. Since God loves the world, he sends Christ to be the Savior of the world. And since God desires the salvation of all men (1 Timothy 2:4), then it makes sense that his desire would find expression in Christ paying the price of universal redemption (1 Timothy 2:6).⁶⁸ And since Christ has established a sufficient remedy for all, God can point the world to it

67 Stated succinctly, the key issue is that limitarians will not allow for the "general aspect" to include Christ suffering, substituting, or satisfying for the sin of any who are non-elect.

68 Or to frame it differently, if God desires the salvation of all, and there is no expression of that desire in the atonement, it would be a very odd discovery, especially in view of the many texts that certainly sound universal in scope.

through a general invitation. And since a general remedy has been accomplished, God can show great patience towards unbelievers, giving them time to repent, even graciously granting rain and sunshine and children and many other diverse blessings (Romans 2:4).

If we eliminate Christ's universal remedy from the picture, the other counterparts struggle to cohere. For example, what does it mean for God to desire the salvation of the non-elect, but to then not provide a remedy suitable to the effect of his desire, namely, a source of salvation? Or what does it mean for God to offer them a remedy that does not exist? Or to call them to look to Christ as Savior, if there be no Savior? Or to patiently give them time to repent, when there is no source of salvation to repent unto? Or what does it mean for God to love the world and give his only Son, only to not send his Son for them?



Now I am well aware that various rejoinders will be lobbed over the castle wall at this point. It might be asked, for example, why God would desire the salvation of the non-elect and provide a suitable remedy fulfilling that desire, only for that desire to not find *ultimate* expression through the application of salvation? Why do step one but not step two?

The short answer is: take it up with God.

The longer answer is to point again to the duality. God, for wise and holy purposes, operates on a general track, and, for wise and holy purposes, God operates on a particular track. He truly desires the salvation of all men—it flows out of a heart of pure goodness and love. But as all theologians worth their salt know, there's a hierarchy of desires in the purposes of God, and some of these desires don't ultimately express themselves due to his prioritizing other ends.

Consider:

God doesn't delight in the destruction of the wicked. But God destroys the wicked.

Jesus doesn't want to drink the cup of God's wrath (Matthew 26:39). Jesus wants to drink the cup of God's wrath (John

4:34).

God doesn't approve of the death of Christ by the hands of sinners. God approves of the death of Christ by the hands of sinners (Acts 2:23; Isaiah 53:10).

The Scriptures are replete with similar examples.⁶⁹

Insofar as the purposes of this chapter are concerned, it is worth observing that God's desire must surely express itself *in some fashion*, so far as his universal desire of salvation is concerned. Otherwise, why say it at all?

So the question proposed for High Calvinists is: Does God's desire express itself *at all* in Christ's *sin bearing* sacrifice? If not, this would be an odd discovery, especially in light of the passages that seem to express just such a thing.

If you agree, then welcome to the party.



Speaking of the will of God, this seems as good a time as any to discuss the strange charge of wrongdoing that is often leveled against classically moderate Calvinists. It's the old confusion in the Trinity retort.

Robert Letham, in the recent tome defending limited atonement—a book as long as it is frustrating at times—expressed the usual sentiment when he wrote,

...the key problem with the Amyraldian position, and Hypothetical Universalism in general, is that it posits disruption in the Trinity. The electing purpose of the Father

69 For an exquisite treatment of this subject, see Robert L. Dabney, "God's Indiscriminate Proposals of Mercy, as Related to His Power, Wisdom, and Sincerity," in *Discussions*, 5 vols. (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1982), 1:282–313; John Piper, "Are There Two Wills in God?," in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. T. R. Schreiner and B. A. Ware (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); and Robert Gonzales, "The Well-Meant Offer: Its Logical Consistency," *It is Written: Promoting the Supremacy of Scripture* (blog), May 5, 2017; <https://bobgonzal.es/index.php/2017/05/05/the-well-meant-offer-its-logical-consistency/>.

and the work of the Spirit are in conflict with the intention in the death of the Son on the cross. This is contrary to the simplicity of God and the indivisibility of the Trinity.⁷⁰

And,

The Trinity works in harmony rather than in unison—but not in discord. The triune God is one being with one undivided will; to suggest a variety of conflicting purposes in the mind of God is to head in the direction of tritheism. This undermines the simplicity of God. Moreover, when the maxim *opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt* [the external works of the Trinity are undivided] is taken into consideration, Amyraldianism and Hypothetical Universalism present the whole Trinity as being in two minds, first determining that the incarnate Son should die on the cross for the salvation of the whole human race, but then in contrast determining that some, not all, be saved, and going on to put this latter determination into effect.⁷¹

And again, just to make sure we get the point,

In short, the Hypothetical Universalist position, in whatever guise, is inherently incoherent.⁷²

I'm glad he brought up simplicity, because that is exactly what I was thinking about his point.

If finding contradiction is as easy as noting multivalent purposes in the mind of God, we're all doomed. But of course, that's not how the game is played. It's more tendentious in nature. He straps on the

70 Robert Letham, "The Triune God, Incarnation, and Definite Atonement," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. D. Gibson and J. Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 440. For a similar perspective, and one specifically targeting the multiple-intentions view of Shultz and Ware—but which also offers complaints about Hypothetical Universalism in its wider varieties—see Mike Riccardi "Triune Particularism: Why Unity in the Trinity Demands a Particular Redemption," *TMTJ*, (Spring 2022) 159–183.

71 Letham, "The Triune God," 442.

72 Letham, "The Triune God," 444.

adjective “conflicting” to the word “purposes” and then confidently brushes the dust off his hands. There isn’t a multi-faceted cohesiveness to the Hypothetical Universalist view, but “conflicting purposes.”

Let’s see if we can play the game.

Step One: Determine that the incarnate Son lovingly invite the reprobate to receive salvation.

Step Two: Determine that the Spirit not lovingly move the will of the reprobate to accept the Son’s well-meant offer.

Step Three: Proclaim confusion!

Or,

Step one: Note that God sets his electing love on the predestined before the foundation of the world.

Step two: Note that the elect are objects of wrath before they believe.

Step three: Proclaim emotional confusion!

This is a dumb game. Grasshoppers aren’t in a position to so easily discern contradiction in the volitional matrix of God’s eternal counsels. When set in the infinite web of interdependent connections, the various threads of God’s purposes consolidate into a tapestry of majestic proportions. Each strand adds a color, or edge, to the desired pattern. From our myopic vantage point, mystery is unavoidable.

Having said that, it’s quite easy to resolve the supposedly glaring contradiction between Christ dying for all and God not effectually saving all. Listen again to what Letham said, “Hypothetical Universalism present[s] the whole Trinity as being in two minds, first determining that the incarnate Son should die on the cross for the salvation of the whole human race, but then in contrast determining that some, not all, be saved, and going on to put this latter determination into effect.”

If we take the phrase “two minds” and simply replace it with the phrase “multi-faceted purposes,” the fateful “contrast” evaporates. All

that needs to be shown is that God has a variety of complementary reasons for doing things the way he does.

Intention: In order to exhibit the greatness of his love, the Father sends Christ to die for the world. Christ out of love for the world dies for the entire world. The Spirit, in perfect accord with the Father and the Son, fills and guides and supports the Son in this purpose.

Intention: In order to exhibit the exceeding greatness of his grace and love for the elect, the Father sends Christ to especially die for the elect. Christ out of love for the elect dies effectually for them. The Spirit, in perfect accord with the Father and the Son, fills and guides and supports the Son in this purpose, and effectually applies salvation to the elect in due time.

In accordance with the first intention, God demonstrates his love to all the world by loving his enemies in an astonishingly shocking way. The great Judge and Ruler performs the greatest conceivable act of love for those who deserve to be executed at once. Does this not display the goodness and greatness of this King to all the watching world of men and angels? Moreover, God's just judgment, which rests on men breaking his Law, is heightened when men spurn such an amazing offer. God actually extends an offer of mercy to treasonous rebels, and yet, amazingly, they continue to shake their fists at him. Through this they store up wrath, and through this, God's patience is magnified. This is part of God's plan, and the Father and Son and Spirit harmoniously share this goal.

In accordance with the second plan, God intends to demonstrate that he has mercy on whom he will have mercy and he hardens whom he will harden. This shows the exceeding grace of God towards those, who, although they too shook their fists at him, were nevertheless graciously awakened to the depths of their sin and effectually drawn unto Christ. God lovingly pursues them to the uttermost, overcoming their unbelief and uniting them to his Son through faith. Through this, God's attributes are made to blaze on the stage of human history. And the Father and Son and Spirit harmoniously share this goal.

Only the staunchly biased will drive a wedge between these

intentions, saying that God is schizophrenically of “two minds” and “incoherent,” or that somehow these intentions are pitted against the plans of the Spirit or Son. So long as the Son dies for all *in accordance* with a particular *intention* of the Father, no contradiction emerges. Christ dies for all in one sense—in accordance with the Father’s plan—and he dies efficaciously for some—to fulfill a different set of intentions.⁷³

It really is that easy.



Let us imagine that there’s a famous movie director working on a film. Suppose he is principally animated towards its completion for the sake of his wife. The project is dedicated to her. There would be no incongruity, nor offense, if the director also had an interest in creating something entertaining for the public. Nor would it be wrong to say that the director wanted to accomplish a new technique in cinematography, or build his brand, or advance the arts, or benefit financially, or find personal fulfillment through the artistic process. All of these reasons cohere in a multi-faceted aim.

In view of this illustration, it would be a mistake to imagine that the Producer and Director of human history is confined to a singularly narrow intention in the death of Christ. God’s intentions feather into an infinite array of complementary effects and purposes. To say, therefore, that God cannot intentionally provide a provision sufficient for the sins of all men, while yet intending to effectually save some, is to tread on dangerous ground. Shall what is formed say to the Potter, “No, you cannot do that”?

73 One can further see the error of Letham when he approvingly quoted Warfield as saying, “How is it possible to contend that God gave his Son to die for all men, alike and equally; and at the same time to declare that when he gave his Son to die, he already fully intended that his death should not avail for all men alike and equally...” Letham, “The Triune God,” 443. I am no expert in Amyraldism, so I can’t speak to that, but I can say that there are plenty of Hypothetical Universalists who *clearly deny* that Jesus died for all men, alike and equally, in terms of intention to save. Most assert that Christ died for all with an *unequal intent*. I would be just such a one. So it is unfair to mischaracterize the view and then denounce Hypothetical Universalism “in whatever guise” as incoherent. The only guise here is the appearance of fairly representing the view.



In a neighboring vein of thought, it has long been the tendency of strict particularists to improperly frame the debate over the extent of the atonement. Instead of rightly asking “Was Christ punished for the sins of the elect alone?” they often resort to something far less helpful. By way of illustration, Berkhof wrongly asked,

Did the Father in sending Christ, and did Christ coming into the world, to make atonement for sin, *do this with a design or for the purpose of saving only the elect or all men?* That is the question, and that is the only question.”⁷⁴

No, that is not the only question. Not by a long shot. Hypothetical universalists gladly affirm that Christ’s death was designed to save the elect alone. They argue that that is an *indispensable aspect* to God’s design. In fact, it’s difficult to imagine *any* confessionally Reformed thinker demurring.

David and Jonathan Gibson similarly err when they wrote,

The doctrine of definite atonement states that, in the death of Jesus Christ, the triune God intended to achieve the redemption of every person given to the Son by the Father in eternity past, and to apply the accomplishments of his sacrifice to each of them by the Spirit. The death of Christ was intended to win the salvation of God’s people alone.⁷⁵

By failing to ask the more incisive question concerning the extent of Christ’s satisfaction, the debate is not only obfuscated, thereby engendering confusion, but the cards are subtly stacked in their favor. For when the question is so framed, there’s an implicit assumption that God’s special intent to save the elect must be coextensive with the extent of Christ’s satisfaction. This is to say that since God intends to

⁷⁴ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 394.

⁷⁵ David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, “Sacred Theology and the Reading of the Divine Word: Mapping the Doctrine of Definite Atonement,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. D. Gibson and J. Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 33.

savingly apply the benefits of Christ's death only to the elect, then it must mean that Christ only died for the sins of the elect.⁷⁶

But this does not follow. It's the very point in dispute!

This tendency on the part of strict particularists is frankly sloppy, not to mention prejudicial. The history of this debate demands greater precision. But as is often the case when a group grows comfortable, sounding off in their echo chamber, nuance is lost but appreciated by cohorts all the same.

Returning to Berkhof's question, a slight emendation can wonderfully improve it:

Did the Father in sending Christ, and did Christ coming into the world, to make atonement for sin, do this with a design or for the purpose of making a satisfaction only for the sins of the elect or all men?

That is a much better question. And the answer is: all men.

⁷⁶ Lynch, in his review of the book, rightly noted its problem in understanding the actual state of the question: "Generally speaking, the book's *de facto* definition often amounts to little more than this: God intended or designed to savingly *apply* the benefits of the death of Christ to the elect alone. That God designed the death of Christ to be savingly applied only to the elect is hardly controversial among any confessional Reformed theologian, whether he or she affirms hypothetical universalism or not. Instead, the book only obfuscates the real issue that advocates of definite atonement should be arguing, namely, that Christ made a satisfaction only for the sins of the elect." Michael Lynch, "Review of *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*," *Calvin Theological Journal* 49 (2014): 353.

CHAPTER

14

Penal Substitution and the Old Double Jeopardy Argument

In the minds of many a strict particularist, the hinge upon which this debate turns is penal substitution. That is the *creme de la creme* objection to detractors; the big daddy; the silver bullet. There's not a single article, or book, or blog post promoting limited atonement that doesn't proudly unsheathe this argument and flamboyantly swing it around. No, not in the whole world.

Since this objection is so well known, let's quickly summarize it in the form of a nifty catechism.

A Catechism of Strict Particularism

Q: How do we know that Jesus did not die for the sins of the whole world?

A: *Because it would then follow that everyone would be saved, and this contradicts the Scriptures.*

Q: Why else do we know that Jesus did not die for the sins of the whole world?

A: *Because it would mean that some for whom He died end up in hell.*

Q: Why is it a bad thing for a died-for to end up in hell?

A: *It would be a bad thing because it would mean that their sins are being punished twice; once in Christ, and once in them.*

Q: Why is punishing sins twice a bad thing?

A: *Double Jeopardy. Dub.*

Q: Is there any way to avoid this conclusion?

A: *Not without denying penal substitution.*

Q: Why is penal substitution so important?

A: *Because it means that Christ's death infallibly saves. It doesn't make*

salvation a mere potentiality, it perfectly secures redemption for all those for whom it is made. It accomplishes a glorious certainty.

Q: So all those for whom Christ died must be brought to salvation?

A: Yes!

Q: Why?

A: *Because justice demands it.*

Q: What is our opinion of John Owen?

A: *He's the man.*

Q: Why is he the man?

A: *Because he penned the trilemma.*

Q: What is the trilemma?

A: *The trilemma is a concise argument proving limited atonement.*

Q: How does it go?

A: *As follows:*

The Father imposed His wrath due unto, and the Son underwent punishment for, either:

- 1. All the sins of all men.*
- 2. All the sins of some men, or*
- 3. Some of the sins of all men.*

In which case it may be said:

- 1. That if the last be true, all men have some sins to answer for, and so, none are saved.*
- 2. That if the second be true, then Christ, in their stead suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the whole world, and this is the truth.*
- 3. But if the first be the case, why are not all men free from the punishment due unto their sins?*

You answer, "Because of unbelief."

I ask, Is this unbelief a sin, or is it not? If it be, then Christ suffered the punishment due unto it, or He did not. If He did, why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which He died? If He did not, He did not die for all their sins!

Q: Do you enjoy posing this argument to detractors?

A: *Very much!*

Sometimes an argument is championed so loudly and so frequently that its underlings take the resounding repetition as a sign of indestructibility, as if all the scholarly world has beheld its splendor and capitulated to its greatness. Owen's trilemma would be just such an example. The reality, however, is that this argument, along with "the catechism's" overall logic, is not nearly as strong as strict particularists think. In fact, it's pretty weak once the underlying presuppositions are laid bare.



Let's start with a statement.

Christ's satisfaction is penal in nature, *not* pecuniary, and the difference between these two is penetratingly significant.

While admittedly a long quote, Hodge brilliantly summarized the nature of both models. It deserves careful reflection. He wrote,

There are, however, two kinds of satisfaction, which as they differ essentially in their nature and effects, should not be confounded. The one is pecuniary or commercial; the other penal or forensic. When a debtor pays the demand of his creditor in full, he satisfies his claims, and is entirely free from any further demands. In this case the thing paid is the precise sum due, neither more nor less. It is a simple matter of commutative justice; a *quid pro quo*; so much for so much. There can be no condescension, mercy, or grace on the part of a creditor receiving the payment of a debt. It matters not to him by whom the debt is paid, whether by the debtor himself, or by someone in his stead; because the claim of the creditor is simply upon the amount due and not upon the person of the debtor. In the case of crimes the matter is different. The demand is then upon the offender. He himself is amenable to justice. Substitution in human courts is out of the question. The essential point in matters of crime, is not

the nature of the penalty, but who shall suffer. The soul that sins, it shall die. And the penalty need not be, and very rarely is, of the nature of the injury inflicted. All that is required is that it should be a just equivalent. For an assault, it may be a fine; for theft, imprisonment; for treason, banishment, or death. In case a substitute is provided to bear the penalty in the place of the criminal, it would be to the offender a matter of pure grace, enhanced in proportion to the dignity of the substitute, and the greatness of the evil from which the criminal is delivered. Another important difference between pecuniary and penal satisfaction, is that the one *ipso facto* liberates. The moment the debt is paid the debtor is free, and that completely. No delay can be admitted, and no conditions can be attached to his deliverance. But in the case of a criminal, as he has no claim to have a substitute take his place, if one be provided, the terms on which the benefits of his substitution shall accrue to the principal, are matters of agreement, or covenant between the substitute and the magistrate who represents justice. The deliverance of the offender may be immediate, unconditional, and complete; or, it may be deferred, suspended on certain conditions, and its benefits gradually bestowed.⁷⁷

If we take seriously the conditionality annexed to salvation, the strict particularist's logic is deeply cut. If a man does not believe, and therefore doesn't meet the condition for receiving salvation, forgiveness is not granted, and God can justly condemn them, even though Christ satisfied the demands of the Law and justice on their behalf. This

⁷⁷ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 2:470. To quote another Hodge, this time A.A. Hodge, he wrote, "In debt, the payment of the thing due, by whomsoever it may be made, *ipso facto* liberates the debtor, and instantly extinguishes all the claims of the creditor, and his release of the debtor is no matter of grace. In crime, a vicarious suffering of the penalty is admissible only at the absolute discretion of the sovereign; remission is a matter of grace; the rights acquired by the vicarious endurance of penalty all accrue to the sponsor; and the claims of law upon the sinner are not *ipso facto* dissolved by such a satisfaction, but remission accrues to the designed beneficiaries only at such times and on such conditions as have been determined by the will of the sovereign, or agreed upon between the sovereign and the sponsor." A. A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1867), 37.

would be akin to someone sacrificing a lamb during Egypt's tenth plague but not applying the blood to the doorpost. Even though a price was paid by sacrificing a lamb, the household would still be judged for not meeting the attendant condition.

Again, it really is that simple.

In his commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, Ursinus agreed while answering the following objection:

Obj. 2. All those ought to be received into favor for whose offences a sufficient satisfaction has been made. Christ has made a sufficient satisfaction for the offences of all men. Therefore all ought to be received into favor; and if this is not done, God is either unjust to men, or else there is something detracted from the merit of Christ.

Ans. The major is true, unless some condition is added to the satisfaction; as, that only those are saved through it, who apply it unto themselves by faith. But this condition is expressly added, where it is said, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3 : 16.)⁷⁸

However we slice this pie, a condition is a condition.⁷⁹ If you do X, then Y will happen. If X is not performed, Y does not follow. We can cavil long into the night about the supposed impropriety of a died-for being punished in hell, but if God sets the terms, his terms rule supreme, and, by extension, accord with justice. There's no higher

78 Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 4th ed., trans. G. W. Williard (Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Co., 1888), 107.

79 Reformed theologians, however, rightly distinguish between *meritorious* and *instrumental* conditions. While some actions *earn* some rewards, and so are meritorious, other actions are simply instrumental means by which we are given some benefit. They are actions "antecedent to the benefit of the promise; and the mercy or benefit granted, is suspended until it be performed." John Flavel, "*Vindiciæ Legis et Fœderis: Or, A Reply to Mr. Philip Cary's Solemn Call*," in *The Whole Works of the Rev. Mr. John Flavel*, 6 vols. (London: Printed for W. Baynes and Son, 1820), 6:349. See also Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992–1997), 2:674; *Institutio theologiae elencticae*, 16.6.21.

court. It's entirely his prerogative.



Let's amplify the point by exploring a series of questions.

Question: Is it within God's right to establish a condition for receiving salvation, whereby failing to meet that condition results in the person not receiving the thing promised?

We know the answer is yes.

How do we know the answer is yes?

Because God established a condition for receiving salvation.

Next question: Is there something about penal substitutionary atonement that utterly precludes one from annexing a condition for receiving salvation?

Again, we know the answer. It's no.

How do we know the answer is no?

Because God did it.

Given this conditionality, the strict particularist has to run their logic down a different path. According to their rationale, God is under obligation, so far as justice is concerned, to not allow a died-for to fail to fulfill the condition, otherwise they would be condemned, which would be unjust. The reason: punishment would be inflicted twice. This is how many construe the matter.⁸⁰

A number of things can be said in response.



First, let's return to the original question, namely, whether it is within God's right to establish a condition for salvation, whereby failing to meet the condition results in not receiving the thing promised. If God establishes a condition that *justly* excludes a person from receiving the thing promised upon their failing to meet the condition, it

80 "The personal, physical, and spiritual suffering of Christ cannot be undone. Because the suffering has been borne and cannot be returned, it must take effect." And again, "When God has given an answer to a sin, it has been given." Garry J. Williams, "The Definite Intent of Penal Substitutionary Atonement," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. D. Gibson and J. Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 511, 515.

would be odd to then turn around and claim that the effect of failing to meet the condition is unjust. Or to say it differently, if failing to meet the condition results in an unjust situation, then how is the condition justly set up? The point of a condition is to establish an agreed upon contingency, whereby failing to do X does not result in Y. *That* is the fair agreement. But if it's not a fair agreement, then the condition wouldn't be set up; the very presence of a condition should signal to us that it is a fairly established one.

Now it may be the case that God sovereignly purposes to meet the condition given his own interests (such as with election), but that would be something quite different than the supposed injustice of punishing a sinner for not appropriating salvation. Christ's satisfaction as penal satisfaction does not *intrinsically* preclude the establishment of a condition that can be *justly* forfeited.⁸¹

Here the Calvinist may want to point to, say, the covenant of redemption as the thing which ensures that the elect receive salvation, and then say that Christ, in accordance with this, infallibly secured the *application* of the atonement (or that Christ impetrated all the to-be-applied blessings). But if so, it means that it isn't the satisfaction itself that *necessitates* an application. It would be the wider agreement established in the Godhead that obligates the dispensing of pardon to the elect.

81 Hodge is again penetratingly insightful. He wrote, "The application of its benefits [i.e., Christ's satisfaction] is determined by the covenant between the Father and the Son. Those for whom it was specially rendered are not justified from eternity; they are not born in a justified state; they are by nature, or birth, the children of wrath even as others. To be the children of wrath is to be justly exposed to divine wrath. They remain in this state of exposure until they believe, and should they die (unless in infancy) before they believe they would inevitably perish notwithstanding the satisfaction made for their sins. It is the stipulations of the covenant which forbid such a result. Such being the nature of the judicial satisfaction rendered by Christ to the law, under which all men are placed, it may be sincerely offered to all men with the assurance that if they believe it shall accrue to their salvation. His work being specially designed for the salvation of his own people, renders, through the conditions of the covenant, that event certain; but this is perfectly consistent with its being made the ground of the general offer of the gospel... What the Reformed or Augustinians hold about election does not affect the nature of the atonement. That remains the same whether designed for the elect or for all mankind. It does not derive its nature from the secret purpose of God as to its application." Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:557–558.



Secondly, in discussions like this it is altogether common to point out that the elect are objects of wrath until they believe (Eph 2:3). Not only does this mitigate against pecuniary notions of satisfaction, since the cross doesn't immediately save anyone (as would be the case with paying a creditor), it underlines the fact that a condition has to be fulfilled in order to escape condemnation. This observation is salient, good and right. However, there's a related point I want to expand upon by exploring the relationship between faith, apostasy and condemnation.

Since many in Baptistville, along with a fair number of Calvinists, tend to downplay the warnings in Scripture, the ideas that are about to be expressed will likely seem strange, if not alarming. This is especially true for those who hold to a rather flat view of "once saved always saved." Advocates of easy believism will have a stroke.

Let's approach this slowly.

We'll begin with an example of a warning passage. Many could be selected, but for the sake of simplicity, let's pluck Colossians 1:21–23a out of the bag. There we read,

"And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard."

In order to be presented holy and blameless before God, Christians must continue in the faith, or else be damned. This is to say that final salvation is conditioned upon perseverance.

If you do not do X, then Y will happen.

X = Persevering faith

Y = Condemnation

When stated this plainly, many will feel a strong aversion swell within them, since it will likely be supposed that I am stating something

that contradicts the Canons of Dort, or Westminster, or the London Baptist Confession of Faith, or whatever. Quite the contrary. These all teach the perseverance of the saints, or, similarly, the preservation of the saints.

In order to demonstrate that the saints must continue or else be damned, one need only ask themselves what the saints are being *preserved from*? Answer: apostasy and condemnation. The same can be asked with respect to perseverance. What are the saints needful to persevere in? Answer: faith. Otherwise they fall away and suffer the penalty of condemnation.

Robert L. Reymond agrees when he writes the following,

These several conditions—endurance to the end, abiding in Christ and his Word, continuing in or holding fast to the faith—are they not essential to one’s final salvation? And where they do not exist, can that professing Christian expect to be finally saved? To the first question, the Calvinist would answer emphatically in the affirmative, and to the second, he would respond just as emphatically in the negative. These answers may come as a surprise to some Arminian Christians, but Calvinist Christians, out of genuine concern to oppose the quietism and antinomianism within evangelical churches, are as zealous to insist upon these conditions as means to salvation as are Arminians.⁸²

None of this is to deny, of course, that some profess spurious faith (Titus 1:16; Matthew 15:8), or that God infallibly keeps his sheep (John 10; Romans 8), or that those who ultimately fall away are consistently viewed in Scripture as not occupying the same sphere of spiritual life as the elect (1 John 2:19, 3:6; 1 Timothy 2:19; Matthew 7:23; Hebrews 6:9, 10:39).

Now the reason for highlighting the warnings and the necessity of perseverance is to point out that condemnation is held in abeyance so long as one’s union with Christ is maintained through faith. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are *in Christ*” (Romans 8:1; emphasis mine). And, “If anyone does not *abide in me* he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown

82 Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 786.

into the fire, and burned” (John 15:6; emphasis mine. See also 1 John 2:24).

This means that salvation is found through union with Christ. Before we were united to Christ, we were objects of wrath. When we are united to Christ through faith, we are told that this union is maintained through an abiding faith. Condemnation is threatened in the event of separation. It’s a real thing.⁸³

How this relates to limited atonement is seen in the following way. If double jeopardy is a matter of strict injustice once a person’s sins are forgiven (or punished in Christ for that matter), then the threat of condemnation tells us that it’s not legally improper; it accords with justice. Because if it was diametrically opposed to justice, the warnings would not exist. This tells us that union with Christ is the critical feature to this discussion. Outside of *that* connection condemnation is a live option. Whatever we think satisfaction necessarily entails, so far as double jeopardy is concerned, it doesn’t *de facto* preclude condemnation. Apostasy justly results in condemnation. It’s woven into the very fabric of the soteriological framework thereby signaling its legality.⁸⁴

A fascinating passage to ponder in this respect is 1 Corinthians 11:32. It reads,

But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Some of the Corinthians were sick and even dying because of their sinful behavior. Interestingly, their removal from the earth was gracious,

83 The warnings exist in relationship to bonds of some sort. For example, we wouldn’t warn a bachelor to remain faithful to his wife, and we wouldn’t warn an NFL player to carefully maintain policies in the NBA. Warnings presuppose a relationship of some kind. In the case of those who argue that the New Covenant is comprised of only regenerate believers fail to appreciate this point. People fall away from something objective, as evidenced in the olive tree of Romans 11. You can actually see the branches lying on the ground. If a person is unwilling to say that they lost their salvation, then one must resort to the idea of the covenant. The latter is my view. Apostates break covenant and thereby fall from an objective relationship (Hebrews 10:29).

84 If a man is acquitted of a crime, and there is no conditionality at play, then how can the acquitted man be threatened with guilt for the same crime later? There would be no legal basis upon which to leverage the charge or threat.

since this kept them from being condemned with the world. Here we are explicitly told that condemnation was a potentiality that God circumvented through some rather extraordinary means. Rather than appealing to some kind of Owenian logic whereby sin is covered through a pecuniary model of satisfaction, which would presumably remove the threat of condemnation as a matter of strict injustice, we should recognize that God lovingly preserves his own because he has promised to do so. Therefore, it would seem that satisfaction is not the crucial piece that cements a believer to Christ,⁸⁵ but rather God's preserving grace which energizes the believer to cling to Christ. God stirs us to faith and he stirs us to remain steadfast.

Broadening the discussion back to unbelievers more generally, this means that the threat and realization of condemnation for those who refuse to trust in Christ is entirely just, even in view of Christ's satisfaction.



Fourthly, there's a technical component to this discussion that is often lost on strict particularists. There's the pecuniary and penal distinction that has been touched upon already, but also the related idea that Christ suffered a just equivalent (*tantundem*), and not the exact penalty the Law demands of sinners (*idem*). In order to get at this concept and its relationship to the double jeopardy argument, a series of quotes will be leveraged to communicate the central idea and its resulting implications. We'll listen to Baxter, Dr. Alan Clifford, and then Tony Byrne who especially provides a delightful illustration and explanation of the concepts.

First up, Richard Baxter. He wrote,

Cont. 28. *Is it not unjust to punish him that Christ died for, even one*

85 Michael Lynch wrote, "Reformed theologians have insisted on an infallibility of the application of Christ's satisfaction to the elect, but this infallibility is not to be found in or grounded on the *nature* of satisfaction. To rest infallibility of application on the nature of Christ's atoning work assumes not only a crass pecuniary logic regarding the satisfaction, but also collapses the distinction between election and the work of Christ." Michael J. Lynch, "*Quid Pro Quo* Satisfaction? An Analysis and Response to Garry Williams on Penal Substitutionary Atonement and Definite Atonement," *EQ* 89.1 (2018): 65.

sin twice?

Ans. No, Unless it were the same person that suffered, or the very same punishment that was due (and all that was due) were expected again; and unless it were against our mediators will. But all is contrary in this case. 1. The Law bound no one to suffer but the offender. 2. Therefore Christ suffering was not the same punishment which the Law did threaten, but it was *Satisfaction* instead of it; which is the *Tantundem*, not the *idem quod debitum suit*, but *redditio æquivalentis alias indebiti*, as the Schoolmen call it. For *noxæ caput sequitur*; the Law threateneth not a surety, but only the sinner, and *ubi alius solvit, simul aliud solvitur*. 3. And Christ himself never satisfied with any other intent; and therefore it is according to his will, that they that tread under foot the blood of the Covenant wherewith they were Sanctified, as an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of Grace, should suffer the far sorer punishment, *Heb.* 10. Yea it is Christ himself that will have it so, and that doth so judge, them, and inflict this punishment for the contempt of grace.

And it is his will that his own members be punished by correction, notwithstanding his sufferings: As many as he loveth he doth rebuke and chasten: And Christ doth not wrong himself: The end of his suffering never was to execute the redeemed from all suffering, nor to make believers lawless.⁸⁶

Christ did not suffer the exact punishment due sinners (the *idem*) but rather suffered a just equivalent (*tantundem*). The Law threatens eternal punishment for unrepentant sinners, so naturally Christ did not suffer the identical punishment in that respect. Owen recognized and admitted as much. However, since he viewed the price paid in a more commercialistic sense (so much for so much sin), he saw a direct correlation between the price and the injustice of paying that same price again. But if pecuniary notions are rightly discarded, then the

⁸⁶ Richard Baxter, *The Scripture Gospel Defended* [...] (London: Printed for Tho. Parkhurst, 1690), 47–48. Baxter's language has been modernized for ease of reading.

problem dissolves. Dr. Clifford explained,

The idem-tandundem distinction automatically answers Owen's objection that if any suffer eternally for whom Christ died, then 'double payment' is being demanded. But assuming the commercialist analogy, there is no duplication of payment. Those who reject the gospel do not suffer again what Christ has suffered for them. He 'paid' the tantundem, or equivalent penalty; they will 'pay' the idem, or exact price.⁸⁷

Tony Byrne brilliantly illustrated the categories when he wrote,

Second, his work was a *penal* satisfaction, and not a *commercial* transaction. Therefore, the focus is on the *person* suffering and not the *thing* 'paid.' Here's what I mean. In a commercial transaction, the focus is on the *thing* paid. For instance, let's say a man named Bilbo eats at a restaurant and his bill comes to 40 dollars. Frodo hears that Bilbo does not have the money to pay and decides to step in and pay the bill. The restaurant will therefore not pursue Bilbo for the 40 dollars. The *thing* has been paid. Bilbo merely comes to a mental awakening to the fact that his bill has been paid by another (Frodo) and is thankful. Whether he's thankful and acknowledges it or not, no one pursues him for the money. It's paid in full and there are no further obligations.

A *penal* payment, on the other hand, is not like this. Consider the following scenario: Frodo is put in jail for committing a certain crime X for 10 years. Frodo is really innocent but suffers in jail for the full 10 years. Afterwards, it is discovered that Bilbo has really committed crime X and not Frodo. Even though Frodo has already suffered for 10 years, the state

87 Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640–1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 130. One might try to argue that the price paid, even while an equivalent one, functions as the same price being paid since it is justly commensurate to what is required. Here it still must be admitted that it isn't the exact payment, but rather a gracious arrangement whereby a surety sovereignly affixes conditions that relax the strict need for release. The payment doesn't obligate God, narrowly considered.

captures Bilbo and makes him suffer the same 10 years in jail, despite the fact that Frodo has already suffered the amount of time required. Can you see the difference? The focus in this penal transaction is on the *person* paying and not the *thing* paid.

Next, or thirdly, let's consider the *substitutionary* aspect of Christ's work. Let's suppose that Bilbo commits crime X but denies it, and yet Judge Gandalf rightly finds him guilty, but Frodo loves Bilbo and agrees to suffer for crime X. Judge Gandalf is under no obligation to accept Frodo's willingness to suffer in his stead, but graciously allows the arrangement under some conditions. Judge Gandalf allows Frodo to suffer for X but will not release Bilbo from his penal obligations unless he confesses to committing crime X and joins Aragorn's army within a span of time. Even though Frodo has suffered for crime X in his innocence, Bilbo may still be charged with the crime and not be released unless he fulfills the judges aforementioned conditions. There is no injustice if Bilbo suffers for crime X even though Frodo has suffered for it, since it's not *the same person* "paying twice." Injustice would occur if the same person suffered twice for the same crime, but there is no injustice if person 1 (Frodo) suffers for person 2 (Bilbo) and person 2 (Bilbo) remains under penal obligations (i.e., remains under penal wrath, so to speak) unless he fulfills certain conditions.

There is graciousness in **(1)** the judge even allowing for a substitute and in **(2)** allowing the suffering of Frodo to be credited to Bilbo when the conditions are met. Both acts are gracious since it's a penal *substitution*. If it was a commercial transaction, Bilbo, whether he's thankful or not, could claim that it's his *right* to be released since the thing has already been paid by Frodo.

However, this commercial presentation is not what we find in scripture regarding Christ's work. We find that it's *penal* (not commercial) and that it's *substitutionary* (entirely an act of grace with no obligation to release upon the thing being suffered). If Christ suffers for someone and yet that same person

suffers for their own sins, there is no “double jeopardy.” It’s not the same person suffering twice, but two different people suffering. God has added conditions to His gracious scheme in order for the guilty party to be released from their penal obligations. If one does *not* meet the conditions (i.e., repent and believe), then they are still held accountable to suffer for their crime (hell).

Thus, I (as one who maintains that Christ suffered for the entire human race) really hold to a penal substitution and not a commercial transactionalism. Even though Christ’s work is *analogically* compared to various commercial transactions in scripture for the sake of illustration, it is not an univocal comparison. Christ’s satisfaction is *not* literally commercial, but *penal* in nature. If one pushes the commercial analogies so far as to make them literal, then I believe that one will arrive at a pound for pound (or a so-much-suffering-for-so-much-sin) viewpoint, such that Christ was wounded measurably for the amount of the elect’s sins alone which were transferred to him. This view has been called ‘Equivalentism’ historically.⁸⁸



Lastly, we have what might be the simplest and most straightforward objection: direct biblical evidence is nonexistent while conditionality is everywhere. The evidence that this conditionality must be fulfilled in *direct view of Christ’s satisfaction* is simply not to be found.

Owen’s trilemma is laced with a few, critically questionable ideas. Various concepts can be marshaled and strapped together, and even seem to glow with promise, but when the argument cannot be anchored in a text that clearly supports the idea of double jeopardy, it begins to appear suspect. And when certain key ideas undergirding it prove troublesome, it begs to be viewed as weak.

The closest passage, so far as I can tell, that can be brought forth in support would be Romans 8:32–34. While a magnificently beautiful

88 Tony Byrne, “On Penal Substitution,” *Theological Meditations* (blog), December 29, 2006; <http://theologicalmeditations.blogspot.com/2006/12/on-penal-substitution.html>.

passage, it has in view the elect (8:29, 33). The classically moderate position can easily account for this by noting that the verse is centered on the efficacious side of the equation. Yes, when Christ dies efficaciously for someone (the elect), God will certainly give them all things. Notwithstanding the beauty of this, it must be admitted by strict particularists that it doesn't address the logic of double payment or double jeopardy. It only links God's purposes in Christ for the elect to certain predestined ends.

Fascinatingly, Dr. Carl Trueman, a capable historian in the strict camp, very nearly agreed with the general sentiment expressed here. In an interview with *Reformation 21*, he was asked the following question:

Following on from the previous question, it is sometimes argued that the Hodges (Charles and Archibald Alexander⁸⁹) as well R. L. Dabney, did not agree with Owen's view of 'limited atonement,' in particular disagreeing with the use of the "double jeopardy" argument that Owen employed. What do you make of this?

By way of response, Trueman said,

Aha, here you probe one of my weaknesses. I rarely read the Hodges and gave up on Dabney many years ago. Indeed, I am an early modernist in terms of scholarship, and, with the exception of Warfield, have really no interest in American theology and have never found any non-contemporary American theologian to be that helpful compared to the European Reformed Orthodox of the seventeenth-century. Thus, I have to plead ignorance on their comments on this point. As to the 'double jeopardy' argument, that is not a strong element of the limited atonement argument; I would not rest my case on that point; and neither did Owen. Far more significant is the covenant of redemption (which, as noted above, was seen by the Reformed Orthodox to be

89 Here the interviewer erred in equating Charles's view with his son's position. While A. A. Hodge sometimes used language which would suggest a moderate position, as in all legal obstacles being removed, he nevertheless maintained that the imputation of sin to Christ was limited (thus reverting to a Turretinian position), unlike his father.

defensible on exegetical grounds), and the issues raised by the Socinian critique of what we now call penal substitution, along with Hugo Grotius's response to the same.

This is likely the closest Dr. Trueman and I will ever come toward finding agreement on this subject, so I'll take it.

CHAPTER

15

Owen Strikes Back

The happy moment Dr. Trueman and I shared at the end of the last chapter quickly melts away once the Owenian conception of the covenant of redemption comes rumbling into view.

The warm fuzzies were good while they lasted.

Now it's time to draw fresh battle lines. And the fresh battle lines come in the form of Owen's all-encompassing view of the covenant of redemption. The central complaint that is going to be lodged against it is that it operates in a Procrustean fashion, cutting off all possibility of universal satisfaction, unnecessarily so.

In many ways, the concept has to be tackled after the last chapter. Those wearing "Make Owen great again" baseball caps will feel a sharp urge to slap me if I don't. The reason: it's pretty darn important to the overall scheme of limited atonement.

Thankfully, Dr. Trueman masterfully unpacks the concept in a chapter on Owen entitled "Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption: John Owen on the Nature of Christ's Satisfaction." So we have a good guide for the tour.

For our purposes, here's what a simple explanation of the covenant of redemption might look like for Owen:

A decision is made in the Godhead for Christ to pay a price for the release of those for whom he will die.

God the Father accepts this price.

The timing of the application is stipulated according to God's determination (i.e., the agreement)

Christ pays the price through his death.

The paid price is not refusable since the payment is baked into the agreement; the agreement was made with that in mind.

Christ's High Priestly office and intercession cannot be divorced from the extent of his atoning death.

Therefore, all those for whom Christ died will be infallibly saved, not only as a matter of grace, but intra-Trinitarian obligation.

Here's how Dr. Trueman summarized it: "In brief compass, the covenant of redemption is that which establishes Christ as Mediator, defines the nature of his mediation, and assigns specific roles to each member of the Godhead. The Father appoints the Son as Mediator for the elect and sets the terms of his mediation. The Son voluntarily accepts the role Mediator and the execution of the task in history. The Spirit agrees to be the agent of conception in the incarnation and to support Christ in the successful execution of his mediatorial role."⁹⁰

If this basic theological construct is adopted, the retort that Owen's view requires an immediate release from sin at the cross (given his commercial categories) is allegedly sidestepped. Trueman explained why the argument doesn't stick. He wrote,

...not only does the atonement pay the price for sin, it also procures the conditions necessary for the application of Christ's death to the believer in time... To use language of causality, Christ's death is the meritorious cause of the individual's salvation; thus, [Owen's] use of the term *ipso facto* should be seen as referring to causality, not chronology. What changes at Calvary is not the *state* of the unbelieving elect but their *right*: as elect they are not immediately justified; but they

90 Carl R. Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption: John Owen and the Nature of Christ's Sacrifice," in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. D. Gibson and J. Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 214.

do immediately have the full right to enjoy all the benefits of Christ's death when they are united to him at the time he has appointed. This, in turn, points toward the causal grounds of the economy of redemption in the intra-Trinitarian establishment of Christ as Mediator by way of the covenant of redemption.⁹¹

The key idea is that the price paid has to be situated in the wider context of the agreement. It's an interconnected web that forms a whole. Other factors cause it to apply at certain appointed times.

Given its own logic, it's hard to throw a *huge* fit. Granted, some will continue to note problems with the commercialism and its attendant issues,⁹² but this isn't my overriding concern here. The complaint I want to lodge runs along different lines. And it can be advertised through the following quote from Dr. Trueman. Right after describing the covenant of redemption, he wrote,

What is important to understand at this point is that it is the covenant of redemption and *not any other* theological consideration that determines the nature and significance of *any act* that Christ performs as Mediator.⁹³

In case you missed it, the Procrustean ax has started to swing.

Essentially everything else Trueman notes about Owen hinges on this restrictive element. There is the covenant of redemption for the elect and there cannot be anything else alongside it for the non-elect. Not in terms of Christ's dying for sins.

If the payment of Christ is refusable, for example, then:

It is necessary either that God the Father is able to break a prior compact which he has made; or one must allow that Father and Son might be set in opposition to each other

91 Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption," 212; emphasis original.

92 See Dr. David Allen's critique in "A Critical Review of *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*," in *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016), 657–763; cf. pp 686–691 for his review of Trueman's chapter. Dr. Lynch's review article of Gary Williams is insightful as well: "*Quid Pro Quo* Satisfaction? An Analysis and Response to Garry Williams on Penal Substitutionary Atonement and Definite Atonement," *EQ* 89.1 (2018): 51–70.

93 Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption," 214; emphasis mine.

relative to salvation.⁹⁴

If it is asked what Christ's universal sufficiency means in this schema, Trueman said, that for Owen,

...arguments for universal sufficiency based on the Son's ontology are of very limited value and are likely to provoke the obvious commonsense response of "so what?"

And again,

For Owen, abstract discussions of universal sufficiency are just that: abstract and irrelevant. It is not a question of whether the death of the Son of God could be sufficient for all; it is a question of what that death was intended to accomplish. That intention was determined by God in the establishment of the covenant of redemption.⁹⁵

Irrelevant? Abstract? A reply of "so what"?

Good grief.

Whole arms and legs are being chopped off.

Everything is being subsumed by particularism. There is (A) and only (A). Sorry, (B). You cannot exist alongside (A).

The entirety of Owen's argument proceeds upon the supposition that God cannot have multiple intentions with multiple purposes with respect to Christ's mediatorial role. The covenant of redemption *utterly* precludes *any* notions of complementary programs whereby the heart of God finds expression through Christ's atoning death for humanity.

This really is the crux of the debate. There can be no duality. No complementary program. No other dimension to Christ's atoning work for humanity. It is all deemed illogical, off limits, forbidden. A huge sign is posted at the door which reads: universalistic passages cannot nuance the discussion. They cannot find expression in a general plan. They aren't allowed space to breathe in the Father's will for the Son.

To return to a point made in an earlier chapter, this explains why the strict particularist is engaged in a full-time hermeneutical campaign to read the universalistic texts in a different, more accommodating light. It

94 Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption," 219.

95 Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption," 214–15.

has to fit the system. It has to be shoehorned in.

But how is this worth it? Honestly. Is it really worth all the trouble? Doesn't the ax get heavy? Wouldn't it be better to just admit that you're jamming a round peg through a square hole? Wouldn't it be better to adopt a duality of intent that finds concrete expression in the cross work of Christ?

Which is worse: Allowing for multiple intentions in the cross work of Christ or fighting a protracted and highly questionable trench war against the universalistic texts?

Sadly, we know the answer.

And this is precisely why charges of rationalism and reductionism are leveled against strict particularism. Election becomes the all-controlling lens through which everything is viewed and ultimately subdued. Can God intend for Christ to die sufficiently for all and efficiently for the elect? No, it would destroy the Trinity!

But if that is so, then how is God's love for mankind, or his desire that all be saved, or his desiring the wicked to live not result in a similar explosion? I'll tell you why. It's acceptable mystery. And why is it acceptable mystery? Because they say so.

The problem is that Hyper-Calvinists believe there is a better, more consistent path forward. With the machete of reductionism, they cut away whole torsos of mystery. It's a bloody affair, but a very satisfying one for them. Apparent contradiction is chained up in a shed without so much as a hole to peek through.

This is wildly convenient. The problem is that it's wildly unbiblical.

At the end of the day, I don't think we are in a position to say that God has to absolutely limit the mediatorial cross work of Christ to the elect. In the absence of overwhelmingly clear Scriptural support, the far more natural approach would be to say that the covenant of redemption is established with the elect, whereby the price paid, in conjunction with the eternal agreement, necessarily entails the application of Christ's payment. In that sense, the elect must be freed. But it would also seem reasonable to suppose, based on the complementary evidence, that the price paid on behalf of the non-elect is not effectual because God passes them by, leaving them in their willful rebellion and unbelief. They fall outside the covenant of redemption. Thus, the concern strict particularists harbor over an ineffectual atonement is solved, so long as space is granted to a duality

of purpose in Christ's salvific role.⁹⁶

I ask: Is the mystery inherent to this view of things so extraordinarily problematic that it requires us to say that the *entirety* of Christ's mediatorial role be restricted absolutely to the elect?

Listen again to Trueman,

For Owen, however, this prior particularity is crucial, not because of some simplistic logic whereby God elects only some and Christ can therefore only be said to die for some; Owen's case is more elaborate than that. Rather, the very *causal ground of Christ becoming incarnate and taking the role of Mediator must be understood at the outset as being driven by God's desire to save, and that particularly*. This means that Owen must insist that Christ's actions as Mediator must not be understood in isolation from each other. They are separate acts but derive their meaning from his one office as Mediator, an office which is defined by the covenant of redemption. This covenant not only appoints him to die but determines the value or significance of that death and undergirds the *entirety* of his role as Mediator, from conception to intercession at the right hand of the Father.⁹⁷

All this comes down to the weight attached to particularity and the weight attached to the universalistic passages and concepts.

As for me and my household, we welcome both.

96 One might say that sufficiency is rooted in the incarnation, insofar as that created an organic identity and unity with humanity, while Christ's federal headship and union with the elect secures the application of Christ's atoning death, thereby proving to be efficacious. Both aspects correspond to God's varied purposes flowing out of his character unto his glory.

97 Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption," 216–17; emphasis mine.

CHAPTER

16

Another Brief Rant

Humans are organs of pride. Their glands secrete it; their hearts pump it; their minds are factories hammering out molds of it round the clock. It flows through their veins, glows in their eyes, churns in their bellies, and squeezes out in a grand fertilizer.

Watch the odd little groups of men at Hardee's sitting with their coffee, pontificating about the world's problems, solving economic issues with all the ease of professors, world conflicts with all the genius of generals, philosophical quandaries like savants. Whether mailmen on lunch break, mechanics jesting in the garage, factory workers sitting shoulder to shoulder along the assembly line, men in their self-assured confidence know the right answer; and they know it with a sublime certainty—while yet having little to no actual knowledge of the subject. Just read an article, a headline, a Wikipedia entry. Or if a book is actually cracked open, that one volume graduates the man with honors. They're one book wonders!

Among the ranks of strict particularists, and certainly even those with letters adorning their names, this sad and fateful human tendency is alive and well. Having become enlightened, knowing with a certain felicity the errors of Arminianism and Roman Catholicism, they harbor within themselves a grandiose conviction that limited atonement is unassailably true. It's not possible that they've been fed historical misinformation. It's not possible that their categories are myopic. It's not possible that they've been duped in any way whatsoever.

Set before them black and white historical evidence and watch them dismiss it with all the ease of a king. Point to other Reformed interpretations of biblical passages and immediately receive a consortium of pre-recorded tag lines admitting no further thought.

Interact with the text of Scripture, and you'll be handed a portfolio of sanctioned responses.

It's maddening, frustrating, saddening. We of all people should be people of the truth and humility. We've all been wrong before. We all know what it's like to think we're right only to learn later that we were wrong. Entering in through the gates of Reformedom doesn't insulate a man from error. Even if limited atonement is right, and I am but a fool playing the cards all wrong, it doesn't mean that your attitude is right, nor your handling of the data at every point. Far too many are sliding towards Hyper-Calvinism, thinking all the while that they're sitting squarely in the center of mainstream Calvinism.

Years of interacting with strict particularists has utterly convinced me that there's a palpable, prideful blindness at play when it comes to this subject. That is a very harsh thing to say, but I say it in all candor, intending injury only for the sake of shaking many awake.

The problem is that you'll likely think it is someone else who needs a good shaking.

CHAPTER

17

The Whole World

1 John 2:2

Jewish exclusivity is an exquisitely handy tool in the hands of strict particularists. Even though John adds the sweeping adjective “whole” to the word “world” in 1 John 2:2, dispute swiftly arises as to its meaning. The “world,” it is urged, does not mean everyone without exception, but, you guessed it, all people without distinction. Given the typical Jewish mindset, stress needed to be laid on Gentile inclusion. In effect, it is a “not just you” but “also them as well” thing. God is now working among all people groups.

This isn’t an absurd notion. The transition to Gentile inclusion was a bumpy ride. One might recall the Jerusalem council. There’s also the whole visionary episode of Peter questioning God’s command to kill and eat. Needless to say, Jewish exclusivity would require a fair bit of mental rewiring; and as such, it shouldn’t come as a surprise to see the apostles stressing the point in their choice of terminology.

1 John 2:2 could be tricky in that respect, but not necessarily so. It all depends on contextual factors. We’ll examine these momentarily. At the risk of entangling ourselves in the whole “without exception” and “without distinction” discussion again, it seems reasonable to ask whether or not a Jewish Christian would naturally view Christ’s sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish people as inherently exclusionary. Would their mindset parcel out the non-elect? In other words, would they be inclined to understand Christ’s death on behalf of the Jews as accomplished for only a fraction of the people? This seems very doubtful. The Jewish people were a unit—they were tied together as one. Insofar as the Day of Atonement touched the entirety of the

nation, the high day of sacrifice extended to each and every person. None of this is to deny that some among the ranks were not circumcised of heart, but the failure of faith is as common as it is old. It merely meant that the sacrifice made no personal application.

So while attention can be paid to verses that speak of Gentiles as a conglomeration of people groups, it isn't obvious that the strict particularists' intent for employing the "all people without distinction" concept can be applied to the Jewish people. If Christ died for the Jews, what else can this mean but that Christ died for all the Jews? After all, if the mindset of Jewish exclusivity was so prevalent, this would be the natural way of looking at things (John 11:50-51). In fact, if, say, John didn't believe that Jesus died for all men without exception, then wouldn't it be reasonable to suppose that he would overtly delimit the Jews as a category of people through more explicitly restrictive terminology? As it stands, he is more than comfortable utilizing profoundly expansive language in combination with more localized language. He can say,

In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

As well as,

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (1 John 4:14)

John is comfortable personalizing Christ's propitiation, and he is comfortable generalizing it. So to stress again, if combating Jewish exclusivity is on the apostle's agenda, this exclusivity cuts both ways, so far as limited atonement is concerned. The Jewish mindset would be strongly inclined towards the belief that the extent of Christ's sacrifice would be universal for the nation.⁹⁸

98 Interestingly, Paul R Williamson, while attempting to make a case for definite atonement in the Pentateuch, essentially gives away the farm when he admits that definite atonement is nowhere explicitly mentioned, and that "the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) encompasses the entire community, as do similar provisions such as Aaron's censer of incense (Numbers 16), the water of cleansing (Numbers 19), and the bronze snake (Numbers 21). Indeed, even the Passover sacrifice (Exodus 12) and



Let's dig into the verse. It reads:

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

A significant detail to note is the phrase “our sins.” If we ask who comprises this group, and we then contrast that group with the phrase “whole world,” the dichotomy offers a glimpse into the text’s meaning. If, for example, John’s audience is comprised solely of Jews, then the contrast might serve to combat Jewish exclusivity on some level. But this seems doubtful. It’s hard to imagine that the letter is addressing a congregation, or group of congregations (if it is meant to be a circular letter to a region), that is comprised solely of Jews. There is scant evidence concerning the setting and recipients of 1 John, so unfortunately, nothing definitive can be said.

There might be a clue, however, in the last verse, which reads, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” While it would be incorrect to suggest that the Jews at that time were utterly free from the temptation of incorporating idol worship into their lives, it seems to have been a particularly Gentile weakness at that stage of history. So while it would be fitting for John to close with these words, given an exclusively Jewish audience, it is even more fitting given the presence of Gentiles.

The safe bet is that “our sins” includes both Jews and Gentiles.

Proceeding upon this supposition, the dichotomy would be between believing Jews and Gentiles and the whole world. With this juxtaposition in place, it would be hard to believe that the non-elect do

the intercession of Moses (Exodus 32-34) seem to have a general rather than a particular focus...” Paul R. Williamson, ““Because He Loved Your Fathers:’ Election, Atonement, and the Intercession in the Pentateuch,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. D. Gibson and J. Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 227.

not fall within the sphere of the world. And what would otherwise be hard to believe, given the contrast, is nearly impossible to imagine once the phrase is compared to John's usage in the same letter.

A survey of the passages where the term "world" occurs will bear this out:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (2:15)

For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (2:16)

And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. (2:17)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. (3:1)

Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. (3:13)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. (4:1)

And every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. (4:3)

Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (4:4)

They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. (4:5)

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that

God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. (4:9)

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. (4:14)

By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. (4:17)

For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. (5:4)

Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (5:5)

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. (5:19)

John's usage is surprisingly clear. For him, the world represents the fallen culture in opposition to God, sinful humanity, the ungodly ranks of wickedness. D. A. Carson helpfully captured the sense when he wrote,

God so loved *the world* that he gave his Son (John 3:16). I know that some try to take *κόσμος* ("world") here to refer to the elect. But that really will not do. All the evidence of the usage of the word in John's Gospel is against the suggestion. True, *world* in John does not so much refer to bigness as to badness. In John's vocabulary, *world* is primarily the moral order in willful and culpable rebellion against God. In John 3:16 God's love in sending the Lord Jesus is to be admired not because it is extended to so big a thing as the world, but to so bad a thing; not to so many people, as to such wicked people. Nevertheless elsewhere John can speak of 'the *whole* world' (1 John 2:2), thus bringing bigness and badness together. More importantly, in Johannine theology the disciples themselves once belonged to the world but were drawn out of it (e.g.,

John 15:19). On this axis, God's love for the world cannot be collapsed into his love for the elect.⁹⁹

Only those with an invested interest to overturn the natural reading of the text labor against this interpretation. In this we see that the issue is as much psychological as it is exegetical. Where there's a compulsion to herd the data toward a certain outcome, the data will yield for that mind gaps for it to squeeze through. They may be tight gaps—frightfully tight ones—but it's worth the effort, especially when you believe there's a monster chasing you. In this case, it's the simple prospect of Christ dying for the sins of the world out of love.

In his Lectures, Dabney summarized the matter nicely when he wrote,

But there are others of these passages, to which I think, the candid mind will admit, this sort of explanation is inapplicable. In John 3:16, make “the world” which Christ loved, to mean “the elect world,” and we reach the absurdity that some of the elect may not believe, and perish. In 2 Cor. 5:15, if we make the all for whom Christ died, mean only the all who live unto Him—i. e., the elect it would seem to be implied that of those elect for whom Christ died, only a part will live to Christ. In 1 John 2:2, it is at least doubtful whether the express phrase, “whole world,” can be restrained to the world of elect as including other than Jews. For it is indisputable, that the Apostle extends the propitiation of Christ beyond those whom he speaks of as “we,” in verse first. The interpretation described obviously proceeds on the assumption that these are only Jewish believers. Can this be substantiated? Is this catholic epistle addressed only to Jews? This is more than doubtful. It would seem then, that the Apostle's scope is to console and encourage sinning believers with the thought that since Christ made expiation for every

99 D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 17. On page 76 he also wrote, “Surely it is best not to introduce disjunctions where God himself has not introduced them. If one holds that the Atonement is sufficient for all and effective for the elect, then both sets of texts and concerns are accommodated. As far as I can see, a text such as 1 John 2:2 states something about the potential breadth of the Atonement.”

man, there is no danger that He will not be found a propitiation for them who, having already believed, now sincerely turn to him from recent sins.¹⁰⁰

100 R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (1878; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 525.

CHAPTER

18

Reformed Dodgeball

2 Peter 2:1

There's a certain pleasure to be had in watching strict particularists try to circumnavigate 2 Peter 2:1. As is often the case when a swordsman cannot hit his target, he resorts to flailing, wildly swinging every which way. At the risk of mixing too many metaphors, strict particularists load their exegetical shotguns with a variety of explanatory pellets, hoping that one will lodge in the minds of their listeners. "The text is challenging," they will admit, "but also ambiguous. Let me unroll the scroll of possible explanations so as to assuage any reasonable doubts you might have that limited atonement is in trouble here."

Of the offerings typically set forth, there's Owen's argument that "bought" can refer to some kind of deliverance—such as deliverance from the idolatry of the world (vs 20); there's the idea that "bought" can refer to God's having purchased the nation of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:6; Exodus 15:16) and that these false prophets come from the nation of Israel—they're part of those who are "bought" through the Exodus; and there's the observation that the text might be talking about the Father and not Christ, thereby insulating the passage from any intimations of Christ's death.

Or there's my personal favorite. It's the version that argues that Peter is adopting the false teacher's incorrect view of themselves, which is to say that Peter is speaking to the *appearance* of things, not the actual state of affairs. Thomas Schreiner adopted this view in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*. After wading through the interpretive strategies employed by the various cohorts of strict particularism, he concluded

that the other explanations suffer from too many exegetical shortcomings. He then wrote,

Is there a reading that treats this text plausibly, and consistently interprets what Peter says about the false teachers in both verse 1 and verses 20–22? I suggest there is: Peter’s language is phenomenological. In other words, it *appeared as if* the Lord had purchased the false teachers with his blood (v. 1), though they actually did not truly belong to the Lord.¹⁰¹

It is a marvel of theology when a verse that says “he bought them” can be turned into “he did not buy them.” Dr. Schreiner wrote, “A right understanding of 2 Peter 2:1 actually supports definite atonement, since Christ did not *actually* buy these false teachers—for if it had, they would have persevered.”¹⁰²

Here I am reminded of a story. While sitting in a Sunday school class listening to a retired pastor in the PCA teach on John 3:16, he confidently concluded, telling the class that “God does not love the world.” I’ve only read a couple books on hermeneutics, so I could be missing something, but I wonder if it is good practice to make a verse say the exact opposite of what it sounds like it’s saying?

Interestingly, Dr. Schreiner anticipated a similar discomfort with his conclusion. After asking why Peter would use such phenomenological language, he asked,

Is this an artificial interpretation introduced to support a theological bias? I have already said that the Arminian reading of the text is straightforward and clear. One can understand why it has appealed to so many commentators throughout history.¹⁰³

101 Thomas R. Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. D. Gibson and J. Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 390; emphasis original.

102 Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement,” 392.

103 Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement,” 390. Since Dr. Schreiner equated “bought” with “necessarily saved,” outside commitments compelled him go the phenomenological route. What he needs is a category of universal satisfaction that purchases without compromising Christ’s dying efficaciously for the elect.

I don't know about you, but I like straightforward and clear. What is not clear, however, is that taking the term "bought" in a straightforward way requires one to adopt an Arminian framework. Once again, we seem to be at that strange corner of the universe where John Calvin himself is left scratching his head. Commenting on the verse, he wrote,

Though Christ may be denied in various ways, yet Peter, as I think, refers here to what is expressed by Jude, that is, when the grace of God is turned into lasciviousness; for Christ redeemed us, that he might have a people separated from all the pollutions of the world, and devoted to holiness, and innocency. They, then, who throw off the bridle, and give themselves up to all kinds of licentiousness, are not unjustly said to deny Christ by whom they have been redeemed.¹⁰⁴

And on Jude 4, he wrote,

"The only Lord God," or, God who alone is Lord. Some old copies have, "Christ, who alone is God and Lord." And, indeed, in the Second Epistle of Peter, Christ alone is mentioned, and there he is called Lord. But He means that Christ is denied, when they who had been redeemed by his blood, become again the vassals of the Devil, and thus render void as far as they can that incomparable price.¹⁰⁵



Naturally, Dr. Schreiner doesn't pull his view from out of thin air. He defends it by appealing to 2:20–21, arguing that since the false teachers *appeared* to be genuine Christians, but were in actuality not the real deal (1 John 2:19), then we have conceptual grounds for supposing that they were not bought (2:1). He explained,

Those who were fomenting the false way were, so to speak,

104 John Calvin, "Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles," in *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols., trans. J. Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 22:393.

105 Calvin, "Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles," in *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22:433–44.

“Christians.” They were to all appearances “bought” by Christ (2 Pet. 2:1) and seemed to “know” him as Lord and Savior (v. 20). Peter is not claiming that they were actually Christians, that they were truly redeemed (v. 1), or that they truly knew Jesus as Lord and Savior (v. 20), but that they gave every reason initially for observers to think that such was the case.¹⁰⁶

On the face of things, this isn’t an absurd line of argumentation. However, upon closer inspection, it suffers from a few key problems. While I would agree that these false teachers were not justified saints (which is to say that they were not regenerate Christians), they were, by virtue of the objectivity of the covenant, genuinely set apart as Christians (Romans 11:17–21; Hebrews 10:29; John 15:1–6). Baptism set them apart (Acts 2:41). There was a real change of status, much in the same way that a circumcised Jew in the OT was objectively set apart and responsible to the terms of the covenant.

In Peter’s view, these false teachers *really did escape* the defilements of the world (in some sense) through the knowledge of Christ, and by falling away, they *really* were worse off—“the last state has become worse for them than the first” (vs. 20; compare 1:4). It would have been better to have not known the way of righteousness than to turn back from it. They are “accursed children” (vs. 14), and, “forsaking the right way, they have gone astray” (vs. 15). In view of these facts, there is a real sense in which they were externally saints; they had the triune name of God stamped upon them (Matthew 28:19). Not born again, but objectively set apart.

As a result, appealing to the fact that the false teachers appeared to be real Christians is to slip past the objectivity of Peter’s words. The situation is not appreciably phenomenological given the realities Peter specifically touches.¹⁰⁷ A person can really trample under foot the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and a person can really be bought by the Master by virtue of Christ’s universal satisfaction, and they can relate to it via the objective markers. The false teachers

106 Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement,” 391.

107 In Jude 1:4, these ungodly people are said to “deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.” The denial is objectively real. Similarly, when the false teachers are said to deny the Master who bought them, one should naturally take Peter at face value, for if the denial is really a rejection of the Master, then the denial is surely also a denial of what the Master is said to have done to become their Master.

externally committed themselves to Christ, and in so doing, entered into a new relationship, even if not salvifically.¹⁰⁸

Now every good Reformed Baptist may want to wrinkle their chary brows at these covenantal sensibilities, but the texts adduced in its favor are hard to budge. Peter comes dangerously close to upsetting our theological systems, and we would do well to let him do just that.¹⁰⁹

108 If a man who has no love for his to-be bride, and is only using her for some selfish end, nevertheless says “I do” during the wedding ceremony, he is objectively married, even though his heart is all wrong. Additionally, one might note that there is no compelling reason to equate the appearance of salvation in 2:20–21 with the so-called appearance of being “bought” in 2:1, for the simple reason that the Scriptures provide a clear theological lens by which to understand the spiritual nature of apostates. However, when it comes to the so-called appearance of being purchased, the Scriptures provide a clear lens for understanding how Christ pays a universal price of redemption for all, while yet being efficient in the designs of God for the elect. One might say that this entire book is a defense of that point.

109 One of Dr. Schreiner’s deep concerns can be seen in how he concluded his thoughts on 2 Peter 2:1, “Definite atonement refers not only to the *intended* target of the atonement—namely, the elect—but also to its *efficacy*: the atonement achieves its purpose, full and final salvation for the elect. What some fail to grasp in using 2 Peter 2:1 in support of a general atonement is that to affirm general atonement here is to compromise the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. For we have seen in 2 Peter 2 that what Peter teaches about the atonement (v. 1) cannot be separated from what he teaches about perseverance (vv. 20–22).” Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement,” 391–392. This of course doesn’t follow, or it isn’t obvious how it follows. Classically moderate Calvinists affirm universal satisfaction in combination with an effectual design for the elect, whereby the elect will certainly attain full and final salvation with all perseverance. The logic of limited atonement is baked into his concern, and it is a valid concern, if and only if the logic of limited atonement is biblical. Quite naturally, if it is not, then the problem largely dissipates under the rule set of another paradigm.

CHAPTER

19

1 Timothy 4:10

Yes, *The Savior of all Men*

Exegeses in the Reformed camp tend to be frightened in one of two ways, respecting 1 Timothy 4:10. The first phantom pertains to the prospect of actual universalism, the second to universal satisfaction. As for the former, it is of no real consequence, since the very text eschews the idea by contrasting believers with the rest of humanity with the word “especially.” Christ is said to be *especially* the Savior of believers. This, quite naturally, signifies a special *salvific* status as opposed to those who do not believe.

So the real boogeyman that needs to be chased away with a nightlight is universal satisfaction. Whatever else is said about this text, strict particularists cannot have it mean that Christ died for the sins of all men.

The general strategy, therefore, will be to find a crack in the term “Savior” or “all men.”¹¹⁰ If one of these terms can be massaged into a more congenial concept, so as to keep it from stepping on the toes of limited expiation, then all peace and harmony will be restored to the field of systematics, thereby leaving us poor moderates to stand outside in the cold.

As was briefly noted some time ago in chapter nine, the most common tactic is to argue that the word “Savior” denotes the idea of preservation. God sustains, or preserves men as a gracious benefactor

110 A rarer tactic is to weld the Greek into something more appetizing, whereby the word “especially” is magically turned into the word “namely,” or “that is.” Vern Poythress has thoughtfully challenged the argument in “The Meaning of *μάλιστα* in 2 Timothy 4:13 and Related Verses” *Journal of Theological Studies*, NS, Vol. 53, Pt. 2, (October 2002), 523–32.

in diverse ways (Psalm 36). This is, of course, a welcome doctrine, but one not best suited for 1 Timothy 4:10. I Howard Marshall offered a sensible summary why this is the case. He wrote,

(1) In every case [in the Pastoral Epistles] the terms “save”, “Savior” and “salvation” are used in their normal theological sense to refer to spiritual salvation. This is so even in 1 Timothy 4:10, where some scholars have defended the view that God is here the general benefactor of all people in this world and especially so of believers (presumably in that he confers eternal life upon them), and that what we have here is a warning against venerating human beings as gods and saviors. This view can be confidently rejected since it imports a sense of “savior” which is unlikely after the clear previous use in 1 Timothy 2:3–6 and indeed throughout the Pastoral Epistles. It also requires that the term be understood very awkwardly in two different senses with the two nouns that are dependent upon it, in a this-worldly non-spiritual sense with the former and in an eschatological spiritual sense with the latter. While a contrast with the use of the title for earthly rulers may be implicit, nothing suggests that here the author is suggesting that the saving activity of his God is of the same kind as theirs.¹¹¹

Since Dr. Marshall is an advocate of Arminianism, many readers may feel an unrestrained sense of doubt swelling within them, thereby causing them to take what he says with a grain of salt. In that case, I would point the reader to Dr. Schreiner’s chapter in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*.¹¹² Perhaps a strict particularist will prove more

111 I Howard Marshall, “For All, for All My Savior Died,” *Semper Reformanda: Studies in Honor of Clark H. Pinnock*, ed. Stanely E. Porter and Anthony R. (Cross; Carlisle, Uk: Paternoster, 2003), 329.

112 Thomas Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. D. Gibson and J. Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 382–385. Alan E Kurschner also briefly noted, “Some interpreters have suggested that God is ‘Savior of all people’ in a *physical-preserving sense*—if you will, a ‘common grace Savior.’ And then he is a *spiritual* Savior, especially of those who believe. This is an unlikely interpretation since there is nothing in this context where Paul defines ‘Savior’ in

palatable.

As for the phrase “all men,” it proves stubborn as a mule against the typical appeal to classes of men. The reason why is straightforward. If believers are a subset of all men, then the phrase “all men” makes reference to everyone else; and if this somehow misses a human or two, one might surely wonder why certain unbelievers get tossed out of the category of “all men.” Is there another circle outside the circle labeled “all men” designated “Like, really all men”?

Given the discomfort of going this route, many opt for the “Savior-Preserver” approach.¹¹³



But there’s a better way, really, and it’s a path that some strict particularists venture to some happy degree. Dr. Schreiner would be

these two different ways. Further, v. 8b provides a soteriological context, ‘*the present life and also for the life to come.*’ And in v. 10, the natural reading is that Paul uses the same meaning for “Savior” for humanity in general, and believers in particular.” Alan E. Kurschner, “On 1 Timothy 4:10,” AOMin (blog), October 20, 2011; <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/exegesis/on-1-timothy-410/>.

113 Interestingly, Patrick Fairbairn, while appealing to the idea of God as Preserver with respect to 1 Timothy 4:10, seems to see in the concept more than what is typically granted. He wrote, “The term Saviour represents Him as the deliverer and preserver of life; but in what sense, or to what effects, must be inferred from the connection. As the living God, He may be said to be the Saviour of all men, since by His watchful and beneficent providence they are constantly delivered from destruction and preserved in being. Actually He is not more to all men, although more in manifestations of goodwill and acts tending toward salvation, since He sets before men generally, and often even presses on their acceptance, the benefits of a work of reconciliation, which, from its essential nature, is perfectly sufficient to meet the necessities of all, and recover them to life and blessing. As it is in the character of a Saviour-God that He does this, there seems no valid reason why it should not be comprised in the sense we put upon the apostle’s language. Yet, as the language indicates rather what God actually is to men, what they actually receive from Him, than what He reveals Himself as ready and willing to give them, we are led by the natural and unconstrained import of the words to think mainly of the relation in which God stands to men indiscriminately as the Author and Preserver of their present life. And from this as the less, the apostle rises to the greater. From what God is and does in behalf of such as are dependent on Him for the common bounties of providence, he proceeds to indicate what God is and does besides, in respect to those who are related to Him as His redeemed in Christ — the Saviour, especially of those who believe.” Patrick Fairbairn, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Eerdmans: T&T Clark, 1874), 184–185.

just such a one.

Toward the end of his treatment of 1 Timothy 4:10, he argued that “Savior of all men” means that “Paul is saying here that God is *potentially* the Savior of all kinds of people—in that, as the living God there is no other Savior available to people—but that he is *actually* the Savior of only believers.”¹¹⁴

After this winsome admission, he went on to say,

1 Timothy 4:10 illustrates that definite atonement may be affirmed alongside other biblical truths, such as God’s salvific stance to the world and the possibility for people to be saved if they believe in Christ. Those who hold to a definite intention in the atonement to save only the elect also believe that God desires people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:3–4; cf. Ezek. 18:32), that he is available as Savior to all people (1 Timothy 4:10), that Christ’s death is sufficient for the salvation of every person,¹¹⁵ and that all are invited to be saved on the basis of Christ’s death for sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). But it is a *non sequitur* to suggest that affirming any of these biblical truths somehow negates the truth that Christ intended to die only for his elect, actually paying for their sins alone.¹¹⁶

The symphony above was playing beautifully until a violin string snapped on the footnote and a tuba snorted at the crescendo. For it must be asked again how the death of Christ is sufficient for the salvation of *every* person when the sufficiency is a statement of its *intrinsic* value *unrelated* to its design? Similarly, how can a non-died-for be saved if Christ didn’t pay for their sins in any way? This is the deep and abiding rub facing all strict particularists, and it is not at all a *non sequitur* to discern the striking incongruity between affirming limited expiation and the aforementioned biblical truths.

Marshall rightly asks the strict particularist,

114 Thomas Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles,” 385.

115 See footnote 30: “The sufficiency of Christ’s death is a statement of its intrinsic value unrelated to its design.”

116 Thomas Schreiner, “‘Problematic Texts’ for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles,” 385–386.

But to say that the atonement is sufficient for all people but has not been made for all is meaningless. How can the atonement be sufficient for people for whom it has not been made? This is sheer unconvincing casuistry. Further, it contradicts Berkhof's own principle that the atonement and the application of salvation are two indissoluble parts of one purpose of God. For on his premises how can this God produce an atonement that is sufficient for all people without also providing gifts of effectual calling which are sufficient for all people?¹¹⁷

And again, with penetrating logic, Edward Polhill, while addressing the same problem, wrote,

Now then for the extent of the covenant [of grace]. Are not those promises, "Whosoever believes shall be saved," "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely," with the like, a part of the covenant? and are they not extensive to all men? Both are as plain as if they were written with a sun-beam... If Christ did no way die for all men, which way shall the truth of these general promises be made out? "Whosoever will may take the water of life." What, though Christ never bought it for him? "Whosoever believes shall be saved." What, though there were no price paid for him? Surely the gospel knows no water of life but what Christ purchased, nor no way of salvation but by a price paid. But you will say, that albeit Christ died not for all men, yet are those general promises very true, and that because their truth is founded upon the sufficiency of Christ's death, which hath worth enough in it to redeem millions of worlds. I answer, there is a double sufficiency, *sufficientia nuda* consisting in the intrinsical value of the thing, and *sufficientia ordinata* consisting in the intentional paying and receiving that thing as a price of redemption: the first is that radical sufficiency whereby the thing may possibly become a price, the second is that formal sufficiency whereby the thing doth actually become a price. Let a thing be of never so vast a value in itself, it is no price at

117 I Howard Marshal, "To All, For My Savior Died," 345.

all unless it be paid for that end, and being paid, it is a price for no more than those only for whom it was so paid; because the intrinsical worth, how great soever, doth not constitute it a price. Hence it is clear, that if Christ's death, though of immense value, had been paid for none, it had been no price at all; and if it were paid but for some, it was no price for the rest for whom it was not paid. These things premised, if Christ no way died for all men, how can those promises stand true? All men, if they believe, shall be saved; saved, but how? Shall they be saved by a price of redemption? There was none at all paid for them; the immense value of Christ's death doth not make it a price as to them for whom he died not; or shall they be saved without a price? God's unsatisfied justice cannot suffer it, his minatory law cannot bear it, neither doth the gospel know any such way of salvation: take it either way, the truth of those promises cannot be vindicated, unless we say that Christ died for all men. But you will yet reply, that albeit Christ died not for all, yet is the promise true; because Christ's death is not only sufficient for all in itself, but it was willed by God to be so. I answer, God willed it to be so, but how? Did he will that it should be paid for all men, and so be a sufficient price for them? Then Christ died for all men. Or did he will that it should not be paid for all men, but only be sufficient for them in its intrinsical value? Then still it is no price at all as to them; and consequently either they may be saved without a price, which is contrary to the current of the gospel, or else they cannot be saved at all, which is contrary to the truth of the promise. If it be yet further demanded, To what purpose is it to argue which way reprobates shall be saved, seeing none of them ever did or will believe? Let the apostle answer: "What if some did not believe? Shall their unbelief make the faith of without effect? God forbid; yea, let God be true, but every man a liar," Rom. iii. 3, 4. And again, "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself," 2 Tim. ii. 13, No reprobate ever did or will believe, yet the promise must be true, and true antecedently to the faith or unbelief of men; true because it is the promise of God, and antecedently true because else it could not be the object of faith. wherefore I conclude that Christ died for all

men so far as to found the truth of the general promises, which extend to all men.¹¹⁸

Whatever fear one may harbor at the prospect of saying that Christ, in His divine office, stands as the Savior of all men (Acts 4:12; John 14:6),¹¹⁹ must surely be extinguished upon the truth of 1 Timothy 2:4–6 which establishes that Christ desires all men to be saved, and that He gave Himself as a ransom for all; or that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people” (Titus 2:11); or that God now “commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30), looking to the one who was lifted up like Moses’ serpent (John 3:14–15).

Or, as J. P. Lilley so eloquently wrote regarding 1 Timothy 4:10,

He is “the Saviour of all men.” This statement is not to be narrowed down to mere providential preservation. We are not at liberty to empty the great word “Saviour” of its natural meaning. Nor are we to restrict the word “all.” God is the Saviour of all men, from the fact that He did not immediately judge the race for sin, but granted men a respite or dispensation of forbearance, under which manifold influences were at work in the direction of turning them from sin. This long-suffering was purchased by the death of Christ (Rom. iii. 21); and to that extent all men are saved by God. There is also the inward striving of the Spirit, in which He so deals with the heart and conscience of men in every age and clime, that they may be constrained to seek the living God and find Him. Such operations are more than preservation. As the older

118 Edward Polhill, “The Divine Will Considered in Its Eternal Decrees,” in *The Works of Edward Polhill* (London: Thomas Ward and Co., 1844), 164.

119 “In a similar sense,” wrote MacArthur, “Jesus is called ‘Savior of the world’ (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14). Paul wrote, ‘We have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers’ (1 Tim 4:10). The point is not that He actually saves the whole world (for that would be universalism, and Scripture clearly teaches not all will be saved). The point is that He is the only Savior to whom anyone in the world can turn for forgiveness and eternal life—and therefore He urges all to embrace Him as Savior. Jesus Christ is proffered to the world as Savior. In setting forth His own Son as Savior of the world, God displays the same kind of love to the whole world that was manifest in the OT to the rebellious Israelites. It is a sincere, tender-hearted, compassionate love that offers mercy and forgiveness. MacArthur “The Love of God for Humanity,” *MTJ* 07:1 (Spr 1996), 24.

theologians put it, they are a part of the heritage of “common grace,” open to all mankind and undeniable tokens of the divine saving power.¹²⁰

120 J. P. Lilley, “The Pastoral Epistles,” in *Handbook for Bible Classes and Private Students*, ed. Dods & Whyte (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1901), 119.

CHAPTER

20

Romans 3:21-24

Among those texts that enjoy the limelight in debates over the extent of the atonement, Romans 3:21-24 is typically left out. This is, perhaps, due to its subtlety, if not searing complexity. If a gorilla like John 3:16 is swatted away by strict particularists, then how much more this tricky jewel?

Yet, here we are, willing to at least take a peek.

It reads,

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom 3:21-26)

The interesting thing about this text—besides, of course, the sheer wonder of it—is that it likely supersedes the strict particularist’s ability to relegate the phrase “all have sinned” to the “all men without distinction” bin; for when it says “all have sinned,” then it must mean all men without exception, if it has in view sinful humanity.¹²¹ Naturally,

¹²¹ Although, G. K. Beale connected the “all have sinned” of vs. 23 with those who

Christ Jesus is explicitly excluded elsewhere, but not the rest of us. Humanity is bound up within the dungeon of unrighteousness (Romans 3:9, 19; 5:12). The significance of this observation can be seen by how Paul effortlessly connects the universality of sin to the universality of Christ's redemption.

As the apostle draws his sustained argument to a climax, he stresses that the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ is available for "all who believe." He then immediately adds that there's no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, since "all men have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." As has just been noted, an appeal to a bare distinction of ethnic groups falls on hard times, since it must be conceded that *all* of the Parthians, or Medes, or Elamites, or Jews are in view. All men without distinction does not brush away universal individuality. Therefore, there is a correlation between the extent of Christ's redemption and the universality of sin in verses 22–25a.

- ~ All have sinned
- ~ And these sinners are justified
 - ~ Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus
 - ~ Whom God put forward as a propitiation
- ~ By faith

The relationship between these concepts indicates that Paul views Christ's work as a suitable remedy for the entirety of human sin; the breadth of the remedy answers to the breadth of the problem. Christ's redemption harbors the solution for all sinners. Provision has been made, such that, any sinner can be justified by faith through Christ's propitiatory sacrifice. Or, to state it differently, all men are savable through Christ's redemption; forgiveness is truly available because God is willing to forgive in Christ.



believe. He wrote, "'Being justified' in 3:24 appears to be an adverbial participle apparently indicating a concessive idea in relation to 3:23: "all [the ones believing] [cf. v. 22] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, though they are justified." Gregory Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 483. If this is correct, then I have to concede that my argument is greatly weakened.

Now it must be admitted, in all candor, that the relationship between the participle “being justified” in verse 24 and the preceding verse (vs. 23) is thorny, causing scholars to feverishly scribble with their exegetical pens. The principal reason why this is so is because the Greek construction is challenging. This is due, in part, to what might seem to follow if we say that all men fall short of the glory of God and *are* justified. Universalists read a text like this with glowing alacrity and proudly wave their banner, declaring that every last person *will be* actually saved.

While sundry theologians have suggested a variety of ways of relating the participle to the context,¹²² Douglas Moo strikes what seems a reasonable chord. Following Cranfield, he wrote,

He [Cranfield] argues that “being justified” is dependent on v. 23, to the extent that it has as its subject “all,” but that it also picks up and continues the main theme of the paragraph from vv. 21–22a. With this we would agree, with the caveat that “all” in its connection with “being justified” indicates not universality (“everybody”) but lack of particularity (“anybody”).¹²³

So when the text says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, *being justified* freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (KJV), it isn’t saying that the redemption of Christ *de facto* saves everyone, but rather that it supplies to all sinners the availability of salvation through faith. One might think of a rough corollary with the following illustration:

122 Some resort to adopting rather unique translations to avoid any apparent universalistic components. After conducting his adroit linguistical-ism-ness through the secret arts of Greek construction, Dr. Reymond finished his exorcism with his own peculiar rendering, saying, “This arrangement makes perfect sense, removes the syntactical difficulty mentioned earlier, and eliminates both the implied universalism and the universal atonement that the Arminian sees here.” I would like to remind everyone that theology is the science and art of making the bible say what we want it to say. Because whatever else might be said about his translation of the text, it’s evident that he is moved by a strong desire to avoid what mainline translations have rendered. See Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 689.

123 Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 227.

For all men are hungry and in dire need of food, being filled freely through the banquet provided by the host, by attending the feast and eating.

The “filled freely” has an implied conditionality in the immediate context (by attending the feast and eating). Similarly, the participle “being justified” is anchored contextually to the necessity of faith in verses 22 and 25. If this is correct, then it would seem that the extent of Christ’s redemption answers to the extent of sinful humanity in some capacity. While commenting on verse 22, Charles Hodge captured the idea when he wrote,

The reason why the same method of salvation is suited to all men is given in the following clause: *For there is no difference among men as to their moral state or relation to God, or as to their need of salvation, or as to what is necessary to that end. What one man needs all require, and what is suited to one is suited to and sufficient for all.*¹²⁴

And writing shortly after, he added,

That this righteousness is suited to and sufficient for all men; not only for all classes, but for all numerically; so that no one can perish for the want of a righteousness suitable and sufficient, clearly revealed and freely offered.¹²⁵



If the exegetical pile weren’t already swaying precipitously upon a stack of interpretive decisions, another concept needs to be tossed into the fray. It’s the statement that God, in divine forbearance, had passed over former sins (vs. 25). The critical question to answer in relation to the topic at hand would be: Whose sins were passed over?

If Paul has in mind the sins of believers under the old dispensation

124 Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 13th printing (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Printing Company, 1977), 90.

125 Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 90.

(Hebrews 9:15), then the natural corollary would be believers under the dawn of the new era in Christ (vs. 26).¹²⁶ If, on the other hand, Paul has in mind the sins of humanity prior to Christ's redemptive work, then the connection between the universality of sin and redemption (and propitiation) collate into something quite interesting for universal satisfaction.

By allowing men to trot about the globe as treasonous rebels, it might have been thought that God was not being just. But now, in view of Christ's universal propitiation, God's justice is vindicated, thereby allowing Him to show Himself patient, even gracious in offering clemency through the gospel, while also proving to be just when he justifies the ungodly through faith.

God wasn't ignoring sin, nor treating it lightly in ages past. The cross of Christ is an exclamation point to that effect.

F. F. Bruce succinctly summarized the idea,

The redemption accomplished by Christ has retrospective as well as prospective efficacy; He is the "mercy-seat" for all mankind—"the propitiation for our sins," as a later New Testament writer puts it (using a word from the same stock as *hilasterion*), "and not for ours only; but also for the whole world" (1 Jn. ii. 2, RV)... Although the moral problem here may not be as obvious to the modern mind as it was to Paul's yet to pass over wrong is as much an act of injustice on the part of a judge as to condemn the innocent, and "shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"¹²⁷

Writing with theological richness, Dr. Mark Seifrid penned the following,

According to the apostle, God is visibly present and savingly encounters us in the crucified and risen Jesus, as he once encountered Israel in the cloud on the mercy seat. Jesus

126 G. K. Beale's treatment of this entire section is insightful, and he might be correct in his judgment that the people of God are in view. See Gregory Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 480–492.

127 F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1st ed., TNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1963), 107–108.

transcended the sacrificial system in the same way in which the Day of Atonement transcends the regular sacrifices of Israel (Bailey 1999:214). Just as “redemption” is solely “*in* Christ Jesus” (3:24b), we find a merciful God in him alone (3:25a). While 3:24b (redemption) emphasizes the changed relation in which humanity stands to the world, sin, and death, 3:25a, with its image of Jesus as the mercy seat, emphasizes the changed relation in which humanity stands to God. Both verses underscore the idea that Jesus is the exclusive locus of God’s saving work. Only in Jesus, the mercy seat, do the heavenly and the earthly savingly meet. Only in the crucified and risen Lord is God’s glory present and promissorily restored to fallen Humanity and the whole creation (cf. Exod. 40:34–35; 1 Kings 8:6–11; Ezek. 43:1–5). The eschatological sanctuary filled with divine glory has been consecrated in Jesus (cf. Ezek. 43:1–5; 44:4; see Kraus 1991:159–67).¹²⁸

And, at the risk of burdening the reader with lengthy quotations, and with a quote from someone who isn’t a friend of Reformed theology, Frederic Godet wrote,

For four thousand years the spectacle presented by mankind to the whole moral universe (comp. 1 Cor. iv. 9) was, so to speak, a continual scandal. With the exception of some great examples of judgments, divine righteousness seemed to be asleep; one might even have asked if it existed. Men sinned here below, and yet they lived. They sinned on, and yet reached in safety a hoary old age! . . . Where were the wages of sin? It was this relative impunity which rendered a solemn manifestation of righteousness necessary... God judged it necessary, on account of the impunity so long enjoyed by those myriads of sinners who succeeded one another on the earth, at length to manifest His righteousness by a striking act; and He did so by realizing in the death of Jesus the punishment which each of those sinners would have deserved to undergo.¹²⁹

128 Mark A Sefrid, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 620.

129 Frederic Godet, *Commentary on St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T

The divide between expositors regarding the meaning of “former sins” is noteworthy in that while interpretive decisions typically gallop along the boundary lines of prior doctrinal conviction, it is not entirely so with this phrase. Arminian scholar, James Morison, writing in the 19th century, noted the opinions of several different commentators. On the universal side, he wrote,

There is, however, among the expositors, who are thus far agreed, a difference of opinion as to the particular extent of the reference. A very considerable number of them, inclusive of Grotius, Hammond, Winzer, Meyer, Rückert, de Wette, Tischendorf, Alford, Conybeare, Matthias, &c., suppose that the Apostle refers to the sins of men, indefinitely, whether Gentiles or Jews, and whether believing or unbelieving, who lived under the preceding dispensations.¹³⁰

But in what might be viewed as a surprise, he sided with the other camp, writing,

We agree with Cocceius and Beza, as well as with the expositors who regard the Apostle as speaking of remission, or forgiveness, in supposing that the former sins referred to are those of believers.¹³¹

Such (perhaps) surprising conclusions continue to this day.¹³²

& T Clark, 1881), 261–262.

130 James Morison, *A Critical Exposition of the Third Chapter of Romans: A Monograph* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co, 1866), 330.

131 Morison, *A Critical Exposition of the Third Chapter of Romans*, 621.

132 On the universal side, John Murray seems to occupy the camp (*Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1968), 119–120), as does Schreiner (*Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2001), 201–203), perhaps even Douglas Moo (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 239–240), though Jonathan Gibson cited Moo in support of his argument that the phrase refers to the faith community of the OT (*From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*; 294). For the universal view, see also Shedd (*Commentary on Romans*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), 82), H. P. Lidden (*Explanatory Analysis of St Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (London: Longmans, Green and CO, 1893), 77), Edwin H Gifford (*The Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, with Notes and Introduction* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1886), 92), and D. A. Carson (“Atonement



Pulling together the various threads, let it be said that if the apostle meant that the totality of sinful humanity can be justified by faith through the redemption found in Christ, and that God through this astonishing display vindicated his righteousness, showing that He was in no wise merely winking at sin in prior ages, but instead demonstrated that through the atonement of Christ “is the divine theodicy for the past history of the world, in which there is so much of forbearance and delay to punish,”¹³³ then it is entirely reasonable to conclude that the height and width and length of Christ’s atoning sufficiency is truly infinite, answering to the needs of any man, if they but enter into a saving relationship by faith. The end-time judgment has broken forth in Christ as the glorious substitute for mankind, thereby providing sinners the opportunity of refuge from God’s wrath, lest they come unto the end and suffer the final judgment for their own sins, spurning the one medicine suited to heal them of that which the Law could not do.

This the apostle labors to show throughout his epistle to the saints in Rome, arguing time and time again that everyone is unrighteous and in need of a Savior (1:18; 2:11–12; 3:9, 10–11, 19, 20); and that a source of righteousness has been made available for the entirety of fallen mankind, saying, “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” (8:3), and, “For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:3–4), and, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him” (10:12), and, “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” (11:32).

in Romans 3:21–26,” *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Practical, Historical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger R. Nicole* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2004), 137). Carson wrote, “In other words, the sins committed beforehand are not those committed by an individual before his or her conversion, but those committed by the human race before the cross.”

133 Shedd quoting Tholuck, *Commentary on Romans*, 82.



It is altogether good when strict particularists champion the infinite value of Christ's atonement. But the point that needs to be continually belabored is the glitch that occurs when this affirmation is set next to the insistence that Christ did not die for the sins of all men. It's a glitch precisely because Christ's atonement is infinitely applicable to mankind as a suitable source of salvation.

To get at this one more time, but from a slightly different angle, suppose I were to ask how much righteousness is available in Christ for sinners? If he were a cup full of a liquid, and the liquid represented the amount of righteousness that can be dispensed to sinners who come to him, is there an end to how much he can impart?

Of course not. The righteousness is unlimited.

If we imagine a trillion sinners flocking to him, the reservoir of available righteousness would not dip in the least. It is like the flour and oil in the story of Elijah. Or, similarly, consider the serpent propped up in the wilderness. Would it be sensible to ask how much healing could have been dispensed from it? Since the healing comes from God, there is an infinite wellspring running through it, having no deficiency whatsoever.

Through the redemption accomplished by Christ, a price was paid such that there is an infinite supply of righteousness made available to sinners. The price paid was infinite, the redemption accomplished is infinite. An endless line of sinners could drink from his cup, and the water of righteousness would never stop sloshing over the lip of the vessel.¹³⁴

134 With a judicious eye, Dabney noted, "But sacrifice, expiation, is one—the single, glorious, indivisible act of the divine Redeemer, infinite and inexhaustible in merit. Had there been but one sinner, Seth, elected of God, this whole divine sacrifice would have been needed to expiate his guilt. Had every sinner of Adam's race been elected, the same one sacrifice would be sufficient for all. We must absolutely get rid of the mistake that expiation is an aggregate of gifts to be divided and distributed out, one piece to each receiver, like pieces of money out of a bag to a multitude of paupers. Were the crowd of paupers greater, the bottom of the bag would be reached before every pauper got his alms, and more money would have to be provided. I repeat, this notion is utterly false as applied to Christ's expiation, because it is a divine act. It is indivisible, inexhaustible, sufficient in itself to cover the guilt of all the sins that will ever be committed on earth. This is the blessed sense in which the Apostle John says (1st Epistle ii. 2): 'Christ is the propitiation (the same

With this in mind, one must wonder what strict particularists mean when they insist that Jesus did not die for the sins of everyone, while also affirming that there is an infinite supply of righteousness obtained through the atonement for all men. The reply would likely be that the infinite value is intrinsic to Christ, but that God's design was to pay for the elect's sins alone, thereby making the application of the atonement certain for them.

Naturally, we are agreed about the certainty of the application to the elect. But the crucial question that needs to be asked is: Is the value of the payment infinite or not? If it is, then why isn't there enough righteousness for a non-died-for?

Here the strict particularist will surely reply, "But wait! There is enough righteousness for the whole world! It's infinite!"

To this I would simply ask: Then why the insistence that Christ died only for the sins of the elect if that substitutionary death also secured the provision of righteousness for those for whom Christ did not die?

In brief:

Forgiveness and righteousness is available for Joe non-died-for in Christ.

But it is also said that Christ did not die for his sins.

So is the provision of righteousness and forgiveness available by some other means than Christ's substitutionary death? Or is it that the provision is rooted in Christ having died for the sins of another person?

If the latter, then how is Christ dying for, say, Dan's sin also an adequate "substitution" for Joe non-died-for's sin? Is righteousness and forgiveness available in Christ for Joe apart from Christ having made satisfaction for Joe's sin?



word as expiation) for the sins of the whole world.'" R.L. Dabney, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publications, 1895), 60–61.

It would behoove fair-minded High Calvinists to reflect on how righteousness and redemption run infinitely deep in Christ and is available to all men, such that there is no legal barrier preventing sinners from obtaining the righteousness of God.

Here Calvin is helpful:

...as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us (*Institutes*, 3.1.1).¹³⁵

In this sense, then, the extent of the atonement should be undeniably universal. If we mistakenly hold to a quantitative view of Christ's death on behalf of sin (so much for so much sin), then we will inevitably tumble into error. But if we hold to a qualitative view, in combination with an extrinsic and infinitely valuable sacrifice, Christ's substitution will naturally prove suitable for all human beings. His death will be truly sufficient for all as a representative of the human race. If we say that forgiveness is really available to all sinners in Christ, and that this forgiveness can't be drained dry, or is somehow ill-suited to vast swaths of humanity, or merely a placebo instead of true medicine, then there is no way around it: the extent of the atonement encompasses humanity by virtue of its sufficiency; and this sufficiency was *purchased through the sacrificial death of Christ on behalf of mankind's sin*. And if that be so, then what hinders us from proclaiming that Christ is the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29)!

Here it is worth listening to the words of Dort afresh,

III. The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin; is of infinite worth and value,

135 Writing further, Calvin immediately goes on to say, "To communicate to us the blessings which he received from the Father, he must become ours and dwell in us. Accordingly, he is called our Head, and the first-born among many brethren, while, on the other hand, we are said to be ingrafted into him and clothed with him, all which he possesses being, as I have said, nothing to us until we become one with him. And although it is true that we obtain this by faith, yet since we see that all do not indiscriminately embrace the offer of Christ which is made by the gospel, the very nature of the case teaches us to ascend higher, and inquire into the secret efficacy of the Spirit, to which it is owing that we enjoy Christ and all his blessings."

abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world.¹³⁶

And,

VI. Whereas many who are called by the gospel do not repent nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief; this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves.¹³⁷

136 Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 3:586. It is worth remembering that these statements were crafted at Dort with the purpose of allowing both High Calvinists and Classically Moderate Calvinists to subscribe in good faith. As for insight into the debates at that time, see David Allen's excellent work *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016, Kindle location 4923–5191) and Lee Gatiss' helpful journal article regarding Westminster, "Shades of Opinion: The Particular Redemption at the Westminster Assembly" (*Reformed Theological Review*, vol. 69, no. 2, Aug. 2010), as well as Michael Lynch's article "Confessional Orthodoxy and Hypothetical Universalism: Another Look at the Westminster Confession of Faith" (*Beyond Calvin: Essays on the Diversity of the Reformed Tradition*, eds. Bradford Littlejohn & Jonathan Tames, 2017, The Davenant Trust). Additionally, "The Collegiate Suffrage of the Divines of Great Britain, Concerning the Five Articles Controverted At the Synod of Dort" from George Carleton, [et al.], *The Collegiat Suffrage of the Divines of Great Britaine, Concerning the Five Articles Controverted in the Low Countries*, (London: 1629), 43–64. On page 47 we read, "Now it pleaseth God even after the acceptance of this sacrifice, no otherwise to bestow actually upon any man remission of sinnes and eternall life, then by faith in the same Redeemer. And here that same eternall and secret decree of Election shewes it selfe, in as much as that price was paid for all, and will certainly promote all beleevers unto eternall life, yet is not beneficiall unto all; because all have not the gift of fulfilling this condition of the gracious covenant. Christ therefore so dyed for all, that all and every one by the meanes of faith might obtaine remission of sins, and eternall life by vertue of that ransome paid once for all mankinde. But Christ so dyed for the elect, that by the merit of his death in speciall manner destined unto them according to the eternall good pleasure of God, they might infallibly obtaine both faith and eternall life."

137 It is worth noting again that while Dort fairly clearly made room for differing strands of Calvinistic thought regarding sufficiency, there is a measure of debate surrounding the language of the Westminster Confession of Faith (3.6, 8.5, 8). In advance of a more exclusionary note regarding Hypothetical Universalism, see William Cunningham, *Historical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1863), vol. 2, 325–31; Rehnman, Sebastian, "A Particular Defense of Particularism," *Journal of Reformed Theology*, vol. 6, issue 1 (Jan., 2012), pp. 24–34; *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner, 1982), vol. 4, pp. 255–256. For an advance of a

Or, as the Thirty Nine Articles states it:

The Offering of Christ once made in that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction, for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone...¹³⁸

And yet again, this time from the Heidelberg Catechism,

Q. 37 What do you understand by the word “suffered”?

A. That all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, He bore, in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race; in order that by His passion, as the only propitiatory sacrifice, He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the grace of God, righteousness, and eternal life.



As we close out this chapter, it is worth briefly noting Jonathan Gibson’s quip against a universal reading of “former sins.” Granting that it means the sins of all men, he raises an old and rather tiresome

more inclusionary note, see (in addition to Lynch, Allen, and Gatiss above) Richard Baxter, *Certain Disputations of Right to Sacraments and the true nature of Visible Christianity* (London: Printed by William Du-Gard for Thomas Johnson at the Golden Key in St Pauls Church-yard, 1657), Preface, [vi–xvi; pages numbered manually]; Jonathan Moore, “On Hypothetical Universalism and the Westminster Confession of Faith” from “The Extent of the Atonement: English Hypothetical Universalism versus Particular Redemption” in *Drawn into Controversie*, ed. Michael A.G. Haykin & Mark Jones (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), pp. 148–152, 154–155; J.V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards* (Wheaton, ILL.: Crossway, 2014), 189–203; Oliver Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 181–183; Alex Mitchell and John Struthers, *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1874), liii–lxi; Van Dixhoorn, Chad, “Unity and Disunity at the Westminster Assembly (1643–1649): A Commemorative Essay” *The Journal of Presbyterian History* (1997–), vol. 79, No. 2 (Summer 2001), pp. 103–117; One might ponder Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R, 2009), 174–182.

138 Article 31, “Of the One Oblation of Christ Finished upon the Cross.”

retort against universal satisfaction. Here's what he said,

If the “former sins” have a universal reference, then one has to ask what Christ’s propitiatory death accomplished for the sins of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, for example. It makes more sense to understand the “former sins” to be those of the OT faith community, and thus, in this regard, the atonement that Christ offered already had a particular focus.¹³⁹

When it is asked what Christ’s propitiatory death accomplished for the sins of Pharaoh and the Egyptians, the answer is quite simple. A universal provision of salvation.

While fielding a similar question, John Davenant provided insight into the rationale. He wrote,

Objection 1. First, therefore, it may be objected. That at the time when Christ suffered death, many had been adjudged to hell, and tormented there, but there is no redemption from hell: How then can we contend that the death of Christ was ever applicable in any way to these condemned persons?...

But I answer. When we affirm the death of Christ according to the ordination of God, and the nature of the thing, to be a remedy applicable to every man, we consider not merely the outward passion of Christ endured at the appointed moment of time, but the eternal virtue of the death of Christ, bringing salvation to mankind in every age. For Christ, as to the intention of God, was a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, and the efficacy of this propitiatory sacrifice could extend itself as much to those who lived before Christ suffered, as to us who live after his passion. If therefore they only mean, that those could not be relieved by the death of Christ in time, who before his death were by an irrevocable decree adjudged to infernal punishment, we confess the same; because they had then ceased to be living in this world, and

139 Jonathan Gibson, “For Whom Did Christ Die? Particularism and Universalism in the Pauline Epistles,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. D. Gibson and J. Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 295.

therefore were not capable of repentance and faith; but if they mean to contend further, that the eternal virtue of the death of Christ was not applicable to such persons while they were alive in this world, because the passion of Christ did not regard them any more than the wicked and condemned angels, that we deny. For it may be truly said of Cain, Esau, or any man who died before Christ suffered, that he might have been absolved from his sins, and saved through the virtue of the sacrifice to be offered up by the Messiah, if he had believed in him; which cannot be said of the condemned angels: because the universal covenant of salvation under the condition of faith, embraces the whole human race, but does not embrace the fallen angels.¹⁴⁰

140 Davenant, *A Dissertation on the Death of Christ*, 367–368.

CHAPTER

21

Some Practical Implications

“It is truly a matter of grief and exceedingly to be deplored,” wrote Davenant, “that either from the misfortune or the disorder of our age, it almost always happens, that those mysteries of our religion, which were promulgated for the peace and comfort of mankind, should be turned into materials for nothing but contention and dispute. Who could ever have thought that the death of Christ, which was destined to secure peace and destroy enmity, as the Apostle speaks, Ephes. ii. 14, 17, and Coloss. i. 20, 21, could have been so fruitful in the production in strife?”¹⁴¹

It is the peculiar trait of men to war over ideas, not least, theological ones. Sometimes the stakes warrant the use of a shotgun, as when a wolf is found among the sheep. At other times it is little more than a show of bravado, as if each disputant were shirtless, flexing their muscles for the sake of onlookers. In the latter case, the thing that is being debated often proves secondary to that greater aim, namely, the vindication of a man’s self-worth. For to the degree that a man errs in his thinking, especially as it relates to those articles of belief on which he rests his life, or competence, or acumen, to that same degree he will be shown to play the fool. And this is a very grievous thing to carry around in one’s heart; it can feel like a lead weight bent all wrong flopping about, thumping, knocking, jarring the emotions bottled within.

In the case of those who sincerely love the truth and would sacrifice their life for it, it is easy to understand why there’s such a fuss, testosterone notwithstanding. The extent of the atonement is not a

141 John Davenant, “A Dissertation on the Death of Christ,” in *An Exposition of the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians*, 2 vols., trans. J. Allport (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co.; Birmingham: Beilby, Knott and Beilby, 1831–32), 2:317.

doctrine to die over, however, and yet, here we are, standing in a pool of blood, still squaring off, fists raised.

In the case of my own feelings, the passion I feel about this subject isn't primarily rooted in a desire to be right for the sake of not looking stupid, as embarrassing and painful as being wrong can be. And while I sincerely try to follow the truth wherever it leads (all the while deeply feeling my own shortcomings in that pursuit), it isn't simply the truthfulness of the classically moderate view that animates me. It's frustration. Deep, sometimes searing frustration—not only with the theological malpractice inherent to limited atonement, but the practical implications that spiral out of it. This is to say that this debate is not merely theoretical. It has real world implications.

Over the years, I've felt a number of these painful implications. I've learned them through life's hard knocks. This is to say that I am not regurgitating something that I have read, unless, of course, you consider life itself something to be read. These observations are borne out of practical experience, and while chiefly those of my own, I am well aware of the plight of others who have experienced similar things. In this respect, I'm saying the experiences are fairly ubiquitous and worth mentioning.



One of the great strengths of Reformedom is its intense interest in getting theology right. It is profoundly concerned with knowing the truth. This is as laudable as truth is beautiful. In the case of those Christians who do not value the truth, nor show any special interest in discerning it, they tend to act like car salesmen, game show hosts, gurus peddling feelings.

This means that when a man enters through the gates of Reformedom, he often enters with a certain pride of place. He has studied theology and upgraded from the backwoods of Baptistville, or perhaps, Charismania, or the ornate corners of the Roman district. He cherishes the august stalwarts of the tradition; he esteems them, honors them. One need only examine a man's bookshelf to prove the point.

The problem arises, however, when these Reformed giants prove incorrect. Here I have specifically in mind the extent of the atonement. At first, a fresh disciple struggling with the "L" believes that he must be

mistaken, and that those who are so highly educated and have thoroughly parsed the matter, could surely not be so mistaken. This is heightened by the degree of confidence these teachers exude. Not only are they supremely confident that they are right, but they forcefully denounce detractors as grossly mistaken. Labels are freely handed out swiftly discrediting said detractors, making it far easier to dismiss them with a flip of the tongue. They are “not Reformed.”

All this impresses upon the Reformed Christian a sense of confidence, a sense of assurance, a pride of conviction. I have witnessed the twinkle many times, even in the mirror.

The problem, however, is when one of these Reformed disciples sees through the veil, recognizing the error for what it is. It’s a disenchanting experience. Disconcerting, saddening. The fairy dust loses its power. In the end, the realization erodes trust.

Allow me to make this personal.

When a man comes to see that limited atonement is false, it causes them to see its louder proponents in a new light. I can well remember the feeling of frustration I felt toward James White. I listened to his show for years but have since given up on it. While his debating skills are superb, and he is clearly well studied, delving deep into the weeds of textual criticism, or Islam, or Roman Catholicism, once I saw how unfairly he treated the objections of those critiquing limited atonement, as well his “adjacentness” to Hyper-Calvinism (so far as the theoretical is concerned,¹⁴² not his evangelistic fervor), it frustrated me greatly. I felt like a much younger version of myself when I realized that Rush Limbaugh was not fair and balanced in his approach. Funny, yes. Entertaining, sure. But when a person begins to thirst for something more nuanced, the personality behind the mic means little.

One of the practical effects of this realization was that it caused me to question the rest of what James White (or any other zealous proponent of limited atonement) was saying. Because if someone like Dr. White can be so exquisitely wrong while being so exquisitely

142 Unfortunately, Dr. White is allergic to the idea of God’s universal saving desire, and as a result, regularly reasons away those texts of Scripture that speak to it. Consequently, his systematic aversion to the doctrine amounts to a rejection of the well-meant offer. This has been observed even by Cornelis P. Venema, President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, in his comments about White’s *The Potters Freedom*. See Cornelis Venema, “Election and the ‘Free Offer’ of the Gospel (Part 2 of 5),” *The Outlook* 52.4 (April 2002): 18–19.

confident they are right, it is only natural to ask what else might be incorrect. I have to trust outside sources of authority. But in so doing, I have to trust that they are handling the data fairly. All it takes is one big misstep to throw shadows of doubt on other things.

All this is to say that there is a profound responsibility resting on the shoulders of those who teach, and especially upon those who proclaim a particular doctrine with great zeal. It is incumbent upon us to be fair, and to fairly represent opposing ideas with the utmost care, shunning straw men and misinformation with endless concern. If we don't, we'll exasperate others, and a little bit of exasperation goes a long way.

Even to this very day, I struggle with cynicism because of this issue. I can't unsee what I've seen, and I can't unfeel what I've felt. The degree of misinformation and unfairness I have witnessed has left an indelible impression.



This brings us to a related topic hinted at already. Misrepresenting opposing views, or mischaracterizing the historical data, undermines a person's credibility and further fosters mistrust. The amount of historical confusion that has been propagated around this topic by strict particularists, especially as it relates to the views of various figures in Reformedom, including the early Reformers, has been staggering. Men of higher education who should know better have erected inadequate taxonomies detailing the differing viewpoints. If a person arrives at a place where the views of John Davenant can be viewed as Amyraldian, for example, or worse, four-point Calvinism, something foul is afoot. It's either negligence or gross bias.

Thankfully, in more recent literature, these mischaracterizations are slowly being rectified, even by High Calvinists. While there is still plenty to lament in the book *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her* (I'm looking at you, Michael Haykin, to name one), there has been marked improvement from past publications. I tip my hat to you, Lee Gatiss.

From a historical perspective, the heavyweight champion of careful historiography is Dr. Richard Muller. I faintly recall Dr. Oliphint once quipping that when it comes to early Reformed thought, Dr. Muller is omniscient. Even a former pastor of mine, who was a staunch defender of limited atonement, said, when I cited Muller to verify that I was not

a red-headed stepchild living outside the Reformed tradition, “Muller is the gold standard. If he said it, then it is true.”

Since we’re talking about Dr. Muller, I would be remiss if I didn’t share a quote. In a review of Jonathan’s Moore book on English Hypothetical Universalism, he wrote,

Moore also underestimates the presence of non-Amyraldian or non-speculative forms of hypothetical universalism in the Reformed tradition as a whole and thereby, in the opinion of this reviewer, misconstrues Preston’s position as a “softening” of Reformed theology rather than as a continuation of one trajectory of Reformed thought that had been present from the early sixteenth century onward. Clear statements of nonspeculative hypothetical universalism can be found (as Davenant recognized) in Heinrich Bullinger’s *Decades* and commentary on the Apocalypse, in Wolfgang Musculus’ *Loci communes*, in Ursinus’ catechetical lectures, and in Zanchi’s *Tractatus de praedestinatione sanctorum*, among other places. In addition, the Canons of Dort, in affirming the standard distinction of a sufficiency of Christ’s death for all and its efficiency for the elect, actually refrain from canonizing either the early form of hypothetical universalism or the assumption that Christ’s sufficiency serves only to leave the nonelect without excuse. Although Moore can cite statements from the York conference that Dort “either apertly or covertly denied the universality of man’s redemption” (156), it remains that various of the signatories of the Canons were hypothetical universalists—not only the English delegation (Carleton, Davenant, Ward, Goad, and Hall) but also the [sic] some of the delegates from Bremen and Nassau (Martinius, Crocius, and Alsted)—that Carleton and the other delegates continued to affirm the doctrinal points of Dort while distancing themselves from the church discipline of the Belgic Confession, and that in the course of seventeenth-century debate even the Amyraldians were able to argue that their teaching did not run contrary to the Canons. In other words, the nonspeculative, non-Amyraldian form of hypothetical universalism was new in neither the decades after Dort nor a ‘softening’ of the tradition: The views of Davenant, Ussher,

and Preston followed out a resident trajectory long recognized as orthodox among the Reformed.

In sum, this is a significant study of the theology of John Preston and of the importance of a form of hypothetical universalism in the Puritan and English Reformed theology of the early seventeenth century, but its conclusions need to be set into and somewhat tempered by a sense of the broader context and multiple streams of theology in the Reformed tradition.¹⁴³

Venture the halls of the *Puritanboard* and you'll find not a cent of the sanity described above. In fact, to say something akin to the above results in a speedy whipping followed by a swift ban.

No, really.

I don't know how we arrived at this historical sinkhole, but it's unpleasant, and it smells a lot like the tribalism of politics. Here's the playbook: castigate opposing views, represent them poorly, flatten nuance into simplistic statements that engender rage and excitement among fervent followers. When the polarization strengthens into a hard crust, exclude those stationed in the middle. Deem them suspect, wrongheaded, fringe. Next, lump them in with Arminianism, or toss them into the nebulous bag of Amyraldianism. Once the label is firmly fixed in place, they can be roundly ignored. All that is left is to raise a generation or two under teachers that poorly frame the issue, and the rest is history: the majority of Reformed foot soldiers assume that you're the weirdo, bearing the full burden of proof. Counter evidence is then often ignored or shot dead with well-worn mottoes.

This can make the enterprise of theology feel futile. I know that isn't true, but the feeling swells within me when the people I respect treat the classically moderate position so unfairly. When any position is treated unfairly, really.

It's been said that theology is the queen of the sciences. Perhaps so. But like chess, the queen can slide any direction she pleases in the hands of theologians.

Our common love for truth, and our common love for one another,

143 Richard Muller, Review of *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology*, by Jonathan D. Moore, *Calvin Theological Journal* 43.1 (2008): 149–50.

should propel us to really listen to one another, as well the historical data. When we are told that we are “not Reformed” it hurts. Especially when, from our vantage point, so many of the foot soldiers act like unthinking grunts.

Do forgive me. I didn’t mean for that to come across as a criticism.

I meant for it to come across as a harsh criticism.

Let me reign in the sarcasm. In many ways, a large portion of the blame can be laid at the feet of the generals. After all, they are the ones informing the troops. So when they don’t fairly represent all sides, or when they don’t properly frame the issue, the troops simply fall in step.

In a recent review article of *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, historian Michael Lynch, after praising the volume’s willingness to correct the historical record in certain areas regarding the diversity of Reformed thought in the early modern period, wrote the following astonishing words,

Garry William’s two essays are groundbreaking insofar as he is the first (to my knowledge) to interact with the various *Reformed* critiques of the double-payment argument.¹⁴⁴

No doubt, there’s going to be some internet sleuth who will find another essay deep inside the lower corridors of Alexandria in order to prove Lynch wrong. Whatever. Let’s assume there are two or three tucked away somewhere. The astonishment remains. How is it that there is so little interaction with Reformed critiques of the double-jeopardy argument? Wouldn’t that, of all things, be both fascinating and illuminating?

It sure would. But it might be a tad inconvenient too.



The place where this can become exceedingly personal is ordination. When you’re a classically moderate Calvinist sitting in a room filled with High Calvinists, you feel like a lion in a den of Daniels. Their eyebrows furrow in confusion. They inquire with a measure of suspicion. They

144 Michael Lynch, Review of *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, edited by David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, *Calvin Theological Journal* 49.2 (2014): 352.

ask questions that clearly signal they think something is amiss.

This happened to me twice. Once during the examination process to be become a deacon in the RPCNA and once during my examination to become an elder in the PCA. As for the former, the senior pastor was a kind and understanding man, and the ruling elders were likewise good, thoughtful souls. And so it didn't cause a great stir, and I was ultimately approved after the senior pastor and I spent a good bit of time discussing the subject together. However, I doubt this would have been the case in other RPCNA contexts. In fact, I know it. After writing what should have been a rather innocuous blog post on *Gentle Reformation* about the mysterious connection between God's love for the non-elect and his special love for the sheep, other fellow contributors sounded the alarm and pressure was leveraged for me to desist. I reached out to one of the pastors. He told me that my views should disqualify a person from holding an office in the RPCNA.¹⁴⁵ I tried to follow up with some material in order to sort out the issue between us, but I was ghosted. I ended up stepping down from *Gentle Reformation*.

The road toward ordination in the PCA was a little bumpy as well. I was essentially told that my view needed to be juxtaposed with the "traditional" one in teaching contexts. With an inward groan, I agreed.

The thing that was more than a little perplexing was that the senior pastor flatly denied that God desired the salvation of the non-elect, and that God certainly did not offer salvation to the non-elect. One could wonder why those views weren't deemed suspect, if not downright hyper-Calvinistic, but alas, that's not how the cookie crumbles.

In both cases, ordination wasn't barred from me, and for that I'm exceedingly thankful. There is hope for us poor moderates! But then again, I'm aware of others who have struggled with this. I can't say that I know how each of their stories turned out. But I can say that it ought not be a story to tell in the first place.



145 Part of the "troubling views" was my saying straightforwardly that God desires the salvation of the non-elect (in one sense). In case you're curious, I posted the blog post at my site. You be the judge: Austin Brown, "Necessarily, Freely, or Contingently," *The Sound of Doctrine* (blog), September 14, 2017; <https://soundofdoctrine.wordpress.com/2017/09/14/necessarily-freely-or-contingently/>.

Another practical problem hatches during bible studies. There you are, sitting in someone's living room, studying a book of the bible with fourteen other people. One or two are fresh to the faith. Perhaps even baby Christians. When the lesson lands on a text like John 3:16, someone from among the ranks of strict particularism raises a note of concern when you say that God loves all men and that God sent his Son to die for the world. Eager to remove any misunderstanding whatsoever, the strict particularist proceeds to divest the passage of its obvious import. Perplexed by all this, the newer Christian listens with a mixture of confusion and doubt. He thought he knew what the passage meant. It sounded clear enough to him. And yet, here's a mature Christian telling him that the text is not so obvious, and that it doesn't in fact say what it seems to be saying.

One of the dangers of strict particularism is that it can unnecessarily confuse a new Christian. There are plenty of things that are hard to understand in the bible, and so when a clear text is wrongly obfuscated, causing a person to question their ability to grasp the Scriptures, it can introduce an unhealthy amount of uncertainty.

Naturally, this unfortunate tendency is not at all unique to the extent of the atonement. There's a veritable treasure trove of issues that a zealous proponent of some oddity can utilize to derail a bible study and confuse a new Christian. But since I have my sights set on the practical downsides of strict particularism, and since the banner of limited atonement proudly flaps along the ramparts of Reformedom, I take aim and fire.

Baby Christians aren't the only concern. I've also seen my fair share of Reformed Christians set down their Sproul Study Bibles and depart for Rome, or head East. No doubt, there's far more at play than the extent of the atonement when a person decides to cross the Tiber river. But when a man feels conflicted, and is tottering on the edge, feeling the allure of outside voices, sometimes a nudge is all that is required to push them over; and the nudge can be their *correctly* viewing the limitarian's exegesis of the universalistic passages as problematic.

This is merely to again stress that we must be very careful with theological distinctives, since more times than not, theological distinctives are those peculiar articles of dogma that a group holds with great conviction, but which everyone else can plainly see is wrong.

Babies are thrown out with the bath water every day. If a person is

going to cross the Tiber river, let it not be for any valid concern with Reformed theology.

And So It Is

Persuasion is a deeply mysterious project. One man can look at an argument and immediately feel its force, while another can feel altogether unmoved, or better, annoyed. It would seem that every fact we humans stumble upon possesses this beguiling quality. Or is it the other way around? Are we humans altogether beguiling to both self and others?

Perhaps it's best to admit both—facts and men are both difficult to reign in. I suppose that's to be expected, seeing how the curse touches the ground as well the ground of our minds. If you're a strict particularist, I'm sure this entire volume has been one grand, thorny expedition through the corridors of my thoughts. You'll likely want to subdue it with a barrage of rebuttals all your own. And since I've raised the emotional heat in this book, you'll likely oblige me all the same.

I suppose that is inevitable.

Unless, of course, the arguments changed your mind. In that case, the thorns will turn out to be roses and daffodils and tulips shedding their scent in a lush garden. I will have won you over. No, not quite right. The arguments will have won you over.

Or maybe it would be better to say that the arguments have given you pause. That would be fine as well. There's a certain nobility of character to studying the Scriptures daily to see if some proposal is so.



The question of the extent of the atonement is admittedly tricky, but not *that* tricky. Unless a man is moved by an inner compulsion to view the data through a limiting lens, it speaks plainly enough. There's (A) and (B). Even a child can see that. If, however, we are inclined towards discarding the theological glue which binds these two together, we'll opt for reductionism. All the ingenuity of human intelligence will then labor to explain why it must be (A) rather than (B), or (B) rather than (A). My sincere appeal to you, the reader, would be to avoid playing that game. If two thousand years of Christian theology has

taught us anything, it is that the fullness of the data needs space to breathe, even if that fullness confounds us.

Shall I mention the Trinity?

The two natures of Christ?

The interplay between human volition and God's sovereignty?

How about the mind of God?

Mystery is a very mysterious thing, and we would do well to embrace it because it's not going anywhere, not since we're finite.

Consider:

- God is infinite.

- Man is finite.

- Finite things cannot fully comprehend the Infinite.¹⁴⁶

~ Therefore, mystery will walk alongside men as long as they are finite. And last I checked, we're going to remain finite.

Over the years, I've grown to (rather begrudgingly at times) appreciate mystery. Naturally, mystery ought not be used as an excuse for heresy, nor laziness. Both of those should be shunned. My point is that at bottom—and the top and middle—is mystery. Our job is to plumb it best we can while allowing the biblical data in all its fullness to control our conclusions. If there are groups of texts that seem to highlight a particular concept, we should drive a stake into the ground and content ourselves with it. We can work at figuring out what glue best holds the concepts together, or we can submissively accept that we just don't know.

I believe the question of the extent of the atonement is just such a thing. No small measure of hubris is required for a man to say that he perfectly understands all the ins and outs of Christ's death. Not only is the biblical data expansive and deep, but the spiritual mechanisms underlying it are undoubtedly shrouded in a fair bit of metaphor. Perhaps entirely so. One can only wonder how these heavenly matters are viewed in the heavenly spheres. Are there deeper dimensions at play that, if known, would illuminate the mortal happenings here on earth?

146 For the significance of this idea from a theological and historical perspective, see Richard Muller, q.v. *Finitum non capax infiniti*, in *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 125–26.

Would we dare disagree?



This debate, then, operates on a fairly basic fulcrum. There are:

Particularistic Texts and Concepts

And

Universalistic Texts and Concepts

Additionally,

There are a cluster of arguments raised against the classically moderate position: penal substitution requires the accomplishment of Christ's sacrifice to be applied to those for whom substitution was made (accomplishment is ultimately coextensive with application); the double-jeopardy/double payment problem; Christ's mediatorial work cannot be divided among the elect and non-elect lest there be confusion in the Trinity, etc.

And conversely,

There are a cluster of arguments raised against strict particularism: a universal gospel offer requires a universal grounding (universal satisfaction); limited atonement flattens the general-special pattern of Scripture; it undercuts actual sufficiency, raises the thankfulness problem, the quandary of the non-elect rejecting eternal life/forgiveness/righteousness, etc.

It's my belief that we have to take the particularistic texts seriously, which is to say that they urge us to view them in some efficacious sense. Conversely, it is also my belief that the universalistic texts prove

equally as stubborn as the particularistic texts, thereby requiring us to affirm that Christ made satisfaction for the sins of all men. The arguments advanced by strict particularists, which are meant to serve as defeaters to universal satisfaction, prove ultimately weak. At the very least, they don't carry sufficient, constraining weight to overturn the force of the universalistic texts and concepts. Moreover, the feeling that I am on the right track is heightened when I consider the arguments that can be leveraged against limited atonement. They strike me as genuine defeaters, or, at the very least, they strongly encourage me to take the universalistic passages in their plainest sense. Additionally, the interpretive strategies employed by strict particularists regarding the universalistic texts are ostensibly weak, if not tortuous, and this signals that something is amiss. Any apparent contradictions one might level at me for holding both groups of texts in tension through the Lombardian formula is, therefore, held in check by an overall sanguine feeling about well-placed mystery.

Oh, and the consistent testimony of the church isn't anything to sneeze at either.



What I have just now enunciated will be counted worthy of contempt by some. If not contempt, then folly. A. A. Hodge expressed the sentiment well enough when he wrote the following of those who profess such “novelties,”

Although this scheme has been held by some men of talent, who have been at the same time honest professors of the Calvinistic system and of the true doctrine as to the nature of the Atonement in particular—as, for instance, Amyraldus, Bishop Davenant and Richard Baxter, &c.—yet the judgment of the Methodist theologian, Richard Watson, is unquestionably true, that “it is the most inconsistent theory to which the attempts to modify Calvinism have given rise.”¹⁴⁷

And then, moments later, he added with an eye trained on

147 A. A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1867), 378.

Amyraldus and Testardus,

This “Novelty” is, therefore, not heresy, but an evidence of absurdly confused thought and disordered language upon the subject.¹⁴⁸

Last I checked, there is not one passage of Scripture that states that Christ died only for the sins of the elect. If it is the opinion of men that I am absurdly confused for noticing this fact, and incorporate those texts that suggest otherwise into my scheme, I count myself happily muddled. Would to God that ye could bear with me a little in my folly.

From where I am standing, the sky is a stretch of perfect blue, dotted with two birds in flight. A light breeze is playing through the trees and in the distance one can see the faint peak of a snow-capped mountain. It is warm and sunny, the paths in the garden are studded with smooth stones. I invite you to come up. There are lots of people here. There is singing, even dancing.

148 Hodge, *The Atonement*, 378.

Appendix A

A Taxonomy

Four Views of the Will of God and the Cross

Views	Arminianism	Classic/ Moderate Calvinism	High Calvinism	Hyper-Calvinism
God's Love	God <i>equally</i> loves all men	God loves all men, but especially the elect.	God loves all men, but especially the elect.	Classic hyper-Calvinists say that God <i>only</i> loves the non-elect <i>merely</i> to physically preserve them. ----- Some modern hyper-Calvinists deny that God loves the non-elect in <i>any</i> sense.
God's Will	God <i>equally</i> wills all men to be saved.	God wills all men to be saved, but <i>especially</i> the elect.	God wills all men to be saved, but <i>especially</i> the elect.	God <i>only</i> wills the elect to be saved.
God's Grace	God gives all men prevenient grace.	God gives <i>common</i> grace to all, but only effectual grace to the elect.	God gives <i>common</i> grace to all, but only effectual grace to the elect.	Classic hyper-Calvinists say that God is gracious to the non-elect <i>merely</i> to physically preserve them. ----- Some Modern hyper-Calvinists say that God is <i>only</i> gracious to the elect.

Sufficiency	Christ's death is <i>extrinsically</i> and <i>intrinsically</i> sufficient for all.	Christ's death is <i>extrinsically</i> and <i>intrinsically</i> sufficient for all.	Christ's death is <i>extrinsically</i> sufficient for the elect, but only <i>intrinsically</i> sufficient (<i>i.e.</i> , of infinite value) for the rest.	Christ's death is <i>extrinsically</i> sufficient for the elect, but only <i>intrinsically</i> sufficient (<i>i.e.</i> , of infinite value) for the rest.
Human Ability	All men have the <i>moral</i> ability to believe. (See God's grace)	All men have the <i>natural</i> ability to believe, but only the elect are given the <i>moral</i> ability to believe. Some reject this distinction.	All men have the <i>natural</i> ability to believe, but only the elect are given the <i>moral</i> ability to believe. Some reject this distinction.	Only the elect have the ability to believe.
Responsibility	All men are responsible to <i>evangelically</i> believe (<i>i.e.</i> , "dutyfaith").	All men are responsible to <i>evangelically</i> believe (<i>i.e.</i> , "dutyfaith").	All men are responsible to <i>evangelically</i> believe (<i>i.e.</i> , "dutyfaith").	Classic hyper-Calvinists deny that all are responsible to <i>evangelically</i> believe (<i>i.e.</i> , "duty-faith" is denied). ----- Modern hyper-Calvinists affirm "duty-faith."

Notable Representatives

Arminianism	Classic/Moderate Calvinism
<p>Arminius, Episcopius, J. Goodwin, H. Grotius, J. Horn, Whitby, J. Wesley, R. Watson, T. Grantham, A. Clarke, J. Taylor, T. Summers, W. B. Pope, J. Miley, H. O. Wiley, Dale Moody, I. H. Marshall, H. Hammond, J. Griffith, S. Loveday, G. Cockerill, S. Ashby, M. Pinson, J. M. Hicks, P. Marston, R. Forster, J. Dongell, S. Harper, S. Hauerwas, W. Willimon, J. Walls, S. Grenz, J. Cottrell, L. F. Forlines, Robert Picirilli, J. Walls, R. Shank, R. Dunning, S. Witski, J. Kenneth Grider, R. Olson, G. Osborne</p>	<p>Calvin, Vermigli, Musculus, Oecolampadius, Zanchi, A. Marlorate, Bullinger, Zwingli, Luther, Ursinus, Kimedoncius, Paraeus, Rollock, Cranmer, Latimer, Coverdale, Ussher, Davenant, Culverwell, Ward, Hall, Crocius, Alsted, Martinius, Cameron, Amyraut, Daille, Preston, Bucanus, Baxter, Polhill, Harris, Saurin, Calamy, Marshall, Vines, Seaman, Scudder, Arrowsmith, T. Adams, Bunyan, Charnock, Howe, Bates, Humfrey, J. Truman, Swinnock, Edwards, Brainard, Ryle, Chalmers, Wardlaw, A. Strong, Douty, Clifford, Erickson, Demarest</p> <p>-----</p> <p>*Fuller (later writings), *C. Hodge, *Dabney, *Shedd (see Christ's death above)</p>

High Calvinism	Hyper-Calvinism
<p>Beza, Perkins, Ames, Rutherford, E. Reynolds, Owen, Turretin, Witsius, T. Goodwin, Sedgwick, Dickson, Durham, Knollys, Keach, H. Collins, Ridgley, E. Coles, T. Boston, A. Booth, Spurgeon, Dagg, Kuyper, Warfield, Cunningham, Girardeau, Bavink, A. A. Hodge, Berkhof, Boettner, John Murray, Stebbins, Bahnsen, Iain Murray, Hulse, J. I. Packer, Roger Nicole, Helm, R. C. Sproul, Doug Wilson, Horton, David Steele, Curtis Thomas, R. K. M. Wright, Grudem, S. L. Johnson, Storms, G. Long, MacArthur, P. Johnson, John Piper, Tom Ascol</p>	<p>R. Davis, Hussey, Skepp, Gill, Brine, Gadsby, Huntington, J. C. Philpot, W. J. Styles, William Rushton, Pink (early writings), Herman and Homer Hoeksema, Herman Hanko, Gordon Clark, John Gerstner (later writings), David Engelsma, John Robbins, Vincent Cheung, George Ella, Robert Reymond</p>

Chart created by Tony Byrne [Slight modifications for formatting, Curt Daniel removed]. Primary source and contact information can be found at:
TheologicalMeditations.blogspot.com (see subject index page)
CalvinAndCalvinism.com (see index page)

Appendix B

A Brief Selection of Additional Quotations on the Extent of the Atonement

Martin Luther (AD 1483–1546)

No man has ever descended from heaven, been conceived by the Holy Spirit, suffered under Pontius Pilate, or died for the whole human race.¹⁴⁹

Ulrich Zwingli (AD 1484–1531)

But now I come to the words I quoted [in John. 6:53]: “Except ye eat,” i.e., except ye firmly and heartily believe that Christ was slain for you, to redeem you, and that His blood was shed for you, to wash you thus redeemed (for that is the way we are in the habit of showing bounty and kindness to captives—first freeing them by paying a ransom, then when freed washing away the filth with which they are covered), ‘ye have no life in you.’ Since, therefore, Christ alone was sacrificed for the human race, He is the only One through whom we can come to the Father.¹⁵⁰

Thomas Cranmer (AD 1489–1556)

These be very notable and fearful sentences unto all such as be not repentant, but live after their own wills and not after God’s will, neither have the right faith nor love unto God, nor shall be inheritors of his kingdom. And though Christ hath paid a sufficient ransom for all the sins in the world, and is a sufficient Redeemer and Saviour of all the world, yet shall they have no part thereof; for

149 Martin Luther, “Sermons on the Gospel of St. John: Chapters 1–4,” in *Luther’s Works*, 55 vols., ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 22:459.

150 Ulrich Zwingli, *Commentary on True and False Religion*, ed. S. M. Jackson and C. N. Heller (1929; repr., Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1981), 128.

they belong not unto Christ; and Christ utterly refuseth them for his, which have faith and love only in their mouth, and have not the same engraven in their hearts, and expressed in their acts and deeds.¹⁵¹

Heinrich Bullinger (AD 1504–1575)

We also disapprove of those who think that by their own satisfactions they make amends for sins committed. For we teach that Christ alone by his death or passion is the satisfaction, propitiation or expiation of all sins (Isa., ch. 53; I Cor. 1:30).¹⁵²

John Calvin (AD 1509–1564)

Paul makes grace common to all men, not because it in fact extends to all, but because it is offered to all. Although Christ suffered for the sins of the world, and is offered by the goodness of God without distinction to all men, yet not all receive Him.¹⁵³

William Twisse (AD 1578–1646)

And accordingly professe that Christ dyed for all, that is, to obteyne pardon of sinne and salvation of soule for all, but how? not absolutely whether they believe or no, but only conditionally, to witt provided they doe believe in Christ.¹⁵⁴

151 Thomas Cranmer, “Annotations Upon the King’s Book,” in *The Remains of Thomas Cranmer, D.D.*, ed. Henry Jenkyns, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1833), 2:68.

152 James T. Dennison Jr., “The Second Helvetic Confession (1566),” in *Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: 1523–1693*, 4 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008–2014), 2:838; *Confessio Helvetica posterior*, chap. 14.

153 John Calvin, “The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians,” trans. R. MacKenzie, in *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries*, ed. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994–96), 8:117–18.

154 William Twisse, *The Doctrine of the Synod of Dort and Arles [...]* (Amsterdam:

Richard Muller on Moïse Amyraut (1596–1664) and Confessional Boundaries

Nearly all the older scholarship went astray from the actual evidence in its assumptions that hypothetical universalism per se ran counter to the Reformed confessions—notably, the Canons of Dort—and that Amyraut’s form of hypothetical universalism, derived from the theology of his teacher, Cameron, was representative of hypothetical universalism in general.¹⁵⁵

Edmund Calamy as Recorded in the *Minutes of the Westminster Assembly* (AD 1600–1666)

I am far from universal redemption in the Arminian sense; but that that I hold is in the sense of our divines in the Synod of Dort, that Christ did pay a price for all, absolute intention for the elect, conditional intention for the reprobate in case they do believe, that all men should be *salvabiles, non obstante lapsu Adami* . . . that Jesus Christ did not only die sufficiently for all, but God did intend, in giving of Christ, and Christ in giving Himself, did

Successors to G. Thorp, 1631), 16. Since several similar universal statements can also be found in Twisse’s book *The riches of Gods love unto the vessells of mercy, consistent with his absolute hatred or reprobation of the vessells of wrath* [...], which Richard Baxter, Experience Mayhew, and others have cited, some have understandably concluded that Twisse was a kind of Hypothetical Universalist. However, in other Latin writings, he reportedly argued for a limited imputation of sin to Christ, and consequently for a mere hypothetical sufficiency view in the case of the non-elect. It is probably best, then, to view him as a transitional limitarian figure who made many universal statements that some Hypothetical Universalists (e.g., Baxter and Mayhew) have found useful in making a case for their position, as it seems *some* elements of the classic-moderate view can be found in Twisse’s own language.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Muller, “Beyond Hypothetical Universalism: Moïse Amyraut (1596–1664) on Faith, Reason, and Ethics,” in *The Theology of the French Reformed Churches: From Henri IV to the Revocations of the Edict of Nantes*, ed. Martin I. Klauber (Reformed Historical-Theological Studies, eds. Joel R. Beeke and Jay T. Collier; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 205.

intend to put all men in a state of salvation in case they do believe.¹⁵⁶

Richard Baxter (AD 1615–1691)

[1 Timothy] 5, 6. For it must move us to pray for all, in compliance with this Will of God, that would have all Men saved; because there is One God who is good to all, and One Mediator between God and Mankind, who took on him the Common Nature of all Men, and gave himself a Ransom for all, revealed in the Season appointed of God, (or to be preached to all in due time, as God pleaseth.)

Note, The Controversie about Universal Redemption, too hotly agitated by Beza, Piscater, and others, on one side, and by many on the other, I have fully handled in my *Catholick Theologie*, and *Methodus Theologiae*; and it needs no more than as aforesaid: 1. Whoever is damned, it is not because no Ransom was made for him, or because it was not sufficient for him.¹⁵⁷

John Bunyan (AD 1628–1688)

Whether God would indeed and in truth, that the gospel, with the grace thereof, should be tendered to those that yet he hath bound up under Eternal Reprobation?

To this question I shall answer,

First, In the language of our Lord, ‘Go preach the gospel unto every creature’ (Mark 16:15); and again, ‘Look unto me, and be ye saved; all ye ends of the earth’ (Isa 45:22). ‘And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely’ (Rev 22:17). And the reason is,

156 *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, eds. Alexander F. Mitchell & John P. Struthers (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1874), 152.

157 Richard Baxter, “The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy,” in *A Paraphrase on the New Testament* (London: Printed for B. Simmons, at the Three Cocks in Ludgate-street, 1685), xxx3v.

because Christ died for all, 'tasted death for every man' (2 Cor 5:15; Heb 2:9); is 'the Saviour of the world' (1 John 4:14), and the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.

Second, I gather it from those several censures that even every one goeth under, that doth not receive Christ, when offered in the general tenders of the gospel; 'He that believeth not, - shall be damned' (Mark 16:16); 'He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his son' (1 John 5:10); and, Woe unto thee Capernaum, 'Woe unto thee Chorazin! woe unto thee Bethsaida!' (Matt 11:21) with many other sayings, all which words, with many other of the same nature, carry in them a very great argument to this very purpose; for if those that perish in the days of the gospel, shall have, at least, their damnation heightened, because they have neglected and refused to receive the gospel, it must needs be that the gospel was with all faithfulness to be tendered unto them; the which it could not be, unless the death of Christ did extend itself unto them (John 3:16; Heb 2:3); for the offer of the gospel cannot, with God's allowance, be offered any further than the death of Jesus Christ doth go; because if that be taken away, there is indeed no gospel, nor grace to be extended.¹⁵⁸

Stephen Charnock (AD 1628–1680)

It is so acceptable to God, that is a sufficient sacrifice for all, if all would accept of it, and by a fixed faith plead it. It is sufficient for the salvation of all sinners, and the expiation of all sins. The wrath of God was so fully appeased by it, his justice so fully satisfied, that there is no bar to a readmission into his favour, and the enjoyment of the privileges purchased by it, but man's unbelief.¹⁵⁹

158 John Bunyan, "Reprobation Asserted," in *The Works of John Bunyan* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 2:348.

159 Stephen Charnock, "The Acceptableness of Christ's Death," *The Complete Works of Stephen Charnock*, 5 vols. (Edinburgh; London; Dublin: James Nichol; James Nisbet and Co.; W. Robertson; G. Herbert, 1864–1866), 4:563.

Matthew Henry (AD 1662–1714)

Is Jesus Christ the Redeemer? Yes: there is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ, Jesus, 1 Tim 2:5. Is he the only Redeemer? Yes: for there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved, Acts 4:12. Is he a universal Redeemer? Yes: he gave himself a ransom for all, 1 Tim. 2:6. Did he die to purchase a general offer? Yes: the Son of man was lifted up, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, Jonh3:14,15. Is all the world the better for Christ's mediation? Yes: for by him all things consist, Col. 1:7. Is it long of Christ then that so many perish? No: I would have gathered you, and you would not, Matt. 23:37.¹⁶⁰

Jonathan Edwards (AD 1703–1758)

Were it not that the sins of men are already fully punished in the sufferings of Christ, all, both angels and men, might justly hate all sinners for their sins. For appearing as they are in themselves, they are indeed infinitely hateful, and could appear no otherwise to any than as they are in themselves, had not another been substituted for them; and therefore, they must necessarily appear hateful to all that saw things as they be.¹⁶¹

J. C. Ryle (AD 1816–1900)

I will give place to no one in maintaining that Jesus loves all mankind, came into the world for all, died for all, provided redemption sufficient for all, calls on all, invites all, commands all to repent and believe; and ought to be offered to all—freely, fully,

160 Matthew Henry, "Scripture Catechism in the Method of the Assembly's," in *The Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. Matthew Henry*, V.D.M. (London: Joseph Ogle Robinson, 1830), 878. Cited from David Ponter, "Matthew Henry (1662–1714) on the Universal Redemption of Mankind," *Calvin and Calvinism* (blog), August 2, 2011; <http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=10733>. See his additional comments.

161 Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies": (Entry Nos. 501–832)*, ed. Ava Chamberlain and Harry S. Stout, vol. 18, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2000), 450; Miscellany 781.

unreservedly, directly, unconditionally—without money and without price. If I did not hold this, I dare not get into a pulpit, and I should not understand how to preach the Gospel.

But while I hold all this, I maintain firmly that Jesus does special work for those who believe, which He does not do for others. He quickens them by His Spirit, calls them by His grace, washes them in His blood—justifies them, sanctifies them, keeps them, leads them, and continually intercedes for them—that they may not fall. If I did not believe all this, I should be a very miserable, unhappy Christian.¹⁶²

Robert L Dabney (AD 1820–1898)

This seems, then, to be the candid conclusion, that there is no passage in the Bible which asserts an intention to apply redemption to any others than the elect, on the part of God and Christ, but that there are passages which imply that Christ died for all sinners in some sense, as Dr. Ch. Hodge has so expressly admitted. Certainly the expiation made by Christ is so related to all, irrespective of election, that God can sincerely invite all to enjoy its benefits, that every soul in the world who desires salvation is warranted to appropriate it, and that even a Judas, had he come in earnest, would not have been cast out.¹⁶³

William G. T. Shedd (AD 1820–1894)

The Scriptures plainly teach that God so loved the whole world that He gave His only begotten Son to make expiation for “the sins of the whole world;” and they just as plainly teach that part of this world of mankind are sentenced, by God, to eternal death for their sins.¹⁶⁴

162 J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of John: Volume 3* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1880), 186.

163 R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (1878; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2002), 527.

164 William G. T. Shedd, “The Meaning and Value of the Doctrine of Decrees,” *The*

Appendix C

THE JUDGEMENT

OF THE LATE

ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH, AND THE PRIMATE OF IRELAND,

[James Ussher, AD 1581–1656]

OF THE

TRUE INTENT AND EXTENT

OF CHRIST'S DEATH

AND SATISFACTION UPON THE CROSS.

WRITTEN IN ANSWER TO THE REQUEST OF A FRIEND,

MARCH 3, 1617.¹⁶⁵

Presbyterian and Reformed Review 1.1 (January 1890): 10.

165 The friend was Ezekiel Culverwell (c.1554–1631), a Church of England clergyman and rector of Great Stambridge, Essex. On the eve of the Synod of Dort, Culverwell had circulated a manuscript of his opinions, wherein he took issue with the strict view of John 3:16 (which interpreted the “world” to be the elect world of Jews and Gentiles), but not in such a way as to undermine God’s decree of special election. As Culverwell later said, “I profess I cannot find any one clear place where [the World] must of necessity be taken for the Elect only.” See Ezekiel Culverwell, *A Brief Answer to Certain Objections against the Treatise of Faith* (London: Printed by John Dawson, 1646), A7v. Culverwell sent his manuscript to his brother-in-law, Laurence Chaderton (c.1536–1640), a strict particularist. Chaderton then passed the manuscript to Ussher, which prompted Ussher, on March 3, 1618, to give his own thoughts on the matter in a paper entitled *The True Intent and Extent of Christ’s Death*, thus drawing Ussher into the debate. For more details on the background of this debate and a helpful overview, see Richard Snoddy, *The Soteriology of James Ussher: The Act and Object of Saving Faith* (New York: Oxford Press, 2014), 52–

The all-sufficient satisfaction of Christ, made for the sins of the whole world.

The true intent and extent is *lubricus locus*¹⁶⁶ to be handled, and hath, and doth now much trouble the church: this question hath been moved *sub iisdem terminis quibus nunc*,¹⁶⁷ and hath received contrary resolutions; the reason is, that in the two extremities of opinions held in this matter, there is somewhat true, and somewhat false; the one extremity extends the benefit of Christ's satisfaction too far, as if hereby God, for his part, were actually reconciled to all mankind, and did really discharge every man from all his sins, and that the reason why all men do not reap the fruit of this benefit, is the want of that faith whereby they ought to have believed, that God in this sort did love them: whence it would follow, that God should forgive a man his sins, and justify him before he believed; whereas the elect themselves, before their effectual vocation, are said to be "without Christ, and without hope, and to be utter strangers from the covenants of promise."

2. The other extremity contracts the riches of Christ's satisfaction into too narrow a room; as if none had any kind of interest therein, but such as were elected before the foundation of the world, howsoever by the Gospel every one be charged to receive the same; whereby it would follow, that a man should be bound in conscience to believe that which is untrue, and charged to take that wherewith he hath nothing to do.

60. This copy of Ussher's first letter is taken from James Ussher, "The True Intent and Extent of Christ's Death and Satisfaction on the Cross," in *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, 17 vols. (Dublin: Hodges, Smith, and Co., 1864), 12:553–60. Scripture references have been omitted. Nicholas Bernard has another edition in his *The Judgment of the Late Arch-Bishop of Armagh [...] Of the Extent of Christs death, and satisfaction, &c. [...]* (London: Printed for John Crook, at the Ship in St. Pauls Church-yard, 1657). I am indebted to Tony Byrne for compiling the historical circumstances surrounding these letters, as well the various footnotes. At his suggestion, it seemed to me agreeable to include Ussher's correspondence, since it would seem that they have not seen the light of day in modern works.

166 A slippery place or subject.

167 Probably means something like "under the same terms as they are now." Thanks to Dr. Michael Lynch and Dr. Randy Blacketer for their translation recommendations.

Both extremities then, drawing with them unavoidable absurdities: the word of God (by hearing whereof, faith is begotten) must be sought unto by a middle course, to avoid these extremities.

For finding out this middle course, we must, in the matter of our redemption, carefully put a distinction betwixt the satisfaction of Christ absolutely considered, and the application thereof to every one in particular: the former brings with it sufficiency, abundant to discharge the whole debt; the other adds to it efficacy. The satisfaction of Christ only makes the sins of mankind fit for pardon, which without it could not well be; the injury done to God's majesty being so great, that it could not stand with his honour to put it up without amends made. The particular application makes the sins of those to whom that mercy is vouchsafed to be actually pardoned: for, as all sins are mortal, in regard of the stipend due thereunto by the law, but all do not actually bring forth death, because the gracious promises of the Gospel stayeth the execution: even so all the sins of mankind are become venial,¹⁶⁸ in respect of the price paid by Christ to his Father (so far, that in shewing mercy upon all, if so it were his pleasure, his justice should be no loser,) but all do not obtain actual remission, because most offenders do not take out, nor plead their pardon as they ought to do. If Christ had not assumed our nature, and therein made satisfaction for the injury offered to the divine Majesty, God would not have come unto a treaty of peace with us, more than with the fallen angels, whose nature of the Son did not assume: but this way being made, God holds out to us the golden sceptre of his word, and thereby not only signifieth his pleasure of admitting us unto his presence, and accepting of our submission, which is a wonderful grace, but also sends an embassage unto us, and "entreats us that we would be reconciled unto him."

Hence, we infer against the first extremity, that by the virtue of this blessed oblation, God is made placable unto our nature (which he never will be unto the angelical nature offending) but not actually appeased with any, until he hath received his son, and put on the Lord Jesus. As also against the latter extremity, that all men may be truly said to have interest in the merits of Christ, as in a common, though all do not enjoy the benefit thereof, because they have no will to take it.

168 "Venial," according to Nicholas Bernard's edition, *The Judgment of the Late Arch-Bishop of Armagh*, 4.

The well spring of life is set open unto all: “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely;” but many have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep, faith is a vessel whereby we draw all virtue from Christ, and the apostle tells us, that “faith is not of all.” Now the means of getting this faith is “the hearing of the word of truth, the Gospel of our salvation,” which ministereth this general ground for every one to build his faith upon.

SYLLOGISM. What Christ hath prepared for thee, and the Gospel offereth unto thee, that oughtest thou with all thankfulness to accept, and apply to the comfort of thy own soul.

But Christ by his death and obedience hath provided a sufficient remedy for the taking away of all thy sins, and the Gospel offereth the same unto thee. Therefore thou oughtest to accept, and apply the same to the comfort of thine own soul.

Now this Gospel of salvation many do not hear at all, being destitute of the ministry of the word; and many hearing do not believe, or lightly regard it; and many that do believe the truth thereof, are so wedded to their sins, that they have no desire to be divorced from them, and therefore they refuse to accept the gracious offer that is made unto them. And yet notwithstanding their refusal on their part, we may truly say, that good things were provided for them on Christ’s part, and a rich “price was put into the hands of a fool, howsoever he had no heart to use it.”

Our blessed Saviour, by that which he hath performed on his part, hath procured a jubilee for the sons of Adam, and his Gospel is his trumpet, whereby he doth proclaim “liberty to the captives, and preacheth the acceptable year of the Lord.” If for all this some are so well pleased with their captivity that they desire no deliverance, that derogates nothing from the generality of the freedom annexed to that year. If one say to sin his old master, “I love thee, and will not go out free,” he shall be bored for a slave, and serve for ever. But that slavish disposition of his, maketh the extent of the privilege of that year not a whit the straighter, because he was included within the general grant as well as others; howsoever, he was not disposed to take the benefit of it: the kingdom of heaven is like to a certain king that made a marriage of his

son, and sent his servants to those that were bidden to the wedding with this message: "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen, and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready, come to the marriage." If we look to the event, they that were bidden made light of their entertainment, and went their ways, "one to his farm, and another to his merchandize;" but that neglect of theirs doth not falsify the word of the king, viz. That the dinner was prepared, and these unworthy guests were invited thereunto; "For what, if some did not believe, shall their unbelief disannul the faith, and truth of God? God forbid, yea, let God be true, and every man a liar, as it is written, that thou mayest be justified in thy sayings, and overcome when thou judgest. Let not the house of Israel say, the way of the Lord is unequal." For when he cometh to judge them, the inequality will be found on their side, and not on his. "O house of Israel, are not my ways equal, and your ways unequal saith the Lord. The Lord is right in all his ways, and holy in all his works. All the ways of our God are mercy and truth;" when we were in our sins it was of infinite mercy that any way or remedy should be prepared for our recovery. And when the remedy is prepared, we are never the nearer, except he be pleased of his free mercy to apply the same to us, that so the whole praise of our redemption, from the beginning to the end thereof, may entirely be attributed to the riches of his grace, and nothing left to sinful flesh wherein it may rejoice.

The freeing of the Jews from the captivity of Babylon, was a type of that great deliverance, which the Son of God hath wrought for us.

Cyrus, king of Persia, who was *Christus Domini* (and herein but a shadow of *Christus Dominus*, the author of our redemption) published his proclamation in this manner: "Who is amongst you all his people, the Lord his God be with him, and let him go up." Now it is true, they alone did follow this calling, whose spirit God had raised to go up. But could they that remained still in Babylon, justly plead, that the king's grant was not large enough, or that they were excluded from going up by any clause contained therein? The matter of our redemption purchased by our Saviour Christ lieth open to all, all are invited to it, none that hath a mind to accept of it, is excluded from it. "The beautiful feet of those that preach the Gospel of peace, to bring glad tidings" of good things to every house where they tread. The first part of their message being this peace to this house. But, unless God be

pleased out of his abundant mercy “to guide our feet into the way of peace,” the rebellion of our nature is such, that we run headlong to the “ways of destruction and misery, and the ways of peace do we not know.” They have not all obeyed the Gospel, all are not apt to entertain this message of peace, and therefore, though God’s ambassadors make a true tender of it to all unto whom they are sent, yet “their peace only resteth on the sons of peace,” but if it meet with such as will not listen to the motion of it, “their peace doth again return unto themselves.” The proclamation of the Gospel runneth thus: “Let him that is athirst come,” for him this grace is specially provided, because none but he will take the pains to come. But lest we should think this should abridge the largeness of the offer, a *quicumque vult*,¹⁶⁹ is immediately added, and “whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely:” yet withal this must be yielded for a certain truth, that it is God who must work in us “to will and to do of his good pleasure;” and though the call be ever so loud and large, yet none can “come except the Father draw him.” For the universality of the satisfaction derogates nothing from the necessity of the special grace in the application: neither doth the speciality of the one any ways abridge the generality of the other. Indeed Christ our Saviour saith, “I pray not for the world, but for them that thou has given me:” but the consequence hereby referred may well be excepted against, viz. He prayed not for the world, therefore he payed not for the world; because the latter is an act of his satisfaction, the former of his intercession; which, being divers parts of his priesthood, are distinguishable one from another by sundry differences. This his satisfaction doth properly give contentment to God’s justice, in such sort as formerly hath been declared; his intercession doth solicit God’s mercy. The first contains the preparation of the remedy necessary for man’s salvation; the second brings with it an application of the same. And consequently the one may well appertain to the common nature, which the son assumed, when the other is a special privileged vouchsafed to such particular persons only, as the father hath given him. And therefore we may safely conclude out of all these premises, that “the Lamb of God, offering himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world,” intended by giving sufficient satisfaction to God’s justice, to make the nature of man, which he assumed, a fit subject for mercy and to prepare a medicine for the sins of the whole world, which

169 A whosoever will.

should be denied to none that intended to take the benefit of it: howsoever he intended not by applying his all-sufficient remedy unto every person in particular to make it effectual unto the salvation of all, or to procure thereby actual pardon for the sins of the whole world. So, in one respect he may be said to have died for all, and in another respect not to have died for all; yet so as in respect of his mercy he may be counted a kind of universal cause of the restoring of our nature, as Adam was of the depraving of it; for as far as I can discern, he rightly hits the nail on the head that determineth the point in this manner.

THOM. CONTRA GENTILES, LIB. IV. CAP. LV.

Mors [enim] Christi est quasi quædam universalis causa salutis; sicut peccatum primi hominis fuit quasi universalis causa damnationis. Oportet autem universalem causam applicari ad unumquodque [unumquemque] specialiter, ut effectum universalis causæ participet [percipiat]. Effectus igitur peccati primi parentis pervenit ad unumquemque per carnis originem, effectus autem mortis Christi pertingit ad unumquemque per spiritualem regenerationem, per quam Christo homo [homo Christo] quodammodo conjungitur [coniungitur] et incorporatur.¹⁷⁰

AN ANSWER
OF THE
ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH

170 “Christ’s death is by way of being a universal cause of salvation, just as the sin of the first man was like a universal cause of damnation. Now a universal cause needs to be applied to each individual, that the latter may have its share in the effect of the universal cause. Accordingly, the effect of the sin of our first parent reaches each individual through carnal origin: and the effect of Christ’s death reaches each individual through spiritual regeneration, whereby man is united to and incorporated with Christ.” St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles: Books III–IV*, trans. Fr. Laurence Shapcote, 60 vols. (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute; Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Academic, 2018), 12:479; *SCG*, IV.55.

TO
SOME EXCEPTIONS
TAKEN
AGAINST HIS AFORESAID LETTER.¹⁷¹

I cannot sufficiently wonder, why such exceptions should be taken against a letter of mine, which without my privity came to so many men's hands, as if thereby I had confirmed Papism, Arminianism, and I know not what error of Mr. [Ezekiel] Culverwell's, which (as you write) is, and hath been, opposed by many, yea, all good men. The papist (saith one) doth distinguish a mediator of redemption and intercession; and [Robert] Bellarmine (saith another) divides the satisfaction and application of Christ. To which, what other answer should I make but this? To hold that Christ is the only mediator of redemption, but that the saints are also mediators of intercession, that Christ by his merits hath made satisfaction to his father in gross, and the pope by his indulgence, and his priests by their oblations in the mass do make a particular application to particular persons. To join thus partners with Christ in this manner in the office of mediation is popery indeed; but he who, attributing the entire work of the mediation unto Christ alone, doth yet distinguish the act of redemption from the act of intercession,

171 The occasion of this second letter was called for because Ussher's first paper was probably intended for Culverwell's eyes only, as Richard Snoddy noted, but "the recipient, finding in it support for his own ideas, began to circulate it amongst the Puritan clergy. By July, Ussher's views were widely known." Jasper Heartwell, the London barrister, "warned Ussher to expect a written refutation from a Scottish pastor John Forbes, in exile at Middleburg. Bernard's later account relates how a member of the British delegation carried a copy to the Synod of Dort, where objections were compiled in a letter to Ussher. Ussher lamented that his letter 'without my privity came to so many men's hands,' and was astonished at the opposition which it had provoked." Bernard claimed that this was the occasion of Ussher's second letter. Snoddy, *The Soteriology of James Ussher*, 54–55. This second paper is taken from James Ussher, "An Answer of the Archbishop of Armagh, to Some Exceptions Taken Against His Aforesaid Letter," in *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, 17 vols. (Dublin: Hodges, Smith, and Co., 1864), 12:561–71.

the satisfaction made by him unto God, from the application thereof communicated unto men, is as far from popery, as he that thinks otherwise is from the grounds of the catechism; for that Christ hath so died for all men (as they lay down in the conference of Hague) “ut reconciliationem cum Deo, et peccatorum remissionem singulis impetraverit,”¹⁷² I hold to be untrue, being well assured, that our Savior hath obtained at the hands of his father reconciliation, and forgiveness of sins, not for the reprobate, but elect only, and not for them neither, before they be truly regenerated, and implanted into himself; for election being nothing else but the purpose of God, resting in his own mind, makes no kind of alteration in the party elected, but only the execution of that decree and purpose, which in such as have the use of reason is done by an effectual calling, in all by spiritual regeneration, which is the new birth, without which no man can see the kingdom of God.

That impetration, whereof the Arminians speak, I hold to be a fruit, not of his satisfaction, but intercession; and seeing I have learned from Christ’s own mouth, “I pray not for the reprobate world:” I must needs esteem it a great folly to imagine that he hath impetrated reconciliation and remission of sins for that world. I agree therefore thus far with Mr. Aimes [William Ames] in his dispute against [Nicolaas] Grevinchovius, that application and impetration, in this matter we have in hand, are of equal extent; and, that forgiveness of sins is not by our Savior impetrated for any unto whom the merit of his death is not applied in particular. If in seeking to make straight that which was crooked in the Arminian opinion, he [Ames] hath bended it too far the contrary way, and inclined too much unto the other extremity, it is a thing which, in the heat of disputation, hath befallen many worthy men before him; and, if I be not deceived, gave the first occasion to this present controversy. But I see no reason why I should be tied to follow him [Ames] in every step, wherein he treadeth: and so much for Mr. Aimes [Ames].

The main error of the Arminians and of the patrons of universal grace is this, that God offereth unto every man those means that are necessary unto salvation, both sufficiently and effectually; and, that it

172 I.e., to obtain reconciliation with God, and the forgiveness of sins to each individual.

resteth in the free will of every one to receive, or reject the same; for the proof thereof they allege, as their predecessors, the Semipelagians, did before them, that received axiom of Christ's dying for all men, which being rightly understood, makes nothing for their purpose. Some of their opposites (subject to oversights as well as others) more forward herein than circumspect, have answered this objection, not by expounding (as was fit) but by flat denying that famous axiom: affirming peremptorily, that Christ died only for the elect, and for others *nullo modo*.¹⁷³ whereby they gave the adverse party advantage to drive them unto this extreme absurdity, viz. that seeing Christ in no wise died for any, but for the elect, and all men were bound to believe that Christ died for themselves, and that upon pain of damnation for the contrary infidelity; therefore all men were bound to believe that they themselves were elected, although in truth the matter were nothing so:

Non tali auxilio nec defensoribus istis

Tempus eget.¹⁷⁴

Neither is there hope that the Arminians will be drawn to acknowledge the error of their position, as long as they are persuaded the contrary opinion cannot be maintained without admitting that an untruth must be believed, even by the commandment of him that is God of truth, and by the direction of that word, which is the word of truth.

Endeavouring therefore to make one truth stand by another, and to ward off the blow given by the Arminians in such sort that it should neither bring hurt to the truth, nor give advantage to error, admit I failed of mine intent, I ought to be accounted rather an oppugner than anywise an abettor of their fancies. That for the Arminians. Now for Mr. [Ezekiel] Culverwell, that which I have heard him charged withal, is the former extremity, which in my letter I did condemn, viz. That Christ in such sort did die for all men, that by his death he made an actual reconciliation between God and man; and, that the especial reason why all men reap not the fruit of this reconciliation, is the want

173 I.e., in no way.

174 "This kind of help, and defenders like you, are not what the crisis Needs." Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. Frederick Ahl (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 44; II.521–22.

of that faith, whereby they ought to have believed that God in this sort did love them. How justly he hath been charged with this error, himself can best tell; but if ever he held it, I do not doubt, but he was driven thereunto by the absurdities, which he discerned in the other extremity; for what would not a man fly unto rather than yield, that Christ in no manner of ways died for any reprobate, and none but the elect had any kind of title to him, and yet so many thousand reprobates should be bound in conscience to believe that he died for them, and tied to accept him for their redeemer and Saviour; yea, and should be condemned to everlasting torments for want of such a faith (if we may call that faith, which is not grounded upon the word of truth) whereby they should have believed that which in itself was most untrue, and laid hold of that in which they had no kind of interest; if they who dealt with Mr. [Ezekiel] Culverwell laboured to drive out some absurdity by bringing in another, or went about to stop one hole by making two, I should the less wonder at that you write, that though he hath been dealt withal by many brethren, and for many years, yet he could not be drawn from his error. But those stumbling blocks being removed, and the plain word of truth laid open, by which faith is to be begotten, I dare boldly say he doth not hold that extremity wherewith he is charged, but followeth that safe and middle course, which I laid down; for after he had well weighed what I had written, he heartily thanked the Lord and me, for so good a resolution of this question, which for his part he wholly approved, not seeing how it could be gainsayed. And so much likewise for Mr. [Ezekiel] Culverwell.

Now for Mr. [Richard?] Stock's public opposition in the pulpit, I can hardly be induced to believe that he aimed at me therein; if he did, I must needs say he was deceived, when he reckoned me amongst those good men, who make the universality of all the elect, and all men to be one. Indeed I wrote but even now, that God did execute his decree of election in all by spiritual generation: but if any shall say, that by all thereby I should understand the universality of all and every one in the world, and not the universality of all the elect alone, he should greatly wrong my meaning, for I am of no other mind than Prosper [of Aquitaine] was: "Habet populus Dei plenitudinem suam, et quamvis magna pars hominum salvantis gratiam aut repellat aut negligat, in electis tamen et præcitis atque ab omni generalitate discretis, specialis quædam censetur universitas, ut de toto mundo, totus mundus liberatus,

et de omnibus hominibus, omnes homines videantur assumpti.”¹⁷⁵ That Christ died for his apostles, for his sheep, for his friends, for his Church, may make peradventure against those, who make all men to have a share alike in the death of our Saviour: but I profess myself to hold fully with him [Ambrose], who said: “Etsi Christus pro omnibus mortuus est, tamen specialiter pro nobis passus est, quia pro Ecclesia passus est.”¹⁷⁶ Yea, and in my former writing I did directly conclude, that as in one respect Christ might have been said to die for all, so in another respect truly said not to have died for all; and my belief is, that the principal end of the Lord’s death, was, “that he might gather together in one the children of God scattered abroad,” and, that for their sakes he did specially sanctify himself, that they “also might be sanctified through the truth.” And therefore it may be well concluded, that Christ in a special manner died for these; but to infer from hence, that in no manner of respect he died for any others, is but a very weak collection, especially the respect by me expressed being so reasonable, that no sober mind advisedly considering thereof can justly make question of it, viz. That the Lamb of God offering himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world, intending by giving satisfaction to God’s justice to make the nature of man which he assumed, a fit subject for mercy, and to prepare a sovereign medicine that should not only be a sufficient cure for the sins of the whole world, but also should be laid open to all, and denied to none, that indeed do take the benefit thereof: for he is much deceived that thinks a preaching of a bare sufficiency is able to yield sufficient ground of comfort to a distressed soul, without giving a further way to it, and opening a further passage.

To bring news to a bankrupt that the king of Spain hath treasure

175 “God’s people, therefore, has a completeness all its own. It is true that a great part of mankind refuse or neglect the grace of their Saviour. In the elect, however, and the foreknown who were set apart from the generality of mankind, we have a specified totality. Thus the whole world is spoken of as though the whole it had been liberated, and all mankind as though all men had been chosen.” St. Prosper of Aquitaine, *The Call of All Nations*, trans. P. De Letter, ACW 14 (New York, NY; Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press, 1952), 46; *De vocatione omnium gentium*, lib. I. c. 9.

176 “Though Christ suffered for all, it was for us specially that He suffered, because He suffered for His Church” Ambrose, Commentary of Saint Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke, trans. Sr. Íde M. Ní Riain (Dublin, Ireland: Halcyon Press, 2001), 164; *Expositio Evangelii Secundum Lucam*, 6.25 in *Patrologia Latina* 15, col. 1675A.

enough to pay a thousand times more than he owes, may be true, but yields but cold comfort to him the miserable debtor: sufficiency indeed is requisite, but it is the word of promise that gives comfort.

If here exception be taken, that I make the whole nature of man fit for mercy, when it is as unfit a subject for grace as may be.

I answer, That here two impediments do occur, which give a stop unto the peace, which is to be made betwixt God and man. The one respects God the party offended, whose justice hath been in such sort violated by his base vassals, that it were unfit for his glorious majesty to put up such an injury without good satisfaction. The other respects man the party offending, whose blindness, stupidity, and hardness of heart is such, that he is neither sensible of his own wretchedness, nor God's goodness, that when God offers to be reconciled unto him, there must be much entreaty to persuade him to be reconciled to God. In regard of the latter I acknowledge with the apostle, "That the natural man receives not the things of the spirit, for they are foolishness to him; neither can he, because spiritually discerned." And this impediment is not taken away by Christ's satisfaction (which is a work of his priestly function) but by the enlightening of the mind, and softening the heart of the sinner, which are effects issuing from the execution of the prophetic, and kingly office of our Redeemer. When therefore I say, that by Christ's satisfaction to his Father he made the nature of man a fit subject for mercy, I mean thereby, that the former impediment arising on God's part is taken away, that if it were not for the other (for the having whereof we can blame none but ourselves, and in the not removing whereof we cannot say God hath done us any wrong) there were no let, but all men might be saved; and if it pleased God to extend his mercy unto all, as he keeps his freedom therein, in having compassion on whom he will have mercy, and leaving others in blindness, natural hardness of their own heart, yet the worth of Christ's satisfaction is so great, that his justice therein should be looser.

But if this justice (you will say) be satisfied, how comes it to pass that God exacts payment again from any? I answer, We must take heed we stretch not our similitudes beyond their just extent, lest at last we drive the matter too far, and be forced to say (as some have done) that we cannot see how satisfaction and forgiveness stand together, and so by

denying Christ's satisfaction be injurious to God's justice, or by denying remission of sins become injurious to God's mercy. We are therefore to understand, that the end of the satisfaction of God's justice is to make way for God's free liberty in shewing mercy, that so mercy and justice meeting, and embracing one another, God may be just, and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus. Now the general satisfaction of Christ, which was the first act of his priestly office, prepares the way for God's mercy, by making the sins of all mankind pardonable, the interposition of any bar from God's justice notwithstanding, and so puts the sons of men only in a possibility of being justified, a thing denied to the nature of fallen angels, which the Son was not pleased to assume; but the special application of this satisfaction vouchsafed by Christ unto those persons only whom his father hath given him out of the world, which is an appendent, or appertaineth to the second act of his priesthood, viz. his intercession, produceth this *potentia in actum*,¹⁷⁷ that is, procureth an actual discharge from God's anger; and maketh justification, which before was a part of our possibility, to be a part of our present possession.

If it be said: It is a great derogation to the dignity of Christ's death to make the sins of mankind only pardonable, and brings in a bare possibility of justification.

I answer, it is a most unchristian imagination to suppose the merit of Christ's death, being particularly applied to the soul of a sinner, produceth no further effect than this. St. Paul teacheth us that we be not only justifiable, but "justified by his blood," yet not simply as offered on the cross, but "through faith in his blood," that is, through his blood applied by faith. "The blood of Jesus Christ his son," saith St. John, "cleanseth us from all sins;" yet cleanse it doth not by being prepared, but by being applied: prepared it was when he poured it out once upon the cross, applied it is when he washeth us from our sins therein. It is one thing therefore to speak of Christ's satisfaction, in the general absolutely considered; and another thing, as it is applied to every one in particular. The consideration of things as they are in their causes, is one thing; and as they have an actual existence, is another thing. Things as they are in their causes are no otherwise considerable, but as they have a possibility to be. The application of the agent to the

177 I.e., power into action.

patient, with all circumstances necessarily required, is it that gives to the thing an actual being. That disease is curable for which a sovereign medicine may be found, but cured it is not till the medicine be applied to the patient; and if it so fall out, that, the medicine being not applied, the party miscarries, we say, he was lost, not because his sickness was incurable, but because there wanted a care to apply that to him that might have helped him.

All Adam's sons have taken a mortal sickness from their father, which, if it be not remedied, will, without fail, bring them to the second death: no medicine under heaven can heal this disease, but only a potion confected of the blood of the Lamb of God, who came "to take away the sins of the world;" which, as Prosper [of Aquitaine] truly notes, "habet quidem in se ut omnibus prosit, sed si non bibitur non medetur."¹⁷⁸ The virtue thereof is such, that if all did take it, all without doubt should be recovered, but without taking it there is no recovery; in the former respect it may be truly said, that no man's state is so desperate, but by this means it is recoverable, (and this is the first comfortable news that the Gospel brings to the distressed soul) but here it resteth not, nor feedeth a man with such a possibility, that he should say in his heart, "Who shall ascend into heaven to bring Christ from above?" but it brings the word of comfort nigh unto him, even to his mouth and heart, and presents him with the medicine at hand, and desireth him to take it; which being done accordingly, the cure is actually performed.

178 "The beverage of immortality prepared from our weakness and God's power *is apt to restore health to all men, but it cannot cure anyone unless he drink it.*" Prosper of Aquitaine, "Answers to the Vicentian Articles," in *Defense of St. Augustine*, trans. P. De Letter, ACW 32 (New York, NY; Ramsey, NJ: Newman Press, 1963), 164; Art. 1., emphasis mine. *Responsiones ad objectionum Vincentianarum*, 1; PL, vol. 45, col. 1844.

Gift Shop

In the unfortunate event that nothing said in this book proves convincing, and you feel it your duty to storm off and write a scathing review, I would encourage you to at least stop by our gift shop on the way out. The principle manager is a man by the name of Jim Charnock. Prices have been slashed on certain items. Some are even free. He would like to interest you with the following:

“Free Offer – High Calvinist Pull-String Dolls”

I have a hypothetically sufficient supply of my High Calvinist pull-string dolls that I offer to any and all High Calvinists. They don't actually exist for them, but hey, they won't want them anyway, so 'no problema,' to use some Spanish lingo and some more commas to boot.

The wind-up High Calvinist doll with a pull string on the back comes in your favorite High Calvinist model.*

You pull the string and it says:

'If Christ paid the sins of all, then no one can ever be in Hell.'
'If Christ paid the sins of all, then no one can ever be in Hell.'
'If Christ paid the sins of all, then no one can ever be in Hell.'
'If Christ paid the sins of all, then no one can ever be in Hell.'
'AWK'

*The James White doll is currently out of stock.”¹⁷⁹

179 Used and edited with permission by Jim Charnock, “Free Offer - High Calvinist Pull-String Doll.” *Charnockian Logic* (blog), August 7, 2015; <https://charnockianlogic.blogspot.com/2015/08/high-calvinist-pullstring-doll-offer.html>.

