

Newsletter July 2014

In our earlier October 2013 newsletter we discussed the sovereign election of God's people out of the multitude of fallen humanity through specifically targeted divine intervention, and in our May 2014 Newsletter we discussed Arminianism, which rose up to challenge that biblical teaching in the early seventeenth century. Last month, in our June 2014 newsletter we began to consider soteriology (the study of salvation as an effect of divine agency) in some detail by studying the first two points taken from a chart comparing the doctrines of Arminianism with that of biblically reformed Calvinism. We determined that the first point (see partial chart below), that of the total depravity of man, immediately separated the Arminian from the Calvinist – primarily over the false doctrine of free will verses the biblical doctrine of a will that is in total bondage to Satan through both original and incessant sin (cf. Newsletter September 2013). We then discussed the second point by looking for any essential quality found in mankind that could earn them a right to redemption. We found that God's divine election is not based upon any positive condition or attribute found within the individual who is elected because in all of Adam's depraved race nothing of spiritual value exists that even remotely meets God's high standard for righteousness. Therefore, we found that God unconditionally elects specific individuals to receive salvation according to his divine purposes and the dictates of his own holy will, which is exercised through an abundance of love, mercy, and grace made possible through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross in their behalf.

This last finding leads us directly into the next point, which compares the Arminian doctrine of universal atonement with the biblically reformed doctrine of limited atonement. As with the first two points, we shall continue to utilize edited excerpts taken from *Comprehensively Reformed Christianity*, Book I, Chapter 3.5. The partial chart shown below reflects the correct placement of Limited Atonement as point 3, differing from the order that was erroneously printed in Book I. (See "Corrections" on the Newsletter page of our website where you can click a link to download the corrected chart in its entirety). The doctrine of limited atonement defines the great power, intent and extent of God's grace as is determined in full accordance with God's preordination of the elect from eternity. We should note here that the doctrine of limited atonement can more properly be referred to as particular atonement (i.e. effectively applied only to the elect) and universal atonement is often referred to as general atonement (i.e. made available for the acceptance of all mankind).

ARMINIANISM	CALVINISM
1. Mans depravity is not total — man has free will — there is some good in man which he can exercise to turn to God and accept Christ	1. Total depravity — man is morally powerless to make any effort to save himself and does not even have the desire to seek God
2. Election conditional upon faith — faith as an effort of man comes before election	2. Unconditional election — God supplies the faith to believe to whomever He will
3. Universal atonement — salvation is intended for all persons	3. Limited Atonement — salvation is limited to the elect of God — those whom God has chosen

Given that we must ultimately accept the doctrines of total depravity and unconditional election as being fully biblical, specific or limited atonement must necessarily follow. Inasmuch as God unconditionally elects certain specific men and women for redemption out of the broader multitude of Adam's fallen race, it is apparent from that fact that He does not intend that all men should share in Christ's atonement, but that many should remain in a reprobate state to one day face his fierce wrath and eternal judgment. To think otherwise would be to accept the heretical doctrine of "universal salvation," wherein all men and women must ultimately be saved regardless of the unrelenting rebellious mindset they have against God and his Christ. In this radically broadened view of the atonement, God would need to accept the arrogant sinner in his unregenerate state into Heaven. If that were true, how then could Heaven be Heaven while sin is allowed to run rampant through its vast holy regions unabated? Evil would have gained equality with good; Satan would have attained parity with God. Hell as the eternal abode of Satan and the reprobate would remain forever

unpopulated. This is certainly not what Scripture teaches us inasmuch as Jesus had far more to say about the severe consequences of Hell for the reprobate than He did about the wondrous attributes of Heaven for the saved (Mt.5:22,29; 13:42,50; 25:41; Lu.12:5 etc.). Moreover, how could God judge the world in the last days for mankind's rebellion against his holy authority, which He is quite determined to do as is evidenced by the study of prophetic Scripture (cf. Ro.3:6; Book III, Chapter 20.6)? Consequently, it becomes apparent that the atonement of Christ is effective in providing redemption only for a specific number of individuals who have come to believe in Christ in response to the Gospel through a spiritual rebirth initiated by God Himself through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Some would reply to all this that we distinctly read in Scripture that Jesus died as a propitiation for the sins of the world (cf. 1Jn.2:2), thus implying that his death was intended to atone for the sins of all mankind. If there had been even one fully righteous man in this world, Jesus would not have needed to come forth from Heaven to suffer death, but there could never be one perfect man from Adam's depraved race. If Jesus had not stepped forth to rescue mankind from its great corruption, even as Adam first sinned, the world would have been destroyed and all of mankind along with it. Surely, the severely offended holiness of God would have demanded that fierce judgment; only God's intervening promise of redemption through the coming Messiah (the Christ) prevented it (cf. Ge.3:15). There is, therefore, a general sense in which all men and women enjoy the benefits of Jesus' atoning death. This benefit is often referred to as the common or general grace of God that is extended in love to all of mankind (cf. Jn.3:16). Even the reprobate have benefited – although that benefit is limited for the time they spend in this earthly life. Therefore, the very fact that any men at all walk, breathe, enjoy and even thrive in God's providence, is directly attributable to the atoning work of Christ on the cross (cf. Ac. 14:16,17). In that broad sense, the benefits of Jesus' atonement are not specifically limited to the elect, but are received by all who live upon the earth.

However, Jesus did not come forth from Heaven to the earth and die a horrible death on a Roman cross just to bring forth the pleasures of an ephemeral lifespan for mankind, but to bring forth an abundance of eternal life through efficacious redemption from Adam's fall. In that ultimate sense, the atonement is applicable only to the elect – those who through a God-given faith have come to fully accept the Gospel and have put their full trust in Jesus Christ for eternal life – while the non-elect are allowed to continue on in their rebellious depraved state unhindered on their path to perdition. Therefore, we must make an important distinction and say that although the atoning work of Christ is both necessary and sufficient for all men, and that the sins of all mankind were borne by Him on the cross, the atonement is made effective unto salvation only for those who are chosen by God to receive a spiritual rebirth and thereby enabled to believe in Christ. That quickening from death to life is the exercise of God's "special grace." Unlike God's common grace which is a general benevolence toward all mankind that sustains their physical lives here on this earth, his special grace is conferred upon a specific group of individuals, the elect, in order that they may receive certain redemption through Christ's atonement unto life eternal. It is exclusively in the elect that Adam's fallen race is found to be restored and fully justified to God through Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead.

In 1 Timothy 2:4 we further read, "...who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." And again in verse 6 we read, "...who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." If taken in isolation "all" in either or both of these phrases could be construed to mean that God intends that every man and woman is to be saved without exception, but it is very important that we consider the context of these two phrases. In this passage of Scripture, Paul is speaking of the offering up of prayers for those in high authority over us that we as believers may lead a quiet and peaceful life in the practice of the true faith free of hindrance and persecution. What Paul is speaking of here is not universal atonement; he is only speaking to the fact that God is not a respecter of persons. God does not limit his salvation to one class of people over another, but the atonement is made applicable to specific individuals chosen out of all classes of people in due time whether rich, poor, powerful, or weak (cf. 1Ti.2.1-6). Therefore, it is only the lost – those chosen who have not yet been reached out of those in authority – that are the beneficiaries of our prayers.

Lastly, in 2 Peter 3:9 we read, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to

repentance.” Here again we find from the context that “all” does not mean that every individual man and woman will be saved through voluntary repentance, but only that God has purposefully established the return of Christ to occur in the latter days, such that all men and women whom God has specifically chosen out of every generation throughout this vast age of grace will be redeemed in Christ during that interim (cf. 2Pe.3:1-9). As we have repeatedly asserted elsewhere, the depraved nature of fallen man prevents him from even acknowledging the authority of God, much less allow the offering up of genuine repentance worthy of salvation in concert with their obstinate sin-bound will. Hence we find that none of these verses remotely suggest the possibility of universal salvation, nor do they in any way state that the atonement of Christ for sin is made applicable to every individual on earth such that they will be saved eternally.

The Arminian position differs from that of universal salvation by stating that Jesus’ death on the cross only made eternal life possible for everyone, conditioned upon their personal acceptance of the Gospel message through a human response derived from a man’s cognitive mind. If that were so, the atonement that Jesus brought forth in his death would only be a potential or hypothetical propitiation, not an absolute one. The power of the atonement would be diminished to that of a dormant state, not living and active until a man grasps hold of it through an exercise of his fallen will – which, as we have seen before, is not possible. Moreover, we plainly see that if Jesus died to make full atonement possible for everyone in the world, as the Arminian holds, He has failed to do so since no man is able to respond positively to the Gospel out of his depraved nature. We must understand with absolute certainty that failure of divine purpose in the atonement is not within the purview of God’s divine will! Consequently, the biblical reformed position must be that Jesus died specifically for his elect (cf. Ep.1:4-14). Jesus’ pure and sinless sacrificial death has made complete and unconditional atonement for all those whom his Father has given to Him as brothers through the Spirit of adoption (cf. Ro. 8:15) to the exact and full extent that God had intended and preordained from eternity.

Jesus did not die for the eternal salvation of the determined reprobate who vehemently reject Him until death overtakes them. Let us make clear here that God is not the author of sin, nor does He condone sin. The reprobate are not sinners because God has chosen not to redeem them, but because they choose to live their lives apart from God; they permanently remain in that hopeless condition because they outright reject the gift of salvation that is graciously offered to them in Christ through the Gospel. Those who adamantly oppose the doctrine of limited atonement often portray a man who desires to receive the salvation of Christ, but is restrained by God from doing so because he is not one of the elect. We must realize that such a person does not exist! As we have seen, no man naturally seeks God, because his fallen sin nature prevents him from doing so (cf. Ro.3:11). He will never call out to God to plead with Him for mercy since he fully rejects God’s authority and judgment. Nor will he lament that he is not one of the elect, because he does not want to be one.

Yet, out of the vast multitude of Adam’s fallen race comes forth those who have given up on themselves, and have through an overwhelming faith fully accepted the work of Christ on their behalf. We have found that this wondrous faith is not something that we drummed up in ourselves to force or even to entice God to choose us over another; rather, it is something that we have received without condition through an act of God’s special grace and mercy that we, the totally undeserving, may obtain full atonement for our sins in Christ (cf. Ep. 2:8). God has lifted the redeemed out of total spiritual darkness into the light of Truth so that the atonement made by his Son might be made fully effective in them for his own holy purposes and for the magnification of his own glory, not ours. Therefore, we who have been saved must conclude that, but for the saving grace of God, we also would have continued down the same dark road of the reprobate until death finally overtook us and we lost all – even our very soul! This is a very humbling realization that completely destroys any sense of personal pride that the elect could assume in having been chosen. The true worth of mankind is now fully realized in Jesus Christ through the tremendous price of the atonement He has paid for them. All praise, glory, and honor is due to God alone who has miraculously redeemed Adam’s race through the great multitude of his chosen ones (cf. Re.7:9). © *Arthur J. Smith July 2014*