

Newsletter, September 2014

In our June 2014 through August 2014 newsletters we discussed biblically reformed soteriology in considerable detail by comparing the five basic doctrines leading up to the inescapable conclusion that God alone is the source as well as the agency of the eternal salvation of mankind from beginning to end. Because of obvious consequences this reformed doctrine poses for the extremes of present-day evangelicalism, which is largely based upon the delusive doctrine of Arminianism (cf. Newsletter, May 2014), we shall now begin a candid discussion of the Gospel mandate as found in Scripture with respect to biblically reformed soteriology and especially regarding limited atonement, which is difficult for so many to accept (cf. Newsletter July 2014).

When we think of the Gospel mandate, we immediately turn to the Gospel of Matthew in which Jesus commissioned his apostles to propagate the Gospel throughout the entire world: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Mt. 28:19,20; cf. Mk.16:15). Protestants emerging from the great struggle for biblical truth in the Reformation Movement (cf. Book III, Chapters 18.1–18.2) were slow in reaching out to others with the Gospel—particularly to those living in foreign lands. The prevailing view of many in that day was that the Great Commission of Matthew 28 had been given directly only to the apostles – a mission that they had completed in their lifetimes – and it was therefore not binding upon the Church at large in future ages. This radical view is generally known today as hyper-Calvinism – hyper or extreme because it goes far beyond what biblical soteriology, as it was stated by the followers of John Calvin (cf. Book III, page 235), intends and asserts.

The hyper-Calvinist would say that inasmuch as God saves men through a supernatural transformation in a spiritual rebirth, which is predestined in eternity, there is absolutely no need for men to preach the Gospel since God can accomplish this conversion without human assistance. This notion, however, is totally contrary to the express teaching of Scripture, and at the human level it also defies reason. As the Apostle Paul stated in his epistle to the Romans. “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Ro.10:13). In the next two verses he asks rhetorically, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent” (Ro.10:14,15)? The redeemed are not immediately translated into immortal flesh and transported directly to Heaven as they are converted, but are left to live out the remainder of their mortal lives here on earth as a witness to the glory of God and his ability to save sinners. God has chosen his redeemed to work in concert with the Holy Spirit through the propagation of the Gospel. While we must rightly state that the atonement is limited to the elect, we, as mortal men, cannot exclude anyone from coming to Christ; for, we do not determine the elect, God has and does.

The faith that God freely gives to his own does not spring to life until the Gospel is clearly received and comprehended. While it is true that we must respond to God’s offer of salvation in order to receive it, the human response is brought about through an internal act of faith that is the consequence of God’s redemption already at work in us through the Holy Spirit. In God’s timing, the chosen receive the light of Truth (cf. Jn.14:17) by which their sinful state is clearly revealed to their minds (cf. Jn.16:8–11). To some this revelation can be a very abrupt and shocking awakening, while to others it becomes an intensely growing awareness over time. In either event, we come to realize that our sins, which emanate from our fallen sin nature, keep us from communion with our Creator. God greatly loves us and desires to save us, but absolutely abhors our sin that He must severely judge in keeping with the purity of his divine nature. Specific acts of disobedience come to mind and certain of our habits are revealed as egregious sin against God even as the Ten Commandments suddenly rise up like a mountain to condemn us (cf. Ex.19:12; 20:1–19; Ro.7:11). It is absolutely necessary that the elect first see themselves as depraved sinners, even as God sees them (cf. Ge.6:5; Ro.3:10–18) such that they may come to loathe and truly repent of all their sins. In turning away from our sin, we immediately turn toward God to receive the atonement of Christ so graciously offered to us through the Gospel as those chosen to receive it from eternity.

The sinner is often miserable in his sin, but being miserable does not ensure that he will ever cry out to God for salvation. His common solution to this deplorable condition is to commit more sin because that is the only way he knows and is determined to continue in it. He is not convinced that his miserable state of existence is actually a result of his own sinfulness. Instead, there is a propensity to blame others, circumstances, or even God for the fault that is his own. Today’s evangelicalism places a great emphasis upon eliciting a “personal decision for

Christ.” The unsaved are often preached to, pleaded with, and sometimes worn into submission with highly emotional evangelistic messages and imploring musical invitations. All the sinner needs to do, they are told, is to confess their “faith” in Jesus Christ and they will be “saved” thus ending all of their problems. Often this response by the unsaved is made while experiencing an emotional high with the rational mind completely disengaged – having given no thought to the life-changing ramifications of such a decision. Others merely give in to the pressures of Christian family and friends and make a false confession just to “get them off their backs.” We must understand that an act of public pronouncement is not a means by which salvation can be attained, but only confessed; we must first believe deep in our souls that God has raised up Jesus from the dead for the confession to have any validity (cf. Ro.10:9).

When presenting the Gospel to others, we must never conceal the inevitable consequences of accepting Christ as their savior in order to entice them to make a quick confession of faith. Rather, we must be candid and honest about accepting Christ as Lord over our lives as well (cf. Newsletter, November 2013). When we accept Christ we indeed receive the wondrous blessings of eternal salvation, but we also find that we must bear the shame of his cross wherever we go, and Satan will use his worldly constituents to humiliate us in an attempt to draw us back under his ungodly influence. Accepting the way of the cross demolishes all that we may have previously valued in this life to receive in its place an entirely new way of life that is completely alien to our old nature and to the world at large. Therefore, we find that in that new way there is a very high worldly cost to pay for following Christ – all of the false health and prosperity teaching we hear so much about today to the contrary. The Christian life is not one of never-ending peace and health in which we can anticipate abundant material blessings. It is a difficult spiritual struggle against the world, the desires of the flesh, and Satanic powers in which we may very well suffer severe and chronic health problems as well as incur great material loss – even poverty.

Due to wide-spread anti-Christian bias, believers are commonly portrayed as intolerant bigots and even wild-eyed terrorists when they take a strong moral stand in opposition to decadent worldly notions and systems. Because of this worldly bias we can all expect to receive persecution in varying degrees – for some even death. The newborn Christian who has not been properly apprised of the cost of discipleship may not immediately be aware that he could suffer adverse consequences because of various ethical stands that he must now take in response to the demands of his faith. He is no longer accepted into certain clubs and fraternities in which he may have once been welcomed. Certain worldly activities that his co-workers or business associates enjoy may no longer be proper for a Christian to engage in, thus making him an outsider to them. Certain non-ethical practices and social requirements of his job or profession are now seen to be in direct conflict with his new-found faith. So much so, that it may greatly affect his ability to function satisfactorily in the sphere of his current position. Conflicts with unsaved superiors are quite possible as well, sometimes resulting in job loss and even financial ruin.

More often than not, Satan’s attack on the believer’s faith is not launched through mortal enemies but through the believer’s closest friends and relatives – even members of his immediate family. As the prophet Micah said, “For the son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter in law against her mother in law; a man’s enemies are the men of his own house” (Mi.7:6). In many countries today, Christians are hated to the extent that they are betrayed, sometimes even to physical death, by members of their own families and close friends (cf. Mt.10:21). We are reminded of what Jesus said: “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Mt.10:34). A friend or family member’s attack can also be launched out of genuine concern for the believer’s mental well being. When Jesus spoke of the death He must suffer, Peter, with good intentions after the manner of men, rebuked Jesus by saying, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee” (Mt.16:22). Jesus surely felt compassion toward Peter’s benevolent concern at that moment, but for Him to have given in to Peter’s concern would have been disastrous. We must not allow the concern of family members or even our responsibilities toward them interfere with our Christian calling and our daily walk with God in the Spirit of Christ. This is what Jesus was referring to when He said, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Mt.10:37). Often it is the one with whom we have shared all things that suddenly becomes an outsider to us, and we to them. The new believer, already deeply embroiled in the internal spiritual war within his or her own soul (cf. Newsletter, August 2013), has great difficulty in coping with a spouse who cannot understand what he or she is going through. The result of that unreconciled conflict can ultimately lead to separation and divorce as the unbeliever forsakes the marriage relationship (cf. *Unequal Unions*, Book II, page 480; Newsletter February 2014).

Through all of this turmoil, the believer soon discovers what it is like to be in the world, but not of the world. In the words of Jesus, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (Jn.15:18,19). Even our own life must not be savored more than our desire to do God’s will. If it is, we will ultimately lose our life and our eternal soul along with it (cf. Mt.16:25; Mk.8:35; Lu.9:24; Jn.12:25). We must completely die to self – reckoning our old nature to be dead and buried – in order to walk in newness of life. Jesus referred to this commitment to Him at all costs as “bearing our cross” when following Him (cf. Lu.14:27; Mt.10:38; 16:24) – even crucified with Him that we may eternally live in Him (cf. Ro.6:6-11). Nevertheless, while the sufferings for our faith that we may experience in this world are great, they are as nothing compared to the eternal blessings that we look forward to in our heavenly abode (cf. 2Co.4:17,18).

In conclusion, we must understand that we are merely stewards of the Gospel not its owners such that we can choose to dispense it only as we see fit (cf. 1Co.9:16,17). As God has intrusted us as ambassadors with his Gospel (cf. 2Co.5:20), so we must freely dispense it and invest it in his power, not through some false hope that our own clever abilities of speech and persuasion can convert anyone. We do not bring forth the increase in saved souls; God does that through a spiritual rebirth of his elect as He sees fit (cf. 1Co.3:6,7). We are but the instruments of God working under a holy mandate to present the Gospel simply and plainly to any that have ears to hear. Therefore, we must not limit our Christian witness to individuals, groups, or places where we may think that the Gospel will be effectively heard since God has often chosen the most unlikely people from the most unlikely places to receive the gift of eternal salvation. As we go forth with the Gospel in an increasingly hostile world, we know that it will at times fall on rocks, be snatched up by vultures, and be sown amidst thorns. Nevertheless, as God calls forth his own, it will be sown on fertile soil (cf. Mt.13:4–8). We cannot clearly discern in advance the person whom God is preparing to receive it since God is no respecter of persons or of nations (cf. Ac.10:34,35). The door of salvation remains wide open to any and all who will accept Jesus’ righteousness for his sin covering forsaking his own efforts to overcome his corrupt fallen nature through ineffectual works. Truly, whosoever will come to Christ will be saved, and none that do so will be cast out (cf. Jn. 6:37)!

Although the atonement is not universal, the Gospel message is intended for all men to hear without exception. (Read *The Gospel Invitation* on the Home page of this website). Even the reprobate are to hear the plea in which the love of God is so evident (cf. Jn. 3:16). Nevertheless, none that approach Christ for salvation will prove to be the reprobate who through their determined depravity are compelled to reject Him and his love for them until death overtakes them. While it is imperative for us to present the Gospel to everyone without exception, often repeatedly, we must not intentionally allow the Gospel to be shamefully abused, affronted, or openly cursed (cf. Mt.7:6). When we attempt to communicate the Gospel to a person who is bent upon engaging in heated arguments to all biblical issues, we should immediately back off. Perhaps we have unwisely chosen a poor time to approach them and should consider returning later; this becomes a matter that can only be determined through much prayer. However, a repeatedly hostile reaction to the Gospel more than likely means that we have run into a self-confirmed reprobate for which there is absolutely no hope of redemption (cf. Lu.9:5; Mk.6:11). Genuine faith cannot come about through a process wherein we extract a false confession of faith through emotional arguments and nagging persistence from one who hates God; it only subjects the Gospel to unnecessary ridicule.

Therefore, those whom we hope to effectively reach with the Gospel are not the reprobate who are eternally lost by God’s design, but rather those we can more properly refer to as the chosen lost – those who have been elected by God from eternity, but presently find themselves wandering outside the fold of God within a worldly system of unbelief due to their spiritual ignorance of the Gospel. Through the wide propagation of the Gospel, the chosen are apprehended in God’s own timing such that all will ultimately be found in Christ; not one will be left to remain in a lost state (cf. Lu.15:4-7). Upon hearing the Gospel, often repeatedly, the elect must ultimately accept the good news with great joy, while the reprobate will continue to reject it as utter nonsense – thus affirming his own condemnation. Therefore the great commission to clearly give out the Gospel to all people of every class, race, and nationality is not impaired in any way by the doctrine of limited atonement. The mission is only more clearly defined such that we may become more effective stewards in reaching the chosen of God with the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ in this age of grace. © Arthur J. Smith, September 2014