

The Preaching of the Gospel: An Offer of Salvation or the Power unto Salvation

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In the discussion of the well-meaning offer of salvation the question was asked, how do the advocates of this offer of salvation prove their contention? What Scriptures do they advance in support of their view? There, in the first place, what may be called their philosophical proof, or argument, namely that the very fact that the gospel is preached to all men, not only to the elect, must imply that all men who are offered this salvation are able to accept it. And we established the truth that this is not necessarily true. We now continue our discussion of the “proofs” given for the well-meaning offer of salvation.

As far as the confessional basis for this well-meaning offer is concerned, the Reformed branch of the church has three Reformed creeds: the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dordrecht, and the Thirty Articles of the Confession of Faith. From these Reformed creeds the advocates of this free offer quote from the Canons, Art.8 of the third and fourth heads, which reads: “As many as are called by the gospel, are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word, what will be acceptable to Him; namely that all men who are called, should comply with the invitation. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to Him, and believe on Him.” We will return to this “proof” in due time, but now we merely quote this passage.

The proponents of this free offer of salvation also quote, of course, from the Bible. One text is Ezekiel 33:11 - “Say unto them, as I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Another passage often quoted is I Timothy 2:4: “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” In I Timothy 4:10 we read: “For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, Who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those that believe.” Another passage which these proponents of the free offer quote is 2 Corinthians 5:18-20: “And all things are of God, Who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ’s stead be ye reconciled to God.” Also, 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.” In John 3:16 we have the very familiar text: “For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Isaiah 45:22 records this speech of God: “Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.” And to quote one more, in Revelation 3:20 we read: “Behold I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear My voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and I will sup with him, and he with Me.” To these passages many more can be added, but these should suffice.

Before we begin our refutation of these “proofs” for the general, well-meaning offer of salvation, it would be well to quote scriptural passages which clearly teach the very opposite of what the Arminians believe concerning these “proofs.” These particular Scriptures really speak for themselves. Certainly other passages could be cited, but these should be enough. Indeed, if there be in the Word of God a well-meaning offer of salvation, then it is surely true, in the light of the following texts, that the Word of God is in irreconcilable conflict with itself.

Notice first of all the passage in 2 Corinthians 2:14-17: “now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” There is clearly no well-meaning offer of the gospel in this passage. The apostles are, we read, unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved in them that perish. Mind you, this they are unto God! There is surely no universal love of God taught in this word of God. Besides to the one they are the savour of death unto death. This is the

purpose as well as the result of the preaching of the gospel to them that perish. And all this is of God who always causes us to triumph in Christ Jesus.

Or consider Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first and also to the Greek." Imagine if the gospel were merely an offer of salvation and the salvation of a sinner were dependent upon the will of the sinner! Imagine if only that sinner is saved who wills to be saved! Imagine if the gospel were not the power of God unto salvation, the power that is adapted to a sinner's salvation! Of such a gospel we could indeed be ashamed, and we would never be able to say with the apostle that he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Under such circumstances no sinner would ever be saved whether he be Jew or Greek.

How clear and pertinent are Jesus' words recorded in Matthew 11:25 and 26; "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for it seemed good in Thy sight." Mind you, at that time Jesus answered and said. At what time? At the time when we read of what Jesus had said concerning Capernaum and the land of Sodom, reprobate Capernaum and Sodom. Notice that the Lord here speaks of God's decree of reprobation. Some have dared to say that Scripture does not teach the divine decree of reprobation. But Jesus here thanks the Father of heaven and earth for having hid these things from the wise and prudent, and adds: for so it seemed good in Thy sight. The Saviour here thanks the Father for His sovereign decrees of election and reprobation. There is surely no well-meaning offer of salvation in this passage.

Incidentally, other Scriptural passages that teach the doctrine of divine reprobation are I Peter 2:8 and Jude 4. Very familiar also is what we read in Matthew 1:21: "And shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for he shall save His people from their sins." Indeed, His name shall be Jesus, because He shall save His people from their sin - only His people. And it must not escape our attention that this is aid of the babe a considerable time before He was born. Hence, there is no doubt concerning this salvation. In addition to these, what a wonderful passage we have in Ephesians 1:3-14. We cannot quote this passage in its entirety but it surely speaks for itself. What a song of praise we have here on the part of the inspired apostle as he sings of the eternal good pleasure of God! No Arminian can wedge a finger into this wonderful passage of Scripture! And how truly divinely sovereign is this part of the Word of God, in the verses 8-10 which state: "Wherein He abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself; That in the dispensation of the fullness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him." The fact is that verse 3-14 really constitute only one sentence. We have the impression, when reading this wonderful passage of the inspired Word of God, that the apostle Paul once having begun verse 3 finds it very difficult to stop his treatment of this tremendous subject.

And, of course, concerning predestination, we must surely quote Romans 9:11-13: "For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth; It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Need we offer any comment upon this passage of the Word of God? O, yes, it has been said by some in the past, by those who cannot "stomach" this severe and unconditional word of God, that the text must be read thus: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I loved less." But on the contrary, where do we read in Scripture that the Lord loves more or less? Besides, how untrue this interpretation of this Scripture would be! The apostle is referring in this text in Romans 9 to what we read in Malachi 1:1-4. Here the prophet is surely not saying that the Lord loved Esau less. He declares here that the Lord hated Esau and therefore laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.

I repeat that we could quote many more of these passages, as from the Psalms and the Book of Proverbs. But these should be enough to prove that Scripture in many places flatly contradicts the idea that the preaching is an offer of salvation to all who hear.

I wish to conclude these quotations with the passage of Scripture recorded in Luke 23:42-43: "And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise." Why do we refer to this particular passage? We cannot and need not

explain this incident in the sufferings and death of our Lord in detail in this treatment of the subject of well-meaning offer of salvation. And yet, this incident in Luke 23 is very closely related to the subject of the general offer of the gospel. We may well ask the question: Where do we read of an offer in this entire incident? Is not an offer exactly what one would expect here? Mind you, the malefactor (who had committed murder while in the act of robbery), while hanging upon a cross, asks this Jesus of Nazareth to remember him upon coming into His kingdom. What a wonder this is! Imagine: in all that sea of deviltry, in all that howling and raving of a devil-led multitude before the cross of Calvary, this murderer beholds and recognizes in Jesus of Nazareth the Christ of God as entering into His kingdom! We will not dwell upon this aspect of this wonderful incident. We need not call attention to what enabled this convicted criminal to see this in the despised rabbi of Nazareth. But what we do wish to emphasize, in connection with our subject, is that prior to this murderer's request, Jesus had not said one word to him. The last word he had heard Jesus speak was the Saviour's intercessory prayer while Jesus was being nailed to the cross: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." This had been the Lord's last word. Is it not amazing that Christ had not uttered a word since His crucifixion? I would ask the advocates of the well-meaning offer: was not this moment the opportune time for Jesus to offer these murderers salvation? Would not one say that He had no time to lose, that He surely now would preach to these criminals and offer salvation to them? Let the Arminian advocate of the free offer explain this phenomenon! Jesus, while upon the cross, spoke to His mother and also to His beloved disciple, but He speaks not one word to these murderers. We surely have no well-meaning offer of salvation here!