

The Preaching of the Gospel: General Offer or Particular Promises

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Many are the passages that are quoted in support of a well-meaning offer of salvation. In an earlier article we called attention to a few of these - I Timothy 2:3, 4, I Timothy 4:19, and II Corinthians 5:18-20, refuting the Arminian explanation of these passages. We believe that these passages can never be properly used in support of any free and well-meaning offer of salvation. In this pamphlet we will call attention to two more very familiar passages quoted by these exponents in support of their Arminian interpretation of the gospel.

The first passage to which we would call attention is II Peter 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The reasoning here of the Arminian advocates of a general, well-meaning offer of salvation is clear. We read that the Lord is not willing that anyone should perish, but that all should come to repentance. The apostle speaks here of the longsuffering of the Lord. The Lord suffers long with the children of men. It grieves him that they walk in sin. He is desirous that they come to repentance, is not willing that any should perish.

How impossible is this interpretation! There were obviously children of God during those early days in the New dispensation who believed that Christ was coming soon, in their day. Had He not said that He would come quickly? Does not James write in James 5:9 that the judge standeth before the door? Were not the days and times of that day exceedingly perilous? And now the Lord did not come. Was He slack concerning His promise that He would come quickly? Had the Lord forgotten the predicament of His people in the midst of the world? However, if the Lord were delaying His final coming because He was not willing that anyone should perish and everyone should come to repentance, then it must surely follow that He will never appear upon the clouds of heaven. Fact is, even when Peter wrote these words all men had not come to repentance. Many had perished in their sins. And, if His final coming was dependent upon the salvation of all men in the universal sense of the word, then it must follow that the expectation of the people of God will never be realized. His promise will then never be fulfilled. And this failure of fulfillment, we understand, is surely impossible. The Lord is faithful and His promises never fail.

Of course, we may lodge the same objection to the Arminian view of the free offer which we have already stated in previous articles. If the Lord does not will that anyone should perish but that all men come to repentance, why does He not have His gospel preached to all men and provide them with the opportunity to come to repentance? The Lord is surely sovereign in the church's task and calling to preach the gospel. The Lord does not merely determine who will be saved but also to whom this gospel of salvation is sent. Now the Lord is surely longsuffering to His people. He is surely aware of all their afflictions and troubles. He is certainly eager to deliver them out of all their distresses. Of this there cannot possibly be any doubt.

However, there is one expression in this text which the Arminian very conveniently ignores. We do not merely read that the Lord does not will that anyone should perish, but the apostle writes that the Lord is longsuffering to usward. Hence, we must surely read this Word of God as follows: but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any of us should perish but that all of us should come to repentance. Indeed, the Lord is not slack concerning His promise. He is not delaying His coming. It is surely true that He is coming quickly. However, He does not will that anyone of His people should perish, would have everyone of them come to repentance. When Peter wrote these words all God's people had not yet come to repentance. There were many who must still be saved. All they, all who had been given Him of the Father, shall be saved. So, the people of God must be patient, endure whatever affliction will be their lot, and believe that the Lord will surely lead to repentance all those given Him by the Father from before the foundation of the world.

The second text to which we now would call attention is John 3:16: "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," How often one sees this text on billboards throughout the country! A leading commentator has written that this passage of Holy Writ is the rock upon which the truth of sovereign predestination had suffered shipwreck and lies shattered in pieces. Do we not read here that God loved the world? The world here, it is alleged, refers to all men, head for

head. And do we not also read that God gave His Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life?

In preceding articles we have already noted that several scriptural passages establish the fact that the word “world” does not always have the same connotation in Scripture. This is beyond all doubt. The world of John 3:16, which God loved, is surely the world as it is saved. We read of this in the verse that follows, verse 17. When we read in verse 17 that God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world the meaning is, of course, that God did not send His Son to condemn the world which is saved. That God sent His Son to condemn the reprobate world is very clearly taught in Scripture, as, for example, in Luke 2:34. The world of John 3:16 refers to all things, with the Church of God in the center, as it will appear in everlasting life and glory.

Now we read in this passage: “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” We may translate this more literally as follows: “in order that whosoever believeth should not perish but have everlasting life.” The word translated “that” or “in order that” has a twofold meaning. The word means purpose and result. This does not mean, of course, that God’s sending of His son to save the world now depends upon our believing. This is impossible. If this were true then none would be saved. To believe is for the sinner an impossibility. No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him, John 6:44. Faith, we read in Ephesians 2:8, is a gift of God. This means that it is sovereignly bestowed by God upon him to whom it pleases the Father to bestow it. John 3:16 emphasizes that, because God loved the world and sent His Son, now it has been made possible for a sinner to receive salvation through faith. God sent His son. God, in Christ, blotted out all our sin and merited for His own everlasting life. Now we can receive this life as a free gift. We need not merit it, God has merited it for us in Jesus Christ.

This is the message of the gospel, the wonderful message of sovereignly free grace. The Arminian, causing all things to revolve around the will of a sinner, actually closes the door, makes a sinner’s salvation impossible, in as much as no sinner can believe, can ever merit salvation. The truth of God’s free, unconditional and irresistible grace alone opens the door. Indeed, by grace we are saved, through faith. This is the wonderful gospel of John 3:16, which the Savior sets forth before an astonished Nicodemus. It is, therefore, not an “Arminian text”, but a most beautiful and reassuring word to the believer of the certainty of his salvation in Christ.

The next article on the preaching will conclude this brief series by setting forth the scriptural truth of the particular and irresistible promise of Jehovah, the alone living God.