

The Preaching of the Gospel: Not an Offer, But the Sovereign Power unto Salvation

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The well-meaning offer of salvation, notwithstanding the legion of supporters and the multitude of texts quoted to prove it, is still a false, anti-scriptural doctrine. We have, in five previous articles, examined the alleged proof for it, and have shown briefly that the Arminian interpretation will not stand in the light of the whole bible.

And now set forth, positively, the scriptural truth of the particular and irresistible power of the promise. We understand the distinction between an offer and a promise. When someone offers us something then our receiving of it depends upon our accepting the offer. Refusing this offer, we simply do not obtain it. But when we are promised something then our receiving it depends upon him who promised it to us. Indeed, the promise of the living God is not an offer. Even among men the distinction between an offer and a promise is clear. This is surely applicable to the promise or promises of God in Christ Jesus. In general, we would call attention to two incidents in the Word of God.

First of all, there is what is known as the “mother promise” as recorded in Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” This is called the mother promise because all subsequent promises in the Word of God have their origin in it, flow from it, and are dependent upon it. And now I ask the reader: “Is this word of Genesis 3:15 a promise or an offer? Does the fulfillment of this Word of God depend upon the sinner or upon the living God? Does God here offer something to the sinner or does He declare here what He will do? Will the Lord put enmity into the heart of the sinner if and when the sinner permits it? The question is rhetorical. The answer is obvious. We read: “I will put enmity...” How could it be otherwise? The sinner is dead in sin and trespasses. He is full of sin, darkness, death and hatred. This promise of Genesis 3:15 is no offer, but divine and sovereign.

The other incident to which we direct attention is God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah, his wife, of a son. Was this an offer? When the Lord promised to Abraham and Sarah his wife a son, we read that Sarah laughed. This is recorded in Genesis 18. Why did she laugh? She laughed because for them to have a son was humanly impossible. Do we not read in Genesis 18:14: “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” And in Hebrews 11:11-12 we read: “Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.” Was this word of God to Abraham an offer? Did the Lord offer Abraham and Sarah a son? It is true that Abraham did beget a son through Hagar, but Ishmael was not the son promised by Jehovah. Abraham and Sarah were both past age. They could no longer bring forth children. Of Abraham we read in Hebrews 11:12 that he was as good as dead. Indeed, Isaac is a wonder child, the gift of God’s sovereign and almighty grace. Salvation is wrought by God alone. The Lord did not offer Abraham and Sarah a son; instead, He promised them a son.

Indeed, the preaching of the gospel is never to be identified with the proclamation of a general, free and well-meaning offer of salvation. If it were, how could any sinner possibly be saved? The apostle Paul declares in Romans 1:16 that he is not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. If that gospel be an offer we may well be ashamed of it. Why preach a salvation, however wonderful and glorious it may be, if it be placed forever out of reach of any sinner? This would be folly. But now we are not and need not be ashamed of the gospel. Why not? Because the preaching of the gospel is the proclamation of the promise, and the promise is God’s sovereign word that He and He alone will work salvation in the hearts of those who have been given to Christ by the Father from before the foundation of the world.

You ask us to prove this? We have already called attention to the promise of Genesis 3:15 and the promise of the Lord to Abraham and Sarah. Indeed, many scriptures can be quoted. Does not the Word of God speak of God’s unconditional predestination, election and reprobation? (Romans 9, Ephesians 1, et al.) Does not this infallible

Word of God speak of Christ's particular atonement upon the cross of Calvary as set forth in John 10:11, 15, 26-30? Does not Scripture speak of God's irresistible grace, as in Philippians 1:6?

But I will quote, in this connection, only one passage from Scripture, Hebrews 6:17-18: "Wherein God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us." This is a very potent passage of the Word of God. We read here, first of all, of the heirs of the promise. It is plain, therefore, that this promise is not general, for everybody, head for head. It is only for the heirs. And the heirs, of course, are the elect, are those whom God sovereignly incorporated into His eternal will or testament to bestow upon them the promise.

Secondly, the text speaks of two immutable things. These two immutable things are God's counsel and His oath-bound promise. We read here of an oath. When we swear an oath we always swear by one who is greater than we. It means that we swear that the Lord is our witness and will verify what we say. But when the Lord swears an oath He swears by Himself, as we read in Hebrews 6:13, because there is none equal to or higher than God. And now God, willing to show more abundantly unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirms that promise with an oath. Is it therefore not plain from this text that these heirs of the promise are the elect? These heirs have been recorded in God's eternal counsel or will. That counsel is immutable, unchangeable. It cannot possibly be altered or changed. The names of all the elect have been written in God's book of life. Indeed, that counsel itself would be sufficient. It surely assures us of everlasting life and glory. But now it pleased the Lord to show unto the heirs of the promise more abundantly the unchangeableness of His counsel. To do this, He has confirmed it by an oath. And now the child of God stands between the two immutable things: God's counsel and His oath-bound promise. The Lord will take, shall we say, no chances. He will show the heirs of the promise more abundantly the immutability of His counsel by confirming it with an oath. The Lord will realize and fulfill His counsel all by Himself. He will be the sole worker of salvation upon His elect. He will not offer this salvation to these heirs. This would surely endanger the unchangeableness of His will and place their salvation in doubt. Then no heir would be saved. Then it will not happen that what the Lord hath decreed will take place. Hence, God will save His heirs all by Himself. He swears an oath. He takes their salvation upon Himself. He alone will save them.

What a beautiful, potent passage we have here! The people of God, we read, have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before them, the hope of everlasting, heavenly glory and immortality. Our eye is set upon that glory. And now we are sure that we will attain unto it. Notice, we stand between two immutable things: God's counsel and His oath-bound promise. We wrap, as it were, our arms around both of them. God's counsel speaks of our salvation. And the Lord Himself will realize it with His promise, accompanied by an oath. This is the wonderful preaching of the gospel, the good news and glad tidings of our salvation. The preaching of the gospel is surely not an offer. Thanks be to God for that! The child and the church of God are absolutely safe in the midst of the world. May we never relinquish this wonderful truth.