

Reformed Theology – Class 4

THE GOD OF GRACE

GOD'S REDEEMING PLAN

Adam as our representative chose to lead mankind in rebellion against our creator. Faced with a fallen world we could say God had four options:

-
-
-
-

1. Salvation is God's Choice—Election

The Bible clearly teaches that God decided to intervene and save some people. Those people He predestined or elected to be eternally saved.

- Ephesians 1:4 tells us we were chosen by God before the foundation of the world.
- Ephesians 1:5 says we were predestined to be adopted as sons of God.
- Romans 8:28-30 tells us that everyone predestined to be saved by God will in fact be glorified.
- John 15:16; 1 John 4:19; & 2 Thessalonians 2:13 make it clear that our salvation is not a result of our initiatives, "we love Him because He first loved us."
- Acts 13:48 shows that when people choose God it is only because God has ordained them to choose Him.

The Bible states clearly that God's choice of certain men is not based on any virtuous quality or act foreseen in men. Romans 9:11-16 clearly tells us that God chose between Jacob and Esau before either was even born and before either had done anything good or bad. Ephesians 2:8, 9 destroys the notion that God foresaw who would have faith and then elected them. God did foresee who would have faith because He had chosen to give it to them.

2. Is Election Unfair?

In the face of objectors who argue that if the doctrine of election is true then God is unfair, we should be reminded that God has never treated all men equally.

3. God chooses

The belief that the ultimate cause of our salvation is God's choice of us and not our choice of Him was passionately held by the Reformers.

REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED

1. Mediator of Covenant of Grace

The offices of:

-
-
-

2. Certain Number

Jesus, from all eternity was given by God a people to save, the number of which is certain, definite, and unchangeable. His mediatorial work was not intended to provide an opportunity for all men to be saved, but was intended to actually accomplish the salvation of those He came to redeem.

- Matthew 1:21 tells us Jesus came to save His people from their sins.
- John 6:37-39 clearly teaches that the Father gave to the Son a definite number to be saved.
- In Christ's high priestly prayer in John 17:9, Jesus doesn't pray for the whole world, but for those whom thou has given me...
- John 10:11 says the Good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep, not for the goats.

3. Atonement

The Arminian believes the atonement makes salvation available for all, but this conception means that Christ's death doesn't secure anyone's salvation.

Spurgeon's Q and A

Reformed theologians are told we limit the atonement of Christ because we say Christ did not pay for all men's sins.

A = Arminian

R = Reformed

A: Christ died for all men.

R: What do you mean by that?

R: Did Christ die to secure the salvation of all men?

A: No, because that would mean universalism.

R: Did Christ die to secure the salvation of any man in particular?

A: No, because Christ died to make salvation available for all men not anyone in particular.

A: Christ died so that *any* man may be saved if they follow the conditions of salvation (faith).
Christ died to make salvation available for everyone.

The Arminian view is saying that Christ did not die to secure the salvation of anyone. So, Christ's death only makes it possible but by no means secures it for anyone since it is dependent on man's choice. So the Arminian, *limits the power of the cross to save*. Christ therefore is not a savior because he does not secure salvation for anyone. He only makes it possible. He is not a savior but merely a hoping salesman. The power is not in the cross or the Savior but in the hands of man who chooses Christ.

The Reformed view is saying that Christ died only for the elect. He died only for his sheep. He saves them by his death for them. He is a Savior that truly saves by securing the elect.

REDEMPTION APPLIED

1. All those whom Christ died to save, God is pleased to effectually call to Himself.
 - John 6:44-45. All that the Father has given to Christ the Father draws to Christ.
 - Acts 16:14. God opens Lydia's heart.
 - Romans 8:28-30 tells us that all whom God chooses He saves; none who are called fail to come.
 - John 3:1-8. No man is regenerated without the work of the Holy Spirit.
 - Ezekiel 36:24-28. The Holy Spirit is a heart surgeon, He changes our sin nature.

The effectual inward call of the Holy Spirit should be distinguished from the outward/universal call which we are to extend to all men. This is the challenge to all to repent and believe.

The Bible gives hope for the salvation of those who perish unable to cognitively respond to the outward call of the gospel.

"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9).

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." 2 Peter 3:9

"How can we square this verse with predestination? If **it** is not the will of God to elect everyone unto salvation, how can the Bible then say that God is not willing that any should perish?

The text says more than simply that God is not willing that any should perish. The whole clause is important: "but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

What is the antecedent of *any*? It is clearly *us*. Does *us* refer to all of us humans? Or does **it** refer to us Christians, the people of God? Peter is fond of speaking of the elect as a special

group of people. I think what he is saying here is that God does not will that any of us (the elect) perish..." R.C. Sproul, Chosen By God.

2. Why evangelize if all this is predetermined by God and sure to happen anyway?

3. Perseverance of the Saints

There is no question—all those whom the Holy Spirit calls ultimately persevere to the end.

- Ephesians 1:13, 14. The Holy Spirit is the guarantor of Christ's inheritance.
- Romans 8:38, 39. Says unequivocally that nothing can separate us from the love of God.
- John 10:28, 29. Jesus gives us eternal life; it is impossible to have something eternally and then lose it. The Good Shepherd's grip is sufficient to make His sheep secure.

The Arminian believes that our faith saves us, and failure to continue to exercise that faith will cause us to lose our salvation. The security of our salvation affords us no license to sin.

CONCLUSION

Calvinism—Five Points

In response to the erroneous views of some after the Reformation what has come to be called the five points of Calvinism was formulated. It is easy to memorize according to the acrostic "TULIP."

T Total Depravity. The unsaved person is so affected by sin, that he/she is unable to choose God apart from the sovereign, regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This regeneration precedes faith and repentance.

U Unconditional Election. God's election is not based upon any action, faith or future performance by the unsaved person, nor is it a result of God's looking into the future and choosing someone on the basis of their faith. God's setting His redemptive love on some and giving them grace is His sovereign choice.

L Limited Atonement. Jesus' death on the cross secured, for those whom He chose, an eternal relationship with Himself. Jesus did not die merely to provide the opportunity for salvation.

I Irresistible Grace. All those for whom Christ died will come to faith and repentance as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

P Perseverance of the Saints. All those whom God has chosen are eternally secure in their relationship with Him and because of the work of the Holy Spirit, they will persevere. Christians are forgiven, and yet are often rebellious sinners, but yet the deepest desire of

their hearts is to serve Him.

It's my hope that you will grow to love these doctrinal truths as I have; they are the sweetest of the Bible. They reveal a God who loves me from before the foundation of the world, a God who loves me enough to be humiliated for me, a God who loves me enough to find me, and a God who will never throw me away. While others may choose to cry, why didn't Jesus die to save all men? I'm only left to wonder why He died for me. To God be the glory!

"The best proof that Christ will never cease to love us lies in that He never began." Geerhardus Vos

READING ASSIGNMENT

1. Read the Essential Truths of the Christian Faith, (Sproul), sections 25-36; 56-64.
2. Read the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapters 9-10.

Chosen by God, RC Sproul

QUESTIONS & OBJECTIONS

DOESN'T THE BIBLE SAY THAT GOD IS NOT WILLING THAT ANY SHOULD PERISH?

The Apostle Peter clearly states that God is not willing that any should perish.

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

How can we square this verse with predestination? If **it** is not the will of God to elect everyone unto salvation, how can the Bible then say that God is not willing that any should perish?

In the first place we must understand that the Bible speaks of the will of God in more than one way. For example, the Bible speaks of what we call God's *sovereign efficacious will*. The sovereign will of God is that will by which God brings things to pass with absolute certainty. Nothing can resist the will of God in this sense. By his sovereign will he created the world. The light could not have refused to shine.

The second way in which the Bible speaks of the will of God is with respect to what we call his *preceptive will*. God's preceptive will refer to his commands, his laws. It is God's will that we do the things he mandates. We are capable of disobeying this will. We do in fact break his commandments. We cannot do it with impunity. We do it without his permission or sanction. Yet we do **it**. We sin.

A third way the Bible speaks of the will of God has reference to God's disposition, to what is pleasing to him. God does not take delight in the death of the wicked. There is a sense in which the punishment of the wicked does not bring joy to God. He chooses to do **it** because **it** is good to punish evil. He delights in the righteousness of his judgment but is "sad" that such righteous judgment must be carried out. It is something like a judge sitting on a bench and sentencing his own son to prison.

Let us apply these three possible definitions to the passage in 2 Peter. If we take the blanket statement, "God is not willing that any should perish," and apply the sovereign efficacious will to **it**, the conclusion is obvious. No one will perish. If God sovereignly decrees that no one should perish, and God is God, then certainly no one will ever perish. This would then be a proof text not for Arminianism but for universalism. The text would then prove too much for Arminians.

Suppose we apply the definition of the preceptive will of God to this passage? Then the passage would mean that God does not *allow* anyone to perish. That is, he forbids the perishing of people. It is against his law. If people then went ahead and perished, God would have to punish them for perishing. His punishment for perishing would be more perishing. But how does one engage in

more perishing than perishing? This definition will not work in this passage. It makes no sense.

The third alternative is that God takes no delight in the perishing of people. This squares with what the Bible says elsewhere about God's disposition toward the lost. This definition could fit this passage. Peter may simply be saying here that God takes no delight in the perishing of anyone.

Though the third definition is a possible and attractive one to use in resolving this passage with what the Bible teaches about predestination, there is yet another factor to be considered. The text says more than simply that God is not willing that any should perish. The whole clause is important: "but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."

What is the antecedent of *any*? It is clearly *us*. Does *us* refer to all of us humans? Or does *it* refer to us Christians, the people of God? Peter is fond of speaking of the elect as a special group of people. I think what he is saying here is that God does not will that any of us (the elect) perish. If that is his meaning, then the text would demand the first definition and would be one more strong passage in favor of predestination.

In two different ways the text may easily be harmonized with predestination. In no way does it support Arminianism. Its only other possible meaning would be universalism, which would then bring *it* into conflict with everything else the Bible says against universalism.

DID JESUS DIE FOR EVERYONE?

One of the most controversial points of Reformed theology concerns the *L* in TULIP. *L* stands for *Limited Atonement*. It has been such a problem of doctrine that there are multitudes of Christians who say they embrace most of the doctrines of Calvinism but get off the boat here. They refer to themselves as "four-point" Calvinists. The point they cannot abide is limited atonement.

I have often thought that to be a four-point Calvinist one must misunderstand at least one of the five points. It is hard for me to imagine that anyone could understand the other four points of Calvinism and deny limited atonement. There always is the possibility, however, of the happy inconsistency by which people hold incompatible views at the same time.

The doctrine of limited atonement is so complex that to treat it adequately demands a full volume. I have not even given it a full chapter in this book because a chapter cannot do *it* justice. I have thought about not mentioning *it* altogether because the danger exists that to say too little about *it* is worse than saying nothing at all. But I think the reader deserves at least a brief summary of the doctrine and so I will proceed—with the caution that the subject requires a much deeper treatment than I am able to provide here.

The issue of limited atonement concerns the question, "For whom did Christ die? Did he die for everybody or only for the elect?" We all agree that the value of Jesus' atonement was great enough

to cover the sins of every human being. We also agree that his atonement is truly offered to all men. Any person who places his trust in the atoning death of Jesus Christ will most certainly receive the full benefits of that atonement. We are also confident that anyone who responds to the universal offer of the gospel will be saved.

The question is, “For whom was the atonement *designed*?” Did God send Jesus into the world merely to make salvation *possible* for people? Or did God have something more definite in mind? (Roger Nicole, the eminent Baptist theologian, prefers to call limited atonement “Definite Atonement,” disrupting the acrostic TULIP as much as I do.)

Some argue that all limited atonement means is that the benefits of the atonement are limited to believers who meet the necessary condition of faith. That is, though Christ’s atonement was sufficient to cover the sins of all men and to satisfy God’s justice against all sin, **it only effects** salvation for believers. The formula reads: Sufficient for all; efficient for the elect only.

That point simply serves to distinguish us from universalists who believe that the atonement secured salvation for everyone. The doctrine of limited atonement goes further than that. It is concerned with the deeper question of the Father’s and the Son’s *intention* in the cross. It declares that the mission and death of Christ was restricted to a limited number—to his people, his sheep. Jesus was called “Jesus” because he would save his people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (John 10:15). Such passages are found liberally in the New Testament.

The mission of Christ was to save the elect. “This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day” (John 6:39). Had there not been a fixed number contemplated by God when he appointed Christ to die, then the effects of Christ’s death would have been uncertain. It would be possible that the mission of Christ would have been a dismal and complete failure. Jesus’ atonement and his intercession are joint works of his high priesthood. He explicitly excludes the non-elect from his great high priestly prayer. “I do not pray for the world but for those whom you have given Me” (John 17:9). Did Christ die for those for whom he would not pray?

The essential issue here concerns the nature of the atonement. Jesus’ atonement included both *expiation* and *propitiation*. Ex-piation involves Christ’s removing our sins “away from” (*ex*) us. Propitiation involves a satisfaction of sin “before or in the presence of” (*pro*) God. Arminianism has an atonement that is limited in value. It does not cover the sin of unbelief. If Jesus died for all the sins of all men, if he expiated all our sins and propitiated all our sins, then everybody would be saved. A potential atonement is not a real atonement. Jesus *really* atoned for the sins of his sheep.

The biggest problem with definite or limited atonement is found in the passages that the Scriptures use concerning Christ’s death “for all” or for the “whole world.” The world for whom Christ died cannot mean the entire human family. It must refer to the universality of the elect (people from every tribe and nation) or to the inclusion of Gentiles in addition to the world of the Jews. It was a Jew who wrote that Jesus did not die merely for *our* sins but for the sins of the whole world. Does

the word *our* refer to believers or to believing Jews?

We must remember that one of the cardinal points of the New Testament concerned the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's plan of salvation. Salvation was *of* the Jews but not restricted to the Jews. Wherever, it is said that Christ died for all, some limitation must be added or the conclusion would have to be universalism or a mere potential atonement.

Christ's atonement was real. It effected all that God and Jesus intended by it. The design of God was not and cannot be frustrated by human unbelief. The sovereign God sovereignly sent his Son to atone for his people.

Our election is in Christ. We are saved by him, in him, and *for* him. The motive for our salvation is not merely the love God has for us. It is especially grounded in the love the Father has for the Son. God insists that his Son will see the travail of his soul and be satisfied. There never has been the slightest possibility that Christ could have died in vain. If man is truly dead in sin and in bondage to sin, a mere potential or conditional atonement not only *may have* ended in failure but most certainly *would have* ended in failure. Arminians have no sound reason to believe that Jesus did not die in vain. They are left with a Christ who tried to save everybody but actually saved nobody.

Why Not Choose Everybody?

Question

Why didn't a loving God choose everybody?

How do you harmonize with the scriptures that God's sovereign election is done apart from works of the individual, either good or bad (Rom 9:11-13) and yet He punishes those who are left in there sin and at enmity with Him. For instance I heard an Arminian once say that Calvinist are always saying that "it's not about why God didn't choose everyone, it's why did God choose anyone" (Since we all sin). Since God's election is done apart from works good or bad, is this a poor statement?

Answer

Well, the statement "It's not about why God didn't choose everyone; it's why did God choose anyone" makes the point that none of us deserved to be elected, which is true. But the question "Why didn't God choose everyone?" is still legitimate. In one place, Paul answers the question by saying that God wanted to create some people for glory and others for destruction (Rom. 9:21-24). For reasons God does not fully explain to us, it pleases and glorifies him to have some people who are saved and some who are not.

The typical Arminian explanation for why some people are elect and some are not is that God looked down the corridor of time and foresaw faith or merit in some, but not in others. Those in whom he foresaw faith or merit he elected, the others he did not. This is what we might call "conditional election" because individuals must satisfy a condition in order to qualify for election. Paul's whole argument in Romans 9, however, refutes this conjecture rather directly.

The other issue you raise has to do with punishment. More specifically, if the reprobate are punished for their sins but the elect are not, and there is no substantive difference between the reprobate and the elect, how is that fair? The answer is that, in some sense, it is not "fair," if by "fair" we mean "equal treatment." But that does not make it untrue. Equal treatment would be for everyone to perish without mercy, or for mercy to be shown to all. But the Bible never teaches that God treats everyone equally in every instance. In fact, it demonstrates time and again that God favors some people above others, and that he does so for no apparent reason. The demand for equal treatment may seem reasonable to some modern humans, but it is not a biblical concept.

In place of equal treatment, the Bible insists that God treats everyone justly. For some, he expresses justice by punishing them for their sins. For others, he expresses justice by allowing Christ to be their substitute and punishing Christ for their sins. Justice is never compromised. But in some cases, justice is coupled with mercy, whereas in other cases it is not.

It cannot rightly be said, however, that it is unjust to show mercy to some but not all. It may seem arbitrary, but God has the right to act in manners that seem, and in fact may be, arbitrary by human standards. The more important issue is not whether or not our theology implies that God acts arbitrarily, but whether or not the Bible teaches our theology. There is no reasonable basis to reject

out of hand all theological formulations that imply that God acts arbitrarily.

In any event, the Reformed formulation is not that God acts arbitrarily, as some Arminians seem to think we believe, but that he acts according to his good pleasure. For some reason that is inscrutable but not arbitrary, God was pleased to create and choose some for glory and others for destruction. The Bible does not tell us what specifically pleased God as he elected, which makes his decision inscrutable. But it does tell us that the basis was God's good pleasure, commonly described in terms of his glory (cf. Eph. 1:12) and purpose (cf. Rom. 9:11), so that we at least know that his choice was not arbitrary.

In short, we harmonize these ideas not by knowing specifically how all the pieces work together, but rather by knowing that there is nothing inherently contradictory in the ideas despite not knowing all the details.

By Ra McLaughlin

The Gospel According to Arminianism (DAISY)

D-ead but Somehow Alive: Arminians either implicitly or explicitly reject the biblical doctrine of the imputation of Adam's fallen nature and categorically deny "Total Depravity." In other words, each individual is not born inherently sinful, but becomes an enemy of God sometime after a mythical "age of accountability" when he consciously decides to rebel against divine authority. Though it is believed that the man falls at this moment, he is nevertheless supposedly able to later respond to the call of the Gospel and to choose to believe in Christ of his own free will. Thus, faith is not seen as a divine gift, but as a human virtue.

A-bolition of True Grace: Since man is not dead spiritually, and is somehow able to come to God of his own volition, Arminians reinterpret the Bible's doctrine of predestination as God's election of believers based upon His foreknowledge of their future choice. They also insist that God will never force any man to come to Him against his will, but will gently "woo" him into accepting His love. Consequently, salvation is ultimately a reward for the self-righteous act of believing on the part of the sinner rather than the outpouring of the unconditional grace of God.

I-mpotent Savior: Since they do not believe that the salvation of the individual believer was predetermined by God's eternal decree, Arminians necessarily deny that Christ's redemptive work was in behalf of His elect only. It was instead undertaken with the entire human race in mind, making salvation a mere possibility for all men. Such is a clear denial of the Bible's doctrine of an accomplished redemption and reduces the Son of God to a soteriological imposter who, in dying on the cross, invited all, but saved none. It also denigrates His Blood to a means to an end, rather than the end itself.

S-overeignty of the Sinner: Arminians have no concept of the sovereignty of God due to their insistence that His plans and desires may be thwarted and altered by the whims of sinful men. Stressing in their evangelistic efforts that God does not wish any man to perish, they nevertheless believe that anyone can reject God's gift of eternal life no matter how fervently He may attempt to bestow it upon the objects of His affection. Since the desires of the creature can obviously take precedence over the decrees of the Creator, God becomes the servant of man rather than vice versa, and is merely a passive observer of worldly events, rather than the active Director thereof.

Y-ielding Eternal Uncertainty: Arminians who remain consistent with their beliefs also reject the biblical concept that genuine salvation is eternally secure and cannot be lost. If salvation is the individual choice of the believer, then it follows that it can also be terminated by a similar act of the will. A God who is not sovereign in bestowing eternal life cannot be sovereign in preserving it and must again submit Himself to the whims of human autonomy. And so, in direct contrast to biblical soteriology, Arminianism is completely man-centered from beginning to end and for this reason must be rejected as the very dangerous heresy that it is.