

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church
107 East Austin
Fredericksburg, Texas 78624
830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

C0829 – August 27, 2008 – Doctrine Of Missions - Part 4

Let's pick up with what we started last time. We're working with the Doctrine of Missions and we want to spend more time on this period from Acts 2-Rev 3, because we live in this era of history, this is what we call Church History. We face particular challenges in our dispensation and these have to be faced. One of the challenges is whether we should even take the gospel out? Should we go? Are we just invading people's culture, bringing a western gospel? Do they even need to hear the gospel in order to be saved? Or is there another way? Are their multiple ways of salvation? And how does this work with people who've never heard the gospel? Is it fair of God, the age old hot-n-tot in Africa problem. The other question we're facing which is the more technical one is "Can we offer the gospel personally to all men?" In other words, "Can I, if I'm in the field, go over to some person and say, 'Christ died for you?'" or do I have to just generalize the thing and say, "Jesus Christ died for men." Or can I tell my children "God loves you?" There are two different answers to that question floating around, nothing new, you should just know that one group says "No you can't tell your children that, we don't know if God loves them or not," and the other group says, "Yes you can," and these questions are tied up in the question of the extent of the atonement, "For whom did Christ die? Did He die for all men without distinction or did He die exclusively for some men?" So tonight we want to continue on the question of universality, we want to bring in some additional texts to consider and close with the issue of the extent of the atonement.

Universality does not mean Universal Hearing of the Gospel

I want to return to the statement we made last week that universality doesn't mean universal hearing of the gospel. And keep in mind when I say "gospel" I'm talking about the content a person had to believe at their time in history.

I'm using it generally. This is a hard thing for some people to accept that so and so never heard the gospel but they go to hell anyway. I remember hearing a girl, supposedly evangelical argue that if a person didn't hear the gospel in this life then they would get a chance when they stand before God. And this is just a rationalization, this is not taught in the Bible, it actually contradicts certain passages like John 11:25-26. The solution to this has to do with a distinction that has to be made in the doctrine of revelation. On one hand you have general revelation, turn with me to Rom 1 to see this. Commentators have noticed that when Paul penned Rom 1:18-32 he had on his mind the nations that came out of Noah's three sons after the Flood and what they did with truth, what they did with knowledge. And it's basically summed up in the concept of suppression, it's not that men are ignorant of God, it's not that they don't have a clue about God's existence or not, it's that they do have knowledge but they suppress that knowledge. In other words we're talking the difference here between whether a person is ignorant of willfully ignorant and those positions are miles apart. Let's see how Paul addresses this, verse 18, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness," now if you're suppressing something you're pretty sure it's there. The Greek means "to hold down," now some of you have siblings, did you ever have the experience of holding down or being held down by your brother or sister? Now, people don't go around holding down brothers or sisters they don't think are really there. That's what this is talking about. People know truth all men know truth but they suppress truth, let's see how they know it, verse 19, "because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them." So a), it's inside them, this is not something they are looking at, this is not something like the sun, moon or stars outside of them, this is something inside of them, they didn't figure it out themselves, what does it say, "God made it evident to them," so this is not dependent on us, this knowledge, this truth is dependent upon God, He does this, it has nothing to do with you, it has nothing to do with me, it has nothing to do with a missionary going out and talking about God, God does this directly inside a person. Verse 20, "For" and here he extends this self-revelation, now he moves to creation, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse." Now this verse is sort of an enigma, it's a play on words, you can't see it in the English but he uses one Greek word twice, but the second

time he adds a prefix to reverse the meaning. Note the words “His invisible attributes,” alright, that something invisible is unseen, that’s his point, then he defines those things as God’s nature, and then he says something strange, he says these “have been clearly seen” and that’s your opposite. He’s saying “something unseen is clearly seen,” something “invisible is visible,” so he’s saying that all men see things clearly that can’t be seen and we might add that the Greek uses the word “mind” so it’s the mind that sees this. Strange but true, true for all men. Now what’s the means according to this verse? How does the mind see what is unseen? “Through what has been made” alright, we’re back to creation, people look out at creation and it’s inescapable, they see God’s handiwork and they see clearly who God is. People who say they don’t see God are just lying, it’s as simple as that. So we sum up verse 19 just by saying general revelation of God in conscience, everyone knows God in their conscience and verse 20 by general revelation of God in creation, everyone knows God by creation. Does this go for American’s? Does this go for the Maltese? Does this go for some tribe in Africa? Yes, this is universal knowledge. It’s inescapable knowledge, you can’t not know this. And that’s why I always say you don’t have to argue for the existence of God. You don’t have to go into the teleological or ontological or cosmological arguments for the existence of God. Why would you argue for something your opponent already knows unless your believing their agenda over God’s word? See, don’t suck up the agenda, these people aren’t neutral, they want to keep you busy working out your arguments, and Josh McDowell, Norm Geisler, William Lane Craig, J. P. Moreland and all the others, they spend all this time and energy working out these complex arguments when all along you’ve bought into the pagan agenda, which is to keep you off their back while they march ever forward in their rebellion against God, it’s just this suppression technique. Besides, the arguments always work out to “Yes there’s a god but it’s a god made in man’s image, it’s never the God of the Bible.” So Antony Flew, the famous atheist, he admitted to the argument, believed in God. Did he become a Christian? No, He became a deist, he believed in another god, not the god of the Bible. The debate is not over the existence of God as if I have to give them more information and if I give them all the data they’ll be convinced, it’s not an information problem, it’s a rebellion problem, “I don’t want to face God, I know he’s there but I don’t want Him to be there,” so unbelief carries on a campaign to suppress that knowledge, it’s an elaborate campaign, pagans aren’t stupid, they can be brilliant, this isn’t a matter of smarts, this is a matter of rebellion against God. Why am I rebelling?

Because I'm at odds with Him, I'm guilty and I don't want to face that so I suppress, suppress, suppress. So is it ignorance or is it willful ignorance? It's willful, this is deliberate. And what's Paul's conclusion to all this, verse 20? "they are without excuse?" Literally, they are without an apologetic, that's the Greek word there. And where is the unbeliever going to stand trial? At the Great White Throne and Paul's saying, "Look, when you show up before God there's not going to be any good excuses." No one is going to snow God and get by. They know very well and they rejected Him. By the way, according to verse 21 do all men know God? Yes. Now they don't know Him in a saving relationship but they know very well He is there, that's Paul's point, they just don't acknowledge He's there. And this suppression of knowledge is sufficient for final condemnation in the lake of fire. So what about those who never heard? Who cares? It's a non-argument because they knew God very well and they suppressed him. Nobody goes to hell in ignorance. So, the point we're making here in conclusion is that **General Revelation in Creation and Conscience is Enough to Condemn.**

Having said that, is it enough, can a person who goes positive to General Revelation, and he says, "Oh yes, I've looked at creation, my conscience is aware, I know there's a God," is that enough to go to heaven? Again the answer is no, just because General Revelation is enough to condemn does not mean it's enough to save. There's an incongruity here. In fact, follow the logic here. If it's enough to save then are missions a necessity? Do we really need to spend all this money to go out with the gospel to these people? Was it really necessary that Paul go out on those dangerous missionary journeys to preach the gospel? If people can be saved by general revelation? No, of course not. Missions would be a waste of time and money. So, it's enough to condemn but it's not enough to save.

A person must have special revelation. So if we divide the Doctrine of Revelation up you have two heads; General Revelation and Special Revelation. The first is received by every person the second is not. A person must have special revelation from God in order to be saved. Today that body of Special Revelation is in the Bible. It can be shared from one person to another by mouth, by audio and so forth but it always involves certain verbal propositions from the Bible. It's not a feeling, it's not a hunch, it's speech. This is essential. No one can be saved eternally without Special Revelation. Thus the need for missions and missionaries.

Related to this is the issue of content. What must a person believe to be saved? What's the content or the proposition(s)? Here we're not questioning the way of salvation, it's always by grace through faith. What we're questioning is simply "What did God require a person to believe at any given time in history?" This necessarily is a question because the Bible did not drop down out of heaven in one piece. Paul had more of the Bible than Isaiah, Isaiah had more than Moses, Moses had more than Noah, Noah had more than Adam. The Bible grew over time until it was complete. Now the message of by grace through faith remains a solid thread throughout the Bible but obviously the amount of content was enlarged. We call that progressive revelation. Now this is obvious, it is obvious for example that there is a shift from before the Fall to after the Fall. And a difference between the period before the Flood and after the Flood, and a difference before the Cross and after the Cross. That's already at least four dispensations or arrangements. These are not different ways of salvation. There is only one way of salvation, by grace through faith, but the content a person had to believe in these periods differs. So I suggest that a) during certain time periods there is what God has presented, His word, and this must be believed for eternal salvation. So for example, what God presented in Adam, what God presented in Noah, what God presented in Abraham, what God presented in Moses and what God presented in Christ. Once God has presented new revelation then that is the new content a person must believe. Point b) would be that there is a transition period when you move from one period of revelation to another. The clearest example of this is the Book of Acts. In Acts 2 the revelation is the death and resurrection of Christ. This must be believed. Now that does not cause the people who believed the right content before the cross to lose their salvation after the cross just because there's new revelation. For example, Acts 19:1ff you have a group of Jews who were disciples of John the Baptist, they were promising to believe in the one who God pointed out as His Messiah. But they never heard that Jesus had come. Were they believers before Acts 19? Yes, of course they were. Were they a part of the body of Christ? No, they were believers from the prior era and if they had died the day before they would have been a part of OT Israel. So, this kind of thing is really not too hard to understand.

Another question that relates to this, "What if a person is born today in a tribe and they hear the truths of Noah, can that person be saved through

believing the truths of Noah? The answer is no. Once the transition period is over the prior content no longer saves. The issue in the final analysis is does a person respond positively to word God has presented in his time. For all the other questions, “Will not the judge of the earth do what is right?” Of course He will. But what we’ve sent out here is in stone. This is doctrine that you can’t budge on or else you wipe out missions. A final word, if someone goes positive to General Revelation God will make sure they get the Special Revelation they need to be saved. Don’t worry about that. God is sovereign and this is how He works. So let’s conclude with a statement, **Special Revelation from God’s Word is Essential to be Saved.**

Alright, let’s turn to the issue of the **extent of the atonement**. Let me just avail some of you of your curiosity right off the bat. There are several views of the atonement when you get in the nuances. Sometimes people very naively think this is an issue of Calvinism and Arminianism, usually these people align themselves with one of these two systems of theology and start throwing rocks. These people are not interested in your nuances, if you don’t line up with an Arminian then you’re branded a Calvinist or vice versa. By the way the Calvinists didn’t give themselves the name, their opponents gave them this name and it was name-calling, those were fighting words. Furthermore, the verdict isn’t in on whether Calvin believed in limited or unlimited atonement. In some passages he goes one way in others another way and it’s a difficult question because he may have held both positions at different times in his life. It just depends on which of his writings you’re referring to. However, the verdict is in on Martin Luther, Luther held to unlimited atonement, that Christ died for all men. But I think it’s naïve to lump everyone in one camp or the other as if your either a Calvinist or an Arminian. There’s also Moderate Calvinism, historically these men have held some of the Calvinist views but not all of them. They broke away on certain points they thought conflicted with Scripture and the extent of the atonement was one of them. So there are lots of views, we’ll see more later.

So the question, “Did Christ in the cross die for all men?” We’re answering in the affirmative, but the way we state that is by saying “Christ *provided* a salvation for all men on the cross.” Provided being the key word. We’re not saying what the Arminian is saying. He says that Christ in the cross supplied sufficient grace to all so that all may believe. In other words, God in Christ removed man’s inability restoring him to a position where he is able to

cooperate with God in salvation. That's not what we're saying. Nor are we saying what Calvinism is saying, "That Christ died to procure the salvation of the elect." Key word "procure" which means the atonement applies itself, it secures the salvation of the elect. That's not what we're saying.

There are actually seven views as far as I can tell from the literature, each of which can be traced back to what is called the "lapsarian" controversy. Does anyone know what "lapsarian" means? This is one of those issues that theologians get involved in and then laymen come along and they like this theologian and so they read some of their popular literature, it's easy reading, they've never heard of the lapsarian controversy, they just believe whatever this theologian wrote. But they don't know why they wrote that because they haven't got into the deep systematic theology. But it goes back to this lapsarian issue. This is one of the first questions I was asked in seminary? A group of us were standing there talking to Wayne House and we thought we were big boys, real theologians, we'd taken a few classes, so we said, give us your best shot, and he said, Alright, "What does lapsarian mean?" And we stood there like a bunch of dopes. And that's a good less to learn every day of your life. Well it turns out it's the Latin word for "Fall" and the lapsarian controversy has to do with the order of God's decree with respect to the Fall, in other words, in what order did God decree things with respect to the Fall of man. This gets real involved and it can't really be resolved because the decree of God is single in the sense that there's no order to it at all. God just knows all things, He doesn't think in time, He doesn't think in a step-by-step fashion. That's what we do not God. But this is how man thinks and so we project various orders of the decree. Here's a chart with the seven different positions.

Supralapsarian	Infralapsarian	Sublapsarian	Amyraldian	Amyraldian
Hyper-Calvinists	Moderate Calvinists	Moderate Calvinists	Modified Salmurian	Hypothetical Universalists
1. To elect some and reprobate others	To create man	To create man	To create man	To create man
2. To create man	To permit the fall of man	To permit the fall of man	To permit the fall of man	To permit the fall of man
3. To permit the fall	To elect some to eternal life	To provide a ransom price	To provide a ransom price	To provide a ransom for

		for all	for all	all men equally
4. To procure salvation for the elect through the atonement	To procure salvation for the elect through the atonement	To elect some to eternal life through faith	To elect those foreknown to believe	To elect some to moral ability to believe
5. To regenerate the elect by irresistible work of Holy Spirit	To regenerate the elect by irresistible work of Holy Spirit	To convict the world of sin	To convict the world of sin	To regenerate those who believe
		To regenerate the elect by irresistible work of Holy Spirit	To regenerate those who believe	
John Gill & John Owen	J.O. Buswell & Charles Hodge	L. S. Chafer, A.H. Strong, Van Osterzee, & Robert Lightner	H.C. Thiessen & Samuel Fisk	John Cameron, Moise Amyraut, & Richard Baxter

Starting from the left we have the Supra- (above), these are your Hyper-Calvinists, then you have Infra- (later) and Sub- (below), these are your Moderate Calvinists, then you have Amyraldian 1, that's Modified Salmurian, in other words it's a modification of the theology at the French Seminary of Saumur. Then you have Amyraldian 2, these are your Hypothetical Universalists, and finally your Lutheran and Wesleyan, one is Moderate Arminianism and Wesleyan is your pure Arminianism. And you can see the order of decrees under each one. Now watch, don't get lost in all

the details on this chart, we're just looking at the extent of the atonement, and I just want to walk you through the logic of some of these positions. If you take the Supra- position, far left then you have the decree "to elect some and reprobate others," that's double predestination, you have that decree before the decree "To procure salvation for the elect through the atonement." So obviously here if you separate out a subset of humanity before you even get to the cross then you're logically fixed into limited atonement. It's only related to those elect in a direct sense. Do you see the logic of what they're doing? Now move over to the Infra- position. Here again you have the decree "to elect some to eternal life" and again it comes before the decree "to procure salvation for the elect through the atonement," so it's the same as the Supra- position in this detail. So both of these positions teach limited atonement, the differences between these two positions are in other areas, I'm just showing you those significant for the extent of the atonement. The next position is Sub- and in this one a significant difference exists. Notice that the "decree to elect some to eternal life through faith" comes after the decree "to provide a ransom price for all." So in this position God first provides an atonement in Christ for all men and then applies it only to those who are elect through faith. Alright, so this is the first position that teaches an unlimited atonement with limited application. Then you have your Amyraldian 1 view, this is a modification of the 17th century French Theologian from the School of Saumur, his view is similar to the Sub view in that you have the decree "to provide a ransom price for all" coming before the decree "to elect those foreknown to believe," but you'll notice a difference there in how they view election. One is based on God's foreknowledge of who would believe, the other is not. But what I want you to see is that men start here in the lapsarian controversy and that, for them, solves the extent of the atonement. These are logical deductions from this projected order of decrees, I say projected because you can't really break down the decree of God into an order, it's a single thought in the mind of God, He's omniscient, there's not a sequence of thoughts in His mind, He just knows all things simultaneously. But what this shows you is how these theologians are reasoning. And the key is how you order the decree to elect men with respect to the decree to save men. If you put election before salvation then you're limited atonement, always, and you'll make Scripture fit that. If you put salvation before election then you're unlimited atonement, always. There are other important differences in this chart, take the Supra and Infra views, point 4 both use the word "procure" that's a very important word, you don't see that in the other views, that word

is very important to them because what they are saying is Christ's death applies itself. And if you hold that idea and then someone comes along and says, "Christ died for all men without exception," then they say, "Well, then all men without exception would be saved, your preaching universalism." And while some are preaching universalism, that's not what most people mean at all, they just do not see Christ's death as procuring salvation for anyone, it provided salvation, it did not procure it. See that word "provide" is the key word used in the Sub, Amyraldian and other columns under point three in the decrees; salvation was "provided." That's an important distinction and I'm not really doing justice to all the nuances, we could spend several hours on this chart, but we just want to see this point of logic in the debate. This drives people's thinking in the debate over "For whom did Christ die? I just warn you of a couple of things here. One, listen to how people set the question up because not all questions are the right question and I've seen this get set up the wrong way and if you buy into it then you're just going to have a big argument on your hands. The other thing is people get very emotional about this so just be prepared if you get into a discussion. If I were you I'd listen and ask questions, pray through it, stay calm.

Alright, lets look at some biblical texts, if you ask me where I am on this chart, if I'm forced to be in here I'd say that none of them are correct in trying to order the decree but the ones that reflect the teachings of the Bible are somewhere in the Sub- and Amyraldian views, I don't hold to any of them *en toto* and the reason I don't is because I'm trying to be textual. I'm concerned with the text more than maintaining a system. I believe there is a system, God thinks systematically, it's just that I'm not tying myself down immovably in a system and then interpreting the texts to fit the system, I'm just trying to derive what a passage teaches and modify the system as I go along.

Now, turn over to Rom 5. Last week we looked at the heavy hitters, 1 John 2:2, 2 Pet 2:1 and 2 Cor 5:17-21. This week we want to look at Rom 5:18. A few weeks ago we looked at 5:12, how we all fell in Adam, there was a universal fall and this is a set up for verse. Now look at verse 18. This is a real difficult one for Limited Atonement folks, "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men." Now the one transgression is the transgression of Adam in the garden and the one act of righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus Christ on the cross and the

result is justification of life to all men. Now this is not saying universal justification, that everybody will be justified. It is saying universal fall, that all men fell in Adam. There's nothing in the context that limits that. But there is something that limits the justification. Chapter 4 is all about how a man is justified and it's by faith. So faith is the condition implied in the context for a man to be justified. So this is teaching a universal fall in Adam and a universal provision of justification in Jesus Christ, conditioned on faith. Rom 4:3, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. So the greater context of Romans keeps this from being universalism, that all men are justified and it certainly is a difficult verse for limited atonement to handle.

Now turn to 1 Tim 2. This is another one that gives people trouble. If God desires all men to be saved then why aren't all men saved? This seems to be a contradiction. 1 Tim 2:3, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." There is nothing in this text or in any other that would limit the truly universal interpretation of "all men." God wants everyone to experience eternal salvation. The fact that He permits people to perish seems to contradict this, but it does not. The solution to this apparent contradiction is that God's ultimate purpose in history is not the salvation of all but His own glory. Somehow it will glorify God more for some to perish than it would for all to be saved. Look, we can't see the whole picture, God can, and He knows what plan brings Him the most glory.ⁱ Apparently it is the one in which much of humanity perishes. It is clear in many Scriptures that God wants all men to be saved, take Jonah and the Ninevites for example, God didn't want to destroy them, He wanted to save them. So again the easiest explanation is that if salvation were the ultimate goal of God then all would be saved but if His glory is the ultimate goal then His desire for all men to be saved is secondary to His ultimate goal. So this again is a verse supporting unlimited atonement.

Turn over to 1 Tim 4:10, "For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers." Notice the distinction. God is the Savior of all men, *especially* of believers." So we have something similar to 1 John 2:2 in that you have an unlimited statement followed by a limited one. The word *especially* in the Greek is *malista* and means "quantity or degree," and can be translated

“particularly. He is the Savior of all men, particularly of believers.” In what sense then is He the Savior of all men? Is He their Savior in the temporal sense, saving them from disaster or is it in the eternal sense, in that He has provided salvation for them but it is applied only to those who believe? It would seem both senses are in order contextually since verse 8 discusses both the present life and the future one.

Turn to Heb 2:9. “But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.” Again, this specifies the death for “everyone” and not just a subset of humanity.

Now, we’re not denying that certain passages teach that Christ died for believers or for His sheep or for the elect. That is not the debate. The debate is whether there are other passages which extend the provision of His death to all men.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003), 1 Ti 2:3.

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