

# Whosoever Believes: Particular Redemption and the Free Offer of the Gospel

Selected Scriptures

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## Introduction

We return this morning to the series I've entitled, *O Perfect Redemption!*—our extended study on the doctrine of Christ's atonement, and specifically on the controversial doctrine of the extent of the atonement. In this series, I've been seeking to prove to you from Scripture something that, amid the theological downgrade of contemporary Christianity, has become veritably scandalous to believe—namely, that Jesus didn't die for everybody; that the extent of Christ's atonement is limited to the elect alone; that Jesus died to save no more and no fewer than His Father has chosen in eternity past, and has given to Him as His sheep.

And I said this last time, and I'll say it again today. Every time I introduce a sermon in this series, I feel a strong burden to reiterate that, the point of this series has not been to celebrate exclusion of some from the saving will of God. Instead, the point has been to safeguard the atonement from being robbed of what makes it precious and sweet to us sinners, who need a perfect redemption to pay for our sins, and to make us fit to stand in the presence of a holy God.

You see, it sounds generous and loving to say, "Jesus died to save everyone!" But what this series has taught us is that when you bring the implications of a universal atonement to their logical conclusion, you end up undermining precisely what makes the cross Good News. We've learned that if you universalize the extent of the atonement without universalizing the extent of salvation, you make something other than Christ's death the decisive and determinative cause of salvation. If Christ died for people who are not finally saved, then people are saved by something other than Christ's death. And that is not Good News for sinners. You see, quickly, how the doctrine of universal atonement empties the cross of its saving power.

But when you proclaim the Bible's teaching that, though Jesus does not die for every single individual without exception, every single one that He does die for is, *by virtue of that very death*, infallibly assured to be saved from sin and brought home to heaven, *then* you taste the *sweetness* of a particular redemption! When you recognize that the atonement does not need faith added to it to give it its saving power, but that the atonement, of itself, is so savingly powerful that it purchases the very faith that unites us to Christ and the blessings of salvation in Him, then you feel the strength of the cross! Then you can rest your whole soul on the cross! Then you see the glory of a perfect redemption! And so that has been my burden in this series—to protect the

power and glory and sweetness of the cross from the unlikely enemy of a universal atonement, which undermines all of those things.

And to do that, I've defended the particularity of Christ's atoning work on the cross in several ways. We saw that only a particular redemption maintains the **unity of the Trinity** in salvation. The Father elects some; the Spirit regenerates that same number; therefore, the Son must redeem that same number, otherwise, there is disunity in the saving will and work of the Triune God, where there can only be perfect, glorious, unity. We saw that the Triune **God's unified intention** in the cross of Christ was to save sinners—not merely to provide salvation or make salvation possible or available, but actually to save them. We then spent several sermons digging into Scripture's teaching on the **nature of the atonement**—what the Bible says the atonement is. We saw motifs emerge like expiatory sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption. We saw how all of those were like facets in the diamond of penal substitution. And we saw how Scripture defined each of those motifs as **efficacious saving accomplishments** on behalf of particular people, rather than potentially inefficacious provisions on behalf of all without exception, but nobody in particular.

Then we saw how the atonement *must* be understood in the context of the **High Priestly ministry** of Christ—that He is the High Priest and Mediator of the New Covenant, that His blood is the blood of the covenant, and how that covenant is both efficacious unto salvation, and particular to those individuals who partake of its benefits. And then, in the light of *all* of those truths, we saw Scripture cast the atonement in **inherently particularistic terms**—like saying Jesus died for “His people,” for the “many,” for His “sheep,” for “the children of God,” for “His friends,” for “the church,” and for “God's elect.” And then, last time, we took up the objection that Scripture also casts the scope of Christ's death in universalistic terms, like saying He died for “all” or “the whole world.” And we went through each of those texts, and we found that when the “all” and “world” passages are interpreted in their context, and when they're interpreted consistently with the rest of Scripture's teaching concerning the nature and design of the atonement, no text genuinely teaches that Christ has died to atone for the sins of all without exception. None of them contradicts the doctrine of particular redemption. And in fact, we saw how they all complement and, in some cases, even positively reinforce the case for particular redemption.

But then, at the end of that last message, I asked: if that's so, how can we consistently preach the Gospel to all people without exception? Because we certainly must do that! Nothing that I've said throughout the entirety of this series stands at odds with proclaiming the Gospel with earnest urgency to every person we come in contact with. We are to evangelize everyone!

But you say, “If Christ didn't die for everyone without exception, then isn't salvation not *available* to everyone? And if salvation isn't *available* to everyone, doesn't that mean that we

can't *offer* it to everyone?" How can I stand up here in this pulpit, week after week and month after month and year after year, and call everyone within the sound of my voice to repent and believe the Gospel of Christ crucified, and promise that if they do come to Him in faith that He will forgive their sins and be their righteousness before God, if I don't believe that Jesus has died for every last one of them? How can we believe in a strictly *particular* redemption, on the one hand, and a genuinely *universal* free-offer of the Gospel to all people without exception, on the other?

That's going to be the subject of our message this morning. Why does a believer in particular redemption such as myself preach the Gospel to all people without exception? And I'm going to give **three answers** to that question. The particularist preaches the Gospel to all because (1) it's **biblical**; because (2) it's **compatible**; and because (3) it's **genuine**.

## **I. It's Biblical**

In the first place, the believer in particular redemption offers salvation to all without exception by calling sinners to faith in the Gospel because it's **biblical**. The Bible teaches particular redemption. And the Bible teaches the universal Gospel call—that the Gospel should be preached to all indiscriminately. And therefore, our job is to believe both truths, and to behave consistently with both truths, even if they may appear contradictory to us on the surface.

Biblical support for the full, free, universal offer of the Gospel is in ready supply. We can start at the Great Commission. In Luke 24:47, Jesus tells His disciples that the Old Testament predicts that “the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name *to all the nations*, beginning from Jerusalem.” It is by the proclamation of that Gospel that His disciples would, Matthew 28:19, “go...and make disciples of *all the nations*, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.”

These passages task Jesus' followers with proclaiming the facts of the Gospel message: that every man and woman has sinned against a holy God and are unable to save themselves from His deserved punishment, but that God has acted in grace to send His Son into the world to accomplish redemption by His obedient life, His substitutionary sin-bearing death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead. We are to proclaim that “while we were still *helpless*, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly,” Romans 5:6. We have been tasked with summoning everyone who will listen to us to “repent and believe the Gospel,” even as Jesus does in Mark 1:15. We are, along with Paul in Acts 20:21, to “solemnly testify to both Jews and Greeks of *repentance* toward God and *faith* in our Lord Jesus Christ.” And then, in addition to the facts of the Gospel and the call to faith, we must also issue the promise of forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all who believe. We must declare to all within the reach of our influence the promise of

John 3:16: that “whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life”; the promise of Acts 2:38: that those who repent will receive “the forgiveness of sins” and “the gift of the Holy Spirit”; and the promise of Acts 13:38–39: that “through Him everyone who believes is freed from all things, from which you could not be freed through the Law.” This is what we proclaim to all the nations.

Now, some, who believe in the doctrine of election, suggest that since God has chosen only some *throughout* all the nations, and that since Christ has died for only some *throughout* all the nations, therefore, the Gospel should be preached only to those elect ones *throughout* all the nations. But the response has rightly come back: how are we supposed to know who the elect ones are? Spurgeon famously quipped, “If God would have painted a yellow stripe on the backs of the elect, I would go around lifting shirts.” Well, the response came back that we don’t need to see a yellow stripe but that we do need to see identifying marks of election, like godly sorrow and contrition over sin, and once we see those things *then* we can preach the Gospel. But Scripture never instructs us to do anything like that. It simply tells us to call all people to repentance, and the only identifying mark of their election is that they repent and believe the Gospel.

But besides that, the God who tells us in Romans 9:18 that He has mercy on whom He wills and hardens whom He wills also reveals Himself as in some sense fervently desiring the repentance and salvation of the wicked. He says in Ezekiel 33 and verse 11: “I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live.” “I delight not in their destruction, but in their repentance!” And then God issues that earnest call to salvation: “Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?”

God Himself issues numerous indiscriminate calls for sinners to repent, to believe, to find forgiveness, and to be saved from sin and judgment. In Isaiah 45:22, the Lord issues a universal call: “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.” One commentator rightly observes, “If the ends of the earth turn to God, it is only because the individual men who make up the ends of the earth have themselves turned” (Young, 3:215–16). And so this call to repent and be saved is issued to all people indiscriminately.

In Isaiah 55:1, we see a similar call, only with even greater exuberance. Yahweh says, “Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” “Every one” is singular, and so it individualizes this call to faith. But the commands to “Come, buy, and eat” are in the plural, and that generalizes the call. This summons is issued to all and every one; despite their poverty, they are invited to freely partake of the refreshing waters of salvation. And it continues in verses 6 and 7, where God attaches the promise of forgiveness: “Seek Yahweh while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his

thoughts; and let him return to Yahweh, and He will have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” It is evident: God eagerly desires to bestow compassion and forgiveness upon any who would turn to Him for salvation.

But it’s not just God in the Old Testament. We also see the same emphasis from Jesus Himself in the New Testament. In that famous entreaty in Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus invites “*all* who are weary and heavy-laden” to come to Him for rest. Interestingly, as God incarnate, Jesus knew who the elect and the reprobate were! He didn’t need a yellow stripe painted on someone’s back! John 6:64 says, “Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him.” And yet that didn’t keep Him from offering the promises of the Gospel to all indiscriminately, even Judas. Rest was available to all who were weary and heavy-laden.

And so we see from Jesus’ parables, like the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew 22, that the call of salvation goes out to a greater number than who actually respond in faith. That parable details how the king’s slaves invite many to his son’s wedding feast, but how they were all unwilling to come. In the end, Matthew 22:14, Jesus says, “For many are called, but few are chosen.” That is, many are called to repentance and faith through the preaching of the Gospel, but comparatively few are among God’s elect who will respond to the call in genuine faith. You say, “Why does God call them to faith if He hasn’t chosen to grant them faith?” I don’t know. Evidently *He* doesn’t see the contradiction that we see, does He, because that’s exactly what the text says: the extent of the Gospel call is broader than the extent of the Father’s election. The Gospel is to be proclaimed to elect and reprobate alike.

And therefore, we’re not surprised to see Jesus issue indiscriminate commands to believe in Him. In John chapter 6, Jesus is dialoging with those from the crowd of 5,000 that He had fed the previous day with five loaves and two fish. This crowd included those who eventually grumbled at His teaching and ultimately rejected Him, John 6:66. But these very crowds asked Him, in verse 28, what they had to do to “work the works of God.” And Jesus replies in verse 29: “This is the work of God, that you *believe* in Him whom He has sent.” Jesus commands faith from those verse 64 says He knew would not believe! He issues a universal Gospel call to all those He teaches, without distinction or exception!

And His Apostles follow in His footsteps. The Apostle John repeats Jesus’ emphasis in John 6 in 1 John 3:23, where he says, “This is His *commandment*, that we *believe* in the name of His Son Jesus Christ.” This is the very “duty-faith” that hyper-Calvinists repudiate: God commands all indiscriminately to believe on Christ. Or, as Paul says at the close of his sermon on Mars Hill in Acts 17 and verse 30: “God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere [must] repent.” Friends, do all people everywhere repent, in actual fact? No. Sadly, “the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it,” says Matthew 7:13.

Second Thessalonians 3:2 puts it plainly: “not all have faith.” And yet, though not all people everywhere will repent, they are nevertheless commanded by God to do so.

So: *why* do we, who believe in a *particular* redemption, engage in *universal* Gospel proclamation? Number one: because it’s **biblical**. It may be that these two doctrines appear irreconcilable or inconsistent to us, but the fact that they are both clearly taught in Scripture means that there is no true contradiction between them. It may strike us as counterintuitive, but when we’re faced with two doctrines of Scripture that seem to conflict with one another, our duty isn’t to modify one or both of those doctrines to satisfy our rationalistic concerns. No, it’s to submit our fallen reasoning to the infallible revelation of the all-wise God of Truth, and to believe every Word that comes out of His mouth.

## II. It’s Compatible

And so, again, a believer in particular redemption, like me, preaches the Gospel to all people without exception because it’s biblical—because the Bible teaches both a particular redemption and a universal free offer of the Gospel. But a **second** reason is not only because it’s biblical, but also because it’s **compatible**. And by that, I mean that a universal free offer of the Gospel is **compatible** with a particular redemption. And that’s not only because Scripture teaches both doctrines; it does. But it’s not as if they’re entirely unrelated to one another—as if particular redemption were taught in certain contexts of the Bible, while a universal Gospel call was taught in other contexts. No, Scripture not only presents these two doctrines as not-in-conflict with one another; it often presents both of these truths in the very same context without a hint of irony or perceived tension. They show up together! And the biblical authors don’t seem to feel the least bit uneasy about it.

For example, we just spoke about Isaiah 55:1–7. That universal call to repentance and faith comes on the heels of the fourth Servant Song of Isaiah—that famous chapter of Isaiah 53. And in that chapter, we read the great promise that the Suffering Servant who is to come will work righteousness and justification for His people. Isaiah 53:11 says, “As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.” In verse 12, it says, “He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.”

Those are clear references to the atoning work of Messiah, and they are presented in particularistic terms: justify *the many*; He bore the sin of *many*. In fact, verse 10 calls those for whom the Servant dies “His offspring,” and promises that as a result of His faithfulness in rendering Himself a guilt offering, He *will see* those “children” whose sins He has atoned for. But of course, that does not refer to all without exception. Those who finally perish in their unbelief are not the offspring of Christ in any sense. And He will not “see” them, except insofar

as He is their Judge and will execute justice upon them in hell for eternity. And yet, it is only two chapters later in chapter 55 that we have this universal call for everyone who thirsts to come to the waters of salvation and drink freely—the call for any of the wicked to forsake his wicked way and unrighteous thoughts, and find compassion and forgiveness through faith in God.

We see another example of this in Romans 9 and 10. In Romans 9, Paul is virtually relentless in his repeated insistence upon God’s sovereign freedom in choosing to save certain sinners on the basis of nothing in those sinners, but only according to His own good pleasure. In Romans 9:11 he says, “For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘The older will serve the younger.’” Verse 15: “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” “It’s up to Me,” God says. Verse 16: “So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.” And then verse 18 again: “He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.”

But then, after these unqualified declarations of God’s particularism in salvation, we come to the very next chapter—chapter 10 and verse 21—and God says of Israel, “All the day long I have *stretched out My hands* to a disobedient and obstinate people.” The outstretched arms of God are a picture of His earnest, compassionate entreaty for rebels to repent and be reconciled to Him. He’s saying, “I’m right here! Turn to me! Welcome home and receive salvation!” And you say, “God! You just said in chapter 9 that You have mercy on whoever You desire! You just said it doesn’t depend on man but on You! How can you call these people to repentance if You’ve chosen not to grant them repentance?!” And you know what? God doesn’t answer the how question. But there can be no doubt *that* both of those are true, can there? Apparently, neither God, who inspired the text, nor Paul, who wrote it, feels any tension between, “Salvation depends nothing on man, but all on God who chooses,” in chapter 9, and, “I stretch out my hands to all and call you to repentance,” in chapter 10. And so if we find these truths to be incompatible, maybe the problem isn’t with God or Paul. Maybe the problem is with us. It’s definitely with us.

One more. In Matthew 11, just before Jesus issues that tender, searching invitation for all who are weary and weighed down by their sin to come to Him and find rest for their souls, He makes what may be His strongest comments in support of particularist divine sovereignty. Matthew 11:25: “At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight.’” Don’t miss this. He doesn’t just *say* that the Father hides salvation from some and reveals it to others, He *praises* the Father for hiding salvation from and revealing it to others! Then He says, verse 27, “All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know

the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom *the Son wills* to reveal Him.” Now, knowing the Father is the definition of eternal life, John 17:3. Jesus says that no one knows the Father—no one has eternal life—except those to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Salvation is the sovereign prerogative of the Son! He chooses those He will save! And then in the very next verse comes that glorious invitation: “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.”

“Jesus! How can you call all who are weary to come to You for salvation, after You just said that no one comes to salvation except by Your decision? Don’t you realize that a universal Gospel call is not **compatible** with a particular election and a particular redemption?” Well, evidently, in Jesus’ mind, they *are* compatible! because He doesn’t give the slightest indication that they’re at odds with one another in any way. In fact, these texts illustrate that not only is particularism **compatible** with a universal Gospel call, but that particularism is the foundation upon which the universal Gospel call goes forth! As John Murray puts it, “It is on the crest of the wave of divine sovereignty that the unrestricted summons comes to the labouring and heavy laden” (1:81). Not only does particularism pose no obstacle to the indiscriminate proclamation of the Gospel; Scripture presents the latter flowing out of the former. And that is because the only kind of atonement that can serve as a thoroughly solid foundation for such a full and free offer of the Gospel is an *efficacious* atonement. And the only way to preserve an efficacious atonement is if it is a *particular* atonement.

And so: we ought to be no more conflicted about holding fast to the twin truths of sovereign particularism and universal Gospel preaching than were the prophet Isaiah in chapters 53 and 55, the Apostle Paul in Romans 9 and 10, or Jesus Himself in Matthew 11:25–30.

And in fact, the mainstream of historic Reformed particularism has never been conflicted about this. The Synod of Dort was convened in 1618 to establish the accepted Reformed teaching for the churches in Europe in response to the growing Arminianism. And many regard Dort to be the birthplace of the so-called “five points of Calvinism,” because the document they produced was a response to the Arminian teachings, which were known as the five articles of the Remonstrance. And so in some sense, there is no better measure of historic Calvinism than the Canons of the Synod of Dort.

Well, in their section on the work of Christ, the Dort unequivocally asserted the particularity of Christ’s atonement. It says, “It was the will of God, that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, *and those only*, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father” (II/8). And yet, at the same time, under the very same head of doctrine, Dort also affirmed that the Gospel must be preached to all people. It says, “The promise of the Gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting



life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, *and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction*, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the Gospel.” So even the original Calvinists saw no incompatibility between a particular redemption and a universal Gospel call. One scholar makes the claim that “Belief in the full, free and indiscriminate offer of the gospel has been a core dogma of Reformed orthodoxy from the beginning. It has not merely been conceded. It has been insisted on, as a dogma of such importance that any doctrine inconsistent with it would have to be instantly jettisoned” (Macleod, 220).

And so, we believe in a particular redemption and a universal Gospel call not only because it’s biblical, but also because they are genuinely **compatible** with one another.

### III. It’s Genuine

“Ok, Mike. You’ve convinced me. I can’t deny *that* the Bible teaches both a particular redemption and a universal Gospel call, and treats them as if they are perfectly compatible with one another. But how can that be? How can God’s offer of salvation be **genuine** if the Father doesn’t choose all and if the Son doesn’t die for all?”

And that’s a fair question. On the one hand, God declares in Ezekiel 18 and Ezekiel 33 that He “takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked.” And at the same time, He declares that “He does whatever He pleases,” Psalm 115:3. In Isaiah 46:10 He says, “I will accomplish all my good pleasure.” Well, you might expect from these two premises that the wicked never perish. If the God who does whatever He pleases takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather takes pleasure in their repentance, it would seem to follow that every wicked person repents and inherits eternal life. But the wicked do die. Sinners do perish in their unbelief and go into eternal punishment. How can this be?

Well, the answer lies, partly, in observing a distinction in the way Scripture speaks of God’s will. First, there is God’s **will of decree**, or His **decretive** will, which signifies what He has infallibly determined to come to pass. This is the “good pleasure” of Isaiah 46:10, the “eternal purpose” of Ephesians 3:11, whereby He “works all things after the counsel of His will.” In this sense, whatever happens is God’s will, because God is sovereign, and nothing could come to pass unless God had willed it in some sense. Second, there is God’s **will of command**, or what we sometimes call His **preceptive** will. It’s what He’s commanded His creatures to do, in the precepts of His revealed Word. And then, thirdly, there is God’s **will of disposition**—what is pleasing to Him, what He is positively disposed to. Sometimes people call this God’s **optative** will, because “optative” is a grammatical mood that expresses a wish or desire.

Now, here's the mind-bender. Scripture makes clear that by His decretive will God has sovereignly determined certain things to happen which He has forbidden by His preceptive will. You say, "What do you mean? How can that be?" Well, let me ask you: Did God will for Adam to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? In one sense, we have to answer "No." Genesis 2:17 records God's prohibition: "but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you *shall not eat*." But of course, Adam does eat from the tree, plunges mankind into sin, and places us in need of the grace of God through Christ's death and resurrection to save us, which, Scripture tells us, was God's plan all along. Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world, 1 Peter 1:20. Revelation 13:8 says He is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Ephesians 1:4 says that God chose to save sinners in Christ before the foundation of the world. If God planned salvation from sin before the foundation of the world—if magnifying His grace through the cross of Christ was *Plan A*—then it was God's plan for sin to corrupt mankind by Adam's fall. And that means, while it was against God's preceptive will for Adam to eat of the tree, it was according to God's decretive will that that very act was brought to pass. God may be said not to have willed, according to His preceptive will, what He had willed, according to His decretive will.

And we could multiply examples of this. It was against the preceptive will of God for Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery out of jealousy. God's law forbids jealousy, and it certainly forbids selling your brother to slave traders. And yet Joseph himself declares that it was not his brothers who sent him to Egypt, but God! Genesis 45 verse 8: "Now, therefore, it was *not* you who sent me here, but *God*; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt." What God prohibited by His preceptive will, He ordained to take place by His decretive will in order to accomplish His good purposes. That's just what Genesis 50:20 says, right? "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." God willed the evil act He forbade for the good that He intended to accomplish by it.

Or we could go to the cross itself, and observe that it was against the preceptive will of God for Judas to betray Jesus, for the Sanhedrin to find Him guilty of sin, for Pilate to give Him over to be crucified, and for the soldiers to torture and crucify Him. Each of those men sinned by violating the law of God for their part in the murder of Jesus. And yet, what does Isaiah 53:10 say? "It was the will of Yahweh to crush Him." Acts 2:23: It happened "by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God." Acts 4:28: It was "whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur." Though the murder of Jesus was against God's preceptive will, the Father ordained the crucifixion by His decretive will in order to accomplish the salvation of His people.

Well in the same way, God commands by His preceptive will that all men everywhere repent and believe the Gospel, Acts 17:30. By His optative will, He represents His own disposition toward all those made in His image—namely, that He desires none of them to perish, and, when they do, His disposition is not one of maniacal delight in their ruin, but of fatherly grief. "Why will you

die, O Israel?” “O Jerusalem! How often I wanted to gather your children!” And yet, by His decretive will, before the foundation of the world, according to His inscrutable wisdom, He has determined to save only those whom He sovereignly sets His love upon and gives to the Son, and to leave the rest to justly perish in their sins.

And the key point is: His decretive will to save only some does not in any way mitigate (a) His preceptive will by which He commands all to repent nor (b) His optative will by which He sincerely desires their repentance. The universal free offer of the Gospel belongs to the realm of God’s preceptive and optative willing, while the truths of unconditional election and particular redemption belong to the realm of God’s decretive willing. And the existence of one of these “senses” of God’s willing doesn’t cancel out the other or make the other merely feigned or insincere. You could put it this way: particular redemption and universal Gospel preaching are no more contradictory than God forbidding the crucifixion by His preceptive will and His ordaining the crucifixion by His decretive will.

You say, “Ok, I think I’ve followed that. But I still don’t see how the offer can be **genuine** on God’s part. I mean, if I can’t be certain that Christ died for someone, how can I offer them the benefits of His death?” You see, underneath that question is the assumption that the offer of salvation can only be genuine if we know there has been a *coextensive provision*—only if Christ has paid the penalty for everyone’s sins to make them savable; only if He has provisionally procured their salvation, which they can lay hold of by believing.

But is that what makes an offer **genuine**? Coextensive provision? The answer is no. An offer is genuine so long as “if the terms of the offer be observed, that which is offered be actually granted” (Nicole, 409–10). For God to genuinely offer salvation to sinners on the condition of repentant faith, it must be that if any sinner repents of sin and believes in Christ God will never fail to save that sinner. As long as *every* sinner who repents and believes is granted salvation—as long as no one who repents and believes in Christ is turned away from Him—the offer of salvation to all who repent and believe is genuine.

I do think we’ve officially entered the season of Christmas shopping, which means your mailboxes—and maybe even especially your email inboxes—are being inundated with offers for Christmas gifts at “pre-Black-Friday” sale prices. And whether it’s suits, or ties, perfumes or colognes, sweaters, or shoes, I can’t imagine how many advertisements Macy’s sends out this time of year. The Valencia store must send a circular to all 225,000 residents of Santa Clarita—whether by snail mail or email—advertising the same sweater at 60% off! But do any of you think to accuse Macy’s of being insincere—or of failing to make a **genuine** offer—if the Valencia store doesn’t have 225,000 sweaters in stock? No. All we as customers really have the right to expect is that if I show up at Macy’s before the sale is over, I’ll be able to buy that sweater at 60% off.

Now, I grant that no analogy is perfect. But I do think that does illustrate that a coextensive provision is not essential to the **genuineness** of an offer. Instead, as I've mentioned, the essential prerequisite for a genuine offer of anything is that: if the terms of the offer are met, that which is offered must be granted as promised. And when we apply that to the Gospel, God's offer to sinners is that if anyone repents and believes in Christ, he will be saved. John 6:40: "Everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life." And it is precisely the case that if anyone repents and believes in Christ, God will save him. There never has been, nor will there ever be, a case in which a sinner comes to Christ in repentance and faith and is refused salvation! for any reason. No one has ever believed in Jesus and then perished in his sins! Jesus Himself promises in John 6:37: "the one who comes to Me I will *certainly not* cast out."

You say, "But what if somebody comes to Christ in faith and Christ didn't die for them, because they weren't one of the elect?" Well that's impossible, because the only ones who come to Christ in faith *are* the elect—those whom the Father has given Him. Jesus says that very thing in the first half of John 6:37: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me." Jesus says that the only ones who come to Him are those the Father has given to Him. I have no problem preaching, "Whosoever believes"! Because the "whosoever" who *will* believe, are none other than the ones chosen by the Father and granted the gift of faith by the Holy Spirit. And here we're back to where we began with the unity of the Trinity. The perfect unity between the sovereign saving will of all three persons of the Trinity ensures that no sinner comes to Christ in faith and is refused salvation, since the very act of coming is purchased by Christ's atoning death and given by the Father's sovereign appointment. Nobody for whom Jesus did not die will ever meet the conditions of the offer. They are totally depraved. They will never come in repentance and faith. And the fact that Christ didn't die for them doesn't in any way diminish the sincerity of the Gospel offer.

It is certainly not a lie to tell any sinner that you meet that whoever believes will not perish but have eternal life. We may declare to any and every sinner that we ever come in contact with that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has accomplished a full atonement on behalf of sinners. He has purchased forgiveness and righteousness and salvation for every one that His Father has given Him. And He promises that whoever comes to Him in simple faith He will never cast away. The Lord Jesus Christ has never refused salvation to anyone who has met those conditions. There is no insufficiency in His accomplishment. The promise is dependable: all who believe will be saved. And so this offer of salvation is fully and completely **genuine**. It is "totally sincere and without any deceit at all" (Piper, 661).

## Conclusion

And so, why do believers in particular redemption preach the Gospel to all without exception? Because, like the doctrine of particular redemption, the doctrine of the universal free offer of the Gospel is **biblical**! The Bible teaches both. And not only are those two truths biblical, they're also manifestly **compatible**, because Scripture presents both doctrines in the same breath, without any hint that the authors of Scripture found them to be at odds with one another. They taught them both as true, without feeling the need to reconcile them or explain one of them away. And then, finally, contrary to those who claim that a free offer of the Gospel could not be **genuine** unless Christ has died for everyone we might speak the Gospel to, we found that the Gospel offer is genuine because the promise stands inviolable: everyone who believes shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

And so you ought not to feel any tension between (a) believing that Christ has died for His people alone and (b) offering the Gospel, fully and freely, to all people without exception. In fact, it's the particularist who makes the fullest and freest offer of the Gospel—even above those who say that Christ died for everyone. And history has testified to that very fact. History's greatest missionaries and evangelists were believers in particular redemption. The modern missions movement was spearheaded by Jonathan Edwards and David Brainerd and William Carey and Andrew Fuller—all of them five-point Calvinists. The Puritans—men like Thomas Watson, Thomas Goodwin, John Flavel, John Owen, and John Bunyan—who could preach the paint off the walls of their churches, and who did offer the Gospel to their congregations week in and week out, more earnestly and movingly than any revivalist—they were particularists. George Whitefield, Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, and John MacArthur: all believers in particular redemption, and all passionate and committed evangelists.

Why is that? It's because, as we've learned throughout this series, it is only a *particular* redemption that can be a *perfect* redemption. It is only by maintaining the *particularity* of the atonement that we can safeguard the all-powerful *efficacy* of the atonement. And that can only strengthen the evangelist to proclaim his message with the joy and the freedom that comes from knowing that Christ has left nothing unfinished! that all stands accomplished! The particularist offers Christ to the sinner in all His sovereign power to *save*—not just to provide salvation or make it possible. We don't offer people the *opportunity* of salvation; we offer them *salvation*! We don't offer them a *potential* Savior, who will have done as much for them as He's done for those suffering in hell at this moment. We don't offer them a *possibility* which they may turn into an actuality by fulfilling certain conditions. We offer them the *Almighty* Savior, who *accomplished* the work His Father gave Him to do, and cried, "It is *finished*." And *that* is Good News indeed.

And so it *is* as Steve Lawson says it is: the only preacher that plays with a full deck is the Calvinist Evangelist. You who preach the Gospel founded upon a definite atonement can rest absolutely assured that your proclamation *will* be effective, according to the purpose of God—

because His Word never fails to succeed in the matter for which He sends it, Isaiah 55:11. You can be stirred to speak the Gospel boldly, and courageously, and fearlessly, because the Lord has many people in these cities, Acts 18:10. The Good Shepherd has other sheep whose salvation He has purchased, whom He must bring into the fold also, John 10:16. We pursue the purchased, but we preach the Gospel to all. And it's a particular redemption that provides the only sure and sound motivation for full and free Gospel preaching.