

Introduction

The Bible teaches particular redemption *and* the free offer. But this raises a question: How can the two be reconciled? After all, they seem like a contradiction in terms. Let me spell it out. Take these as working definitions:

Particular redemption: Christ died to redeem the elect only

The free offer: God has revealed that the gospel preacher must invite and command all sinners to trust Christ, telling them it is their duty, and promising them salvation if they do

The seeming contradiction is self-evident, is it not?

Neither the Arminian nor the hyper-Calvinist, however, sees a problem; the former denies particular redemption; the latter, the free offer. Both the Arminian and the hyper-Calvinist are logical from a human point of view. But both are wrong.

Many Calvinists take another tack. While not denying either particular redemption or the free offer, they use the formula: ‘Christ’s death, sufficient for all men, but effective only for the elect’, and this, they think, solves the problem. They are wrong. Even though many have adopted this idea, it is a mistake – fundamentally, the same as that of the Arminian and the hyper-Calvinist; namely, the use of human logic to try to rationalise a paradox in God’s word.

My underlying thesis in this book is the same as in my book *The Gospel Offer is Free*; that is, the seeming contradiction¹ can’t be reconciled (by us – God, of course, has no need, since there is no contradiction). But not only can we not reconcile its two parts, we have no right to go beyond Scripture and draw on human logic to try. This is the root issue in all this debate. What is more, we have no *need* to explain the seeming contradiction. What we are required to do is to accept what God says in his word, admit the paradox, and preach it as it stands. Indeed, we should go further; we should glory in the paradox, and preach both sides fully and freely.²

Some will object to my use of the word ‘offer’. This, of course, is not a term found in Scripture. But neither is ‘trinity’, ‘sensible

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sinner', 'elect sinner', 'non-elect', 'total depravity', 'unconditional election', 'particular redemption', 'limited atonement', 'definite atonement', 'effectual calling' or 'irresistible grace'. But is the *concept* there? That is the question! I say it is. Even so, reader, if you still find the word objectionable, when thinking about addressing sinners with the gospel would 'invite', 'exhort', 'command', 'try to persuade',³ 'reason with', 'plead', 'beseech', 'beg', 'implore', 'make overture to', 'tender', 'proffer', do instead?⁴

Speaking for myself, however, I still prefer 'offer' – *because for me it embraces all the other terms which are used in Scripture*, and thus admirably sets out what is involved in preaching the gospel. For it is not enough just to 'declare', 'publish' or 'present' the gospel to sinners, to 'set it before' them. A preacher is not a mere stater of facts; he is a pleader with men for God. He does not stand merely to describe the glories of the gospel; he is to offer Christ to sinners, and do all he can to get them to receive him.⁵

I acknowledge the obvious fact that not all the writers I quote in support of what I say would agree with me in every detail. In particular, not all of them have used the word 'offer'. I am not trying to mislead you, reader, but it would be irritating and confusing to find me constantly chopping and changing to the terms favoured by each individual I mention. The fact is, I believe, at least at the point where I quote them, they all held to the *principle* of what I understand by the free offer, whether or not they used the term itself. And, after all, I am not contending for a *word*, but *what it stands for*.

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And to any who might be saying, with a weary sigh: 'What! Not yet another book on this same old topic!', J.C.Philpot might have an answer:

The Scriptures are full of general exhortations to men to perform what certainly appear, at first sight, spiritual actions [Philpot cited Ezek. 18:30-31; Matt. 3:2; Mark 1:15; Acts 8:22]. These and similar passages undoubtedly call upon natural men to repent, believe and pray, all which are spiritual acts, and as such can only be performed by spiritual persons, and by them only when and as

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God works in them to will and to do of his good pleasure. Now these passages are as much a part of God's word as those which set forth the glorious doctrines of grace... There they are, whether we like them or not; and we believe that many Calvinists have as much wished them out of the word as Arminians have wished the ninth chapter of... Romans blotted out of the Bible... But there the passages are still... There they are... there they still are.

In these two sets of scriptures, clearly, we have a seeming contradiction, from which we cannot run away. Rather, as Philpot said:

Any help, then, in this deeply important matter, any sound and scriptural contribution to remove these difficulties, any real approach to disentangle this perplexing question, we desire to receive thankfully... We do not... consider this a dry doctrinal discussion, a dispute of words, a barren, useless controversy, but one full of interest to those who have been painfully perplexed, and that in proportion to the tenderness of their conscience towards God's word. Were it a dry controversy, we would stand by while the sturdy rams and great he-goats battered in each other's heads. We would take no part in the contest, but would let the bulls of Bashan fight it out, while we were seeking to lie down in the green pastures, and drink of the still waters. The great interest, then, of the subject must be our apology, if we seem to draw out our observations to any unreasonable length.⁶

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Finally, I acknowledge the force of John Davenant's words:

It is truly a matter of grief and exceedingly to be deplored... that those mysteries of our religion, which were promulgated for the peace and comfort of mankind, should be turned into materials for nothing but contention and dispute. Who could ever have thought that the death of Christ, which was destined to secure peace and destroy enmity, as the apostle speaks (Eph. 2:14,17; Col. 1:20-21), could have been so fruitful in the production of strife?⁷

I hope my book will not contribute to this strife. I recognise that the believers I write against take the Scriptures as seriously as I do, and just as sincerely hold their beliefs as I hold mine. Although I criticise their views on the extent of the atonement and its connection with the free offer, I imply no slur on their trust in the Saviour, their faith in his precious blood to cleanse them from their

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sin by the grace of God, and their desire to see sinners saved. Even so, I think their views on this subject are mistaken. Not that everything they say about it is wrong, of course – indeed, much of it is stimulating, edifying and challenging. Nevertheless, on the central point – the link between the extent of the atonement and the free offer – they are mistaken. Or so I contend. And, since I am convinced the issue is of the utmost importance, I have to write.

Why? Why have I written this polemical work? For two reasons. *First*, to try to clear away some of the misunderstanding which surrounds and complicates this subject. *Secondly*, having, I hoped, succeeded in that, I want to stimulate the preaching of the free offer of Christ to sinners, having set it on its right and proper basis.⁸

I am, however, conscious of the danger Davenant spoke of in writing (and reading) a polemical work on the atonement. Deploring strife over the death of Christ, he went on to suggest a reason for it:

This seems to arise from the innate curiosity of men, who are more anxious to scrutinise the secret councils of God, than to embrace the benefits openly offered to them. Hence it comes to pass that from too much altercation on the points: *For whom did Christ die, and for whom did he not die?* little is thought by mankind individually of applying to ourselves the death of Christ, by a true and lively faith, for the salvation of our own souls.⁹

Davenant was right. Arguing about the extent of the atonement and the free offer is one thing, but it counts for less-than-nothing compared to a felt-sense of a personal application of the work of Christ to the soul. I sincerely hope my book does not obscure Christ and his glorious redemption. Rather, believer, I hope you will find your ‘true and lively faith’ in ‘the death of Christ’ to ‘the salvation of your soul’ is strengthened, your concept of Christ’s redemption enlarged. I hope, also, you will be encouraged to offer him and his salvation more freely to sinners. What is more, if you, reader, should start my book without this ‘lively faith’ in ‘the death of Christ’, nothing would please me more than to know that by reading my words you have come to saving faith in the Redeemer; that you, from your heart, should be able to say of the Lord Jesus

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Christ: ‘The Son of God, who loved *me* and gave himself for *me*’ (Gal. 2:20).

In all this, I want to exalt Christ and his atonement. True it is, men think too little of the death of Christ. My conviction is, we cannot think too much!

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Before I begin, I want to thank Michael Haykin for his very generous Foreword – which he kindly offered to write after reading the manuscript. I hope, reader, you find the book half as good as he said it is!

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The responsibility for what follows is, of course, all my own.