

# *The General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

Having set out the general principles in answer to the objection that particular redemption rules out the free offer, I now want to apply these principles briefly to the three groups of Calvinists who make it: 1. The hyper-Calvinist who says the free offer depends on universal redemption. 2. The Amyraldian who says it depends on a universally sufficient but conditional redemption planned by God. 3. The Owenite who says it depends on a universally sufficient redemption arising from Christ's intrinsic worth.<sup>292</sup>

## ***1. The general principles applied to the hyper-Calvinist's objection: The free offer requires, or leads to, a universal redemption***

Of course, if the free offer *does* demand a universal atonement, or leads to it, then the free offer must be wrong. Since the Bible knows only a definite, particular redemption, anything which undermines it must be ruled out.

But I categorically deny that the basis of the free offer is universal redemption. And I challenge all who think it is to produce one biblical example of a gospel invitation or command based upon universal redemption. Where in Scripture are we told, that since Christ died for all, we must preach the gospel to all? May we be given the scriptures where, on the basis that Christ has died for all, sinners are exhorted to trust him? and preachers, on that basis, are warranted to call them to faith and repentance? It cannot be done, *for it is no part of the gospel offer to tell sinners that Christ died for all men*. As their recorded discourses in Acts make clear, Peter did not do it (Acts 2:14-41; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32,42; 8:22; 10:34-43), nor Stephen (Acts 7:2-53), nor Philip (Acts 8:5,35), nor Paul (Acts 13:16-41; 14:15-17; 16:31; 17:22-31; 20:18-35; 22:1-21; 24:10-21,25; 26:2-29; 28:23-28). But we know they preached

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

Christ, salvation through the grace and gift of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ, and – above all, the resurrection of Christ<sup>293</sup> – commanding sinners universally to repent and believe, assuring their hearers that all who did turn to Christ and trust him would be saved, and so on (Acts 2:36,38; 4:12; 5:31,42; 10:43; 13:38-39; 14:21; 16:31; 17:18,30; 18:5,28; 20:20-21; 26:20), that by the grace of Christ, both Jew and Gentile would be saved (Acts 15:11),<sup>294</sup> and they saw thousands converted. That is, they preached the free offer, and with success, *but they never told any congregation that Christ died for all men*; certainly they never said to any unbelievers<sup>295</sup> that Christ died for all men, including *them*. Indeed, when addressing unbelievers, they never even broached the extent of the atonement.<sup>296</sup>

I realise (like me), of course, hyper-Calvinists do not believe in universal redemption. I also know (unlike me) they object to the free offer. They do so because, they say, it inevitably leads to universal redemption; a free offer must be based upon a universal atonement. But this argument, arising from the desire to be logically consistent at all costs, is false. I repeat what I said earlier: The only ground for making the free offer is the plain command of the word of God; this is its warrant. It has nothing to do with the extent of the atonement; it certainly does not require a universal atonement. It is wrong to tell sinners: ‘Christ desires and wants you so much that he has died for you’; it was wrong of Ella to attribute such a sentiment to the free-offer preacher.<sup>297</sup>

Haldane:

It is said the free and unlimited proclamation of the gospel to sinners of mankind is founded on the universality of the atonement; but such is not the case... The notion that the universal proclamation of pardon can only be made on the supposition that Christ died for all, precedes from a false view of what we are commanded to believe [and preach]. The Scripture does not tell us that Christ died for any particular individual; therefore no man is required, in the first instance [that is, before coming to Christ], to believe that Christ died for him. [Indeed, as I have explained, he cannot]... The truth which we are commanded to believe [and preach], cannot be affected by the reception which it experiences. The gospel announces that Christ came into the world to save sinners; it says to all and to each individual who hears it: ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved’. It proclaims a free

*General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

pardon to all who will receive it through faith in the blood of Christ... Men are constantly prone to err on the right hand or on the left. While one class who profess the truth have, in order to simplify the gospel, represented the atonement as having being offered [by Christ on the cross] for those that are [ultimately] lost, as well as for the saved,<sup>298</sup> another class [that is, hyper-Calvinists] – who possess much acquaintance with the truth, and who know that the good shepherd laid down his life only for his sheep [and do not speculate about its sufficiency] – object to address[ing] the gospel to all men indiscriminately. They justly hold that the atonement was made exclusively for the church, and from this they infer that there is no ground for preaching salvation indiscriminately, and beseeching men to be reconciled to God. The error on both sides springs from the same source, *viz.* resting the proclamation of salvation upon our speculations as to the sufficiency of the atonement, and not being satisfied with the positive commandment to preach the gospel to every creature, [as] illustrated by the example of the first ministers of the word.<sup>299</sup>

I agree with John Bonar who had no sympathy with ‘those who think that... universal offers imply universal atonement as the ground of these offers... [who] think... that the salvation of Christ cannot be consistently offered to all unless the atonement was made alike for all – alike for those that perish and for those that shall be saved; in a word, that... God’s offering [Christ to all] supposes redemption wrought... for all’. Bonar was rightly adamant:

No!... We dare neither [limit] what God has left general [that is, the invitation of the gospel], nor make universal what God has made definite [that is, redemption] – we dare not say that Christ died as much for Judas and those who perish, as he did for Paul and those who in heaven are recording for ever his grace in loving them and giving himself for them – but we dare [to] say that Christ is offered to all – freely, truly, fully, and, to all the ends of salvation, offered to all.<sup>300</sup> We dare [to] say that God [was] in Christ reconciling the world to himself, and not imputing to men their trespasses; and, as ambassadors of Christ, yes, as if God did beseech men by us, as in Christ’s stead we do beseech men to be reconciled to God... Our views of the nature of the atonement, and the foreordination of God, does [*sic*] not in the least affect our free and full offer of the gospel to all, because we do what God has commanded us to do, knowing that he has commanded, and that he will do as he has said, and that whosoever believes shall be saved... It is the command of God to offer Christ... It is the command of God to receive him... It is the invitation of God to come to him; and

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

it is the promise of God that whosoever comes shall in no wise be cast out.<sup>301</sup>

William Gouge: ‘Though Christ is, by the outward dispensation of God’s ordinances, offered to all, yet may it not thence be inferred that Christ actually died for all. The offer is made to all, without exception of any that, among those all, they for whom Christ was indeed given might believe’.<sup>302</sup>

Owen rightly rejected the notion that the free offer implies a universal redemption: ‘Their objection... is vain, who affirm that God has given Christ for all to whom he offers Christ in the preaching of the gospel; for his offer in the preaching of the gospel’ is not an indication of God’s purpose but of the sinner’s duty. Owen was quite clear about it: Though ‘the Lord has given his Son only to [and for] his elect’, ministers, not knowing God’s secret purpose, or who the elect are, yet desiring good for all men, ‘may make a proffer of Jesus Christ, with life and salvation in him’. Indeed, it is their calling and duty to make a free offer of Christ to all sinners, even though the atonement is not universal: ‘They command and invite all to repent and believe... they make proffers and tenders in the name of God to all’. ‘This offer is neither vain nor fruitless, being declarative of their duty’.<sup>303</sup>

Cunningham tackled what I am denying; namely, ‘the alleged necessity of a universal atonement, or of Christ having died for all men, as the only consistent ground or basis on which the offers and invitations of the gospel can be addressed indiscriminately to all men’. He began by conceding some undoubted facts:

We fully admit the general fact upon which the argument is based – namely, that in Scripture, men, without distinction and exception, have salvation, and all that leads to it, offered or tendered to them – that they are invited to come to Christ and to receive pardon – and assured that all who accept the offer, and comply with the invitation, shall receive everything necessary for their eternal welfare. We fully admit that God in the Bible does all this, and authorises and requires us to do the same in dealing with our fellow-men.

Just so. But, as he said, regarding ‘the consistency of a limited atonement with unlimited offers and invitations of gospel mercy, or of the alleged necessity of a universal atonement as the only ground

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

or basis on which such offers and invitations can rest', there are two questions which have to be answered. He spelled them out:

*First*, is an unlimited atonement necessary in order to warrant ministers of the gospel, or any who may be seeking to lead others to the saving knowledge of the truth, to offer to men, without exception, pardon and acceptance, and to invite them to come to Christ? And, *secondly*, is an unlimited atonement necessary in order to warrant God in addressing, and authorising and requiring us to address, such universal offers and invitations to our fellow-men?... It is the first question with which we have... to do, as it affects a duty which we are called upon to discharge; while the second is evidently, from its very nature, one of those secret things which belong unto the Lord.

Take the first question – do *we* require a universal atonement to warrant *us* making the free offer? Certainly not:

It is very evident that our conduct, in preaching the gospel, and in addressing our fellow-men with a view to their salvation, should not be regulated by any inferences of our own<sup>304</sup> about the nature, extent and sufficiency of the provision actually made for saving them, but solely by the directions and instructions which God has given us, by precept or example, to guide us in the matter... God has commanded the gospel to be preached to every creature; he has required us to proclaim [it] to our fellow-men, of whatever character and in all varieties of circumstances... to hold out to them, in his name, pardon and acceptance through the blood of atonement – to invite them to come to Christ, and to receive him – and to accompany all this with the assurance that 'whosoever comes to him, he will in no wise cast out'. God's revealed will is the only rule, and ought to be held to be the sufficient warrant for all that we do in this matter, in deciding what is our duty, in making known to our fellow-men what are their privileges and obligations, and in setting before them reasons and motives for improving the one and discharging the other. And though this revelation does not warrant us in telling them that Christ died for all and each of the human race – a mode of preaching the gospel never adopted by our Lord and his apostles – yet it does authorise and enable us to lay before men views and considerations, facts and arguments, which, in right reason, should warrant and persuade all to whom they are addressed, to lay hold of the hope set before them, to turn into the stronghold as prisoners of hope.

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

And then the second question – does the free offer require a universal atonement so that *God* can be cleared of the accusation of insincerity? Cunningham first spelled out the charge:

The second question, as to the conduct of God in this matter, leads into much greater difficulties – but difficulties which we are not bound, as we have no ground to expect to be able, to solve. The position of our opponents is... that it [is] not possible for God, because [it is] not consistent with integrity and uprightness, to address such offers and invitations to men indiscriminately, unless an atonement... [has] been presented and accepted on behalf of all men, of each individual of the human race.

To this assertion, Cunningham replied:

God does not, in offering pardon and acceptance to men indiscriminately, act inconsistently or deceptively, though it is not true that the atonement was universal... And although difficulties will still remain in the matter, which cannot be fully solved, it is easy to show that they just resolve into the one grand difficulty of all religion and of every system of theology – that, namely, of reconciling, or rather of developing, the consistency between the supremacy and sovereignty of God, and the free agency and responsibility of man.<sup>305</sup>

And this ‘difficulty’, as I have said time and again, is a difficulty for us, but not for God, and it is one to which we have to submit ourselves in humble trust and obedience to his revealed word until the great day.<sup>306</sup> In other words, we preach the free offer and hold to particular redemption, and leave the reconciliation of the two to God.

It can be done, it has been done, and it must be done. Brownlow North, for instance, was one who rightly ‘did not preach universal redemption, but regarded Christ as dying as the representative of his covenant people’; yet this ‘did not in the least fetter him in making the fullest and freest offer of the great sacrifice to every sinner’.<sup>307</sup>

Of course not! Particular redemption is not the least hindrance to preaching the free offer to sinners. Quite the reverse! As Thomas Shepard declared:

There is a universal offer to all people where the gospel comes. Enemies are entreated to be reconciled; for though he has not died for all, yet now being king, such is his excellency, that he is worthy of

[being received by] all. Hence [he] commands all to receive him; and if [since] [it] is a condemning sin to reject him, it is then a command [which] lies upon you to receive him... *Neither does this universal offer infer [sic, imply] a universal redemption*, for the gospel, in the offer of it, does not speak absolutely that Christ has died for all, and therefore for you, as the Arminians maintain, but it speaks conditionally.<sup>308</sup> It is for you, if ever the Lord gives you a heart to receive that grace there... *Objection.* But I am not elected, nor redeemed; if I knew that, I [would] dare [to] receive the Lord and his love. *Answer.* What have you to do with God's secret decree of election?... It may be you are redeemed... Receive this love, and it is certain it is for you.<sup>309</sup>

In short, I agree with Ernest Kevan: 'A universal offer does not imply a universal redemption'.<sup>310</sup>

## ***2. The general principles applied to the Amyraldian's objection: The free offer requires a universal redemption, provisional for all, but conditional on faith***

I have given my reasons for denying that the redemption Christ wrought is a universally-sufficient redemption, conditional or provisional on faith. If these arguments stand, clearly such a redemption cannot be the basis of the free offer. I challenge all who think it is to produce one biblical example of a gospel invitation or command based upon it. Where in Scripture are we told that since Christ died provisionally for all, we must preach the gospel to all?<sup>311</sup> May we be given the scriptures where, on the basis of Christ dying conditionally for all, sinners are exhorted to come to Christ? It cannot be done, for *it is no part of the gospel offer to tell sinners that Christ died conditionally for all men*. As before, the only ground for making the free offer is God's command. It has nothing to do with the extent of the atonement; it certainly does not require a conditional atonement for all.

But still the objector insists it does. Who says? The Amyraldian.<sup>312</sup> Why does the Amyraldian say it? Because his logic tells him it must be so. It tells him that a sincere free offer – which is to all – needs an atonement which is likewise for all, a conditional atonement, sufficient for all; otherwise, it is said, the offer cannot be sincere.<sup>313</sup> As the hyper-Calvinist, so the Amyraldian demands a reconciliation of the free offer and the

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

extent of atonement. I repeat what I said earlier: ‘O man, who are you to reply against God?’ (Rom. 9:20). Particular redemption and the universal offer *are* biblical doctrines, and it matters not that we cannot reconcile the two. We have to accept what God says, and obey him in his word. This is the warrant and basis of the free offer.

Haldane:

Those who hold [to] universal atonement, and at the same time admit the doctrine of election [that is, Amyraldians]... tell us Christ died for all, and therefore the gospel is to be preached to all; but they acknowledge that it is only given to a certain number to believe in the Saviour. They admit that, while God beseeches men to be reconciled, he at the same time gives the Spirit – which is as necessary to salvation as the work of Christ – only to those whom he has fore-ordained to eternal life. How, then, can they charge inconsistency on those [like me – JH, DG and others] who maintain that Christ purchased the church – and the church alone – with his own blood? Both acknowledge that the invitations of the gospel are addressed to all in the most unlimited degree; both hold that it is not the purpose of God that all should be saved. The one side maintains that only those for whom the Redeemer stood as surety will listen to the voice of mercy; while the other asserts that although the redemption of all has been purchased, and the sins of all expiated, divine sovereignty restricts salvation to [the elect]. Thus we see that universal atonement removes no difficulty; it still leaves the objection unanswered – [as to] why the gospel is commanded to be preached to the whole world, while divine sovereignty restricts the benefit to a limited number; [God] bestowing only upon some [the necessary] grace to believe, although the Son of God [is said to have borne] the sins of all [mankind] in his own body upon the tree, notwithstanding which, the [non-elect] neither become dead to sin, nor live unto righteousness.<sup>314</sup>

The same goes for effectual calling:

Since it is admitted that the work of the Spirit is as necessary as the work of Christ – that those only whom the Father draws will come to Christ – where is the difficulty of reconciling the universality of the invitations with the veracity of God? It is granted that only a certain number have been elected to eternal life, and that they alone shall be saved. If the doctrine of election does not interfere with the universal proclamation of pardon through faith in Jesus, why should we feel any difficulty in admitting that, while Christ has atoned only for the sins of his chosen people, the gospel should be preached to all mankind to



## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

whom we have access? If we knew for whom the atonement was made, or who are the elect, it would be idle to preach to any others; but this is a secret thing which belongs to God. He has told us that faith comes by hearing, and commanded us in the morning to sow our seed, and in the evening not to withhold our hand, for we know not which shall prosper, whether this or that, or whether they may not be both alike profitable. To give the increase is his exclusive prerogative.<sup>315</sup>

In short:

The matter in dispute between the advocates of universal<sup>316</sup> and limited atonement is not as to the number of the saved; both admit that the elect, and the elect alone, shall inherit eternal life; both admit that the gospel is to be addressed to every creature, and that it is only by the almighty power of the Holy Spirit that the alienation of the human heart is so far overcome as to lead us to receive Christ, and salvation in him. The point in dispute is, whether the atonement was made for all, or whether it was made only for the elect; whether it is effectual for all in whose behalf it was offered [by Christ], or whether [many] of those for whom Christ died... perish in their sins... [Now] salvation is the effect of divine sovereignty; both parties admit that God alone makes one to differ from another...

Pardon is proclaimed to all through faith in Christ, and the proclamation is made effectual by the Holy Spirit, for the salvation of all for whom the atonement was made... Thus men's reception of the gospel shows for whom the atonement was made. Election [that is, those who are elect] is a secret thing which belongs to God, but [the fact of] the salvation of all who believe, without exception, is revealed to us.<sup>317</sup>

Thus far, my reply is fundamentally the same as for the first objection. But in addition, as I have already explained, far from being the basis of a universal offer, the notion of a conditional universal redemption, in fact, does untold damage both to the gospel and to sinners. For a start, it boosts the sinner's pride. As he is coming to faith, he is inevitably encouraged to think of himself as meeting the condition to be redeemed, that he is fulfilling something which Christ has left undone. Christ established but a provisional atonement, and the sinner, by his faith, has to ratify it; so he is told. Thus his pride is encouraged. Yet, in addressing sinners, the preacher's task is to do the very opposite; he has to mortify the sinner's pride, and stop him looking to himself, boasting and bragging about what he can do; the need – and the

*General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

difficulty – is to bring him to look to Christ alone for everything.<sup>318</sup> Thus, far from a conditional, universal and sufficient redemption being the basis of the free offer, it is a source of immense harm to the sinner at the very point where he is most exposed to pride in looking at his own abilities. ‘Nothing in my hand I bring’, has to be changed to: ‘My faith I bring’.<sup>319</sup> And this must lead to the notion of salvation by works, in that the believing sinner is told he has fulfilled the condition which Christ’s redemption left undone. And if that is not a ruination of the gospel, what is?

Furthermore, those who believe in a double redemption, have to divide their congregation, do they not? Or, at least, they do divide it. Now as I have made clear, a preacher should be a dividing preacher,<sup>320</sup> but on the right basis – believers and unbelievers. *But not on the basis of those who have been redeemed absolutely and those who have been redeemed conditionally.* When it comes down to it, how do Amyraldian preachers actually address their hearers? Do they speak *of* those who are elect, and thus redeemed effectively – and those who are not elect, but redeemed sufficiently and conditionally? or do they speak *to* them in these ways?<sup>321</sup> If so, what use is it to tell sinners that redemption is provided for all, but God has decreed to give only some – not all – the faith to trust the Redeemer? How does this leave the sinner in any better position than a particular, absolute and unconditional redemption for all the elect?<sup>322</sup> Indeed, he is in a far worse position. When he hears of this conditional redemption, he has to reason thus: ‘The offer, after all, is empty. Christ’s death, sufficient for me it may be, but am I one of those left to meet the condition and thus make the redemption effective? or am I one of the elect?’ Reader, I cannot see how this can do anything but destroy the gospel, and be an immense hindrance to sinners going at once to the Saviour, and trusting him for all. It really takes the sinner into the hyper-Calvinistic camp – making him wonder whether or not he is elected, *before* he trusts the Saviour.<sup>323</sup>

It is worse. James Macgregor defined what he called ‘the more malignant aspects of Amyraldianism’. I have already quoted the first; namely, the suggestion that God has a saving purpose which does not infallibly save. The second is its tendency ‘to undermine the believer’s assurance of hope’ since ‘many of those for whom

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

Christ gave his life shall nevertheless fall into death eternal'. The third is – and this will sound the most surprising – is 'to prevent unbelievers from coming to God in "full assurance of faith". It is at this third point that the Amyraldians deem themselves strongest... [but] it is at this point – their strongest [as they think] – that I find them weakest'. Why? Macleod explained:

[Amyraldianism] meant a new approach to the case of the anxious sinner when he was told that our Lord had died for him, and that he must right off receive this as the good news of salvation. This method of approach to him *hid* from the enquirer that when it said that the Saviour had died for him it might prove that he had died either in vain, or with no intention to effect his salvation. For the universal redemption which it taught was – on its own showing – a redemption that did not secure life. In this respect the method of treating the anxious played with the use of *deceitful* terms, and did not compare well with the method that had been formerly in use. This older method told the sinner of a Saviour who had died to save his chosen and called ones, and who was now calling and inviting him to make proof of his saving power by taking himself as the Lord his Righteousness, and so sheltering under the covert of his sacrifice and the shield of his intercession. The older Calvinism did not seek to assure the sinner that Christ had died his death [that is, that Christ had died for him in particular, as his substitute, dying the death he deserved] until he had first, in the obedience of faith, closed with him as a Saviour in his office as mediator.<sup>324</sup>

George Gillespie tackled Amyraldians – those he described as neither Arminian nor orthodox Calvinists, but who 'have found out a middle and singular way of their own, that Christ died for all men conditionally, *viz.*, if they shall believe in him, that he has redeemed all on condition of faith'. 'One of their arguments is', he said, 'because otherwise we cannot encourage sinners to believe'. He put his finger on the spot:

When they give... encouragement to sinners upon this ground, that Christ has died for all upon condition of faith, it is to be remembered that... the generality of men can draw no result [conclusion] from the death of Christ (as it is set forth by their doctrine) but [other than] that... whosoever believes on him shall be saved, or that all men shall be saved, if all men believe... So what solid comfort can the soul have from that conditional proposition (which is all the encouragement they do or dare give from the death of Christ [for] all men) – all men shall

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

be saved by Christ if they believe on him. Is it not as true and as certain (may a sinner [not] think within himself) that no man on earth shall be saved, if no man on earth believe; and, for my part, if I believe not, I shall be damned? If all this hang upon the condition of my believing... why, then, has Christ not merited [for] me, and will... not give me, the grace of believing? That new doctrine [Amyraldianism] answers, that Christ has merited faith,<sup>325</sup> and gives the grace of believing, not to all, but to the elect only; that God has, in his eternal decree, intended to pass by... part of mankind,<sup>326</sup> and to keep back from them that grace without which... they cannot believe on Jesus Christ; that though Christ meant that all men should have some sort of call to believe on him, and should be saved upon condition of their believing, yet he has no thought or intention, by his death, to procure unto all men [any man, in fact – see above] that grace without which they cannot believe. This doctrine of theirs, while it undertakes to comfort all men, and to encourage all to believe, it tells them... that all cannot be saved because all cannot believe, that God will not give faith, and so not salvation either, unto millions of sinners. What comfort is it, then, to know that all shall be saved if all believe, when men are told... that all shall not, cannot believe, and so shall not be saved?... Therefore their universal comfort taken from [their supposing of] Christ's dying for all men upon condition of faith, amounts to as much as nothing.<sup>327</sup>

Kennedy was another to speak of those 'Calvinists... [who] teach the doctrine of a double reference of the atonement; representing the atonement as offered in one sense for the elect, and in another sense for all. These maintain that there was a special atonement securing a certainty of salvation to some, and a universal atonement securing a possibility of salvation to all'. He argued against this 'double-reference' system, saying:

It endangers the whole doctrine of the atonement... [and] it is quite unavailing for the purpose to which it is applied. It doubtless sprang out of a desire to find a basis for the offer of Christ to all. To search for it, in a universal reference of the atonement, [indicates] a suspicion that the Calvinistic system [does] not afford it. What helpless ignorance such a suspicion indicates!... They [the Amyraldians] hesitate not to say that without the universal reference they could not preach the gospel at all – in other words, that this is the only basis they find for the call of the gospel. And what do they find there on which to base the offer? A reference [a mere conditional sufficiency for all] that avails for no definite end; that secures no redemption; and that leaves those whom it connects with the death of Christ to perish in their sins. This

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

and no more they find: and on this they base the offer of the gospel! Really! if men cannot preach the gospel without this, it is difficult to see how this can help them.<sup>328</sup>

Haldane:

What difficulty, we ask, is got rid of, by asserting that the ‘atonement included all, and the sins of all’, when that Almighty power, which is as necessary to salvation as the atonement [itself], is withheld? Without atonement, there can be no salvation; the work of the Spirit, which is bestowed only upon the elect, is equally necessary, and therefore if the one is a palpable contradiction [of the universal invitation], what shall we say of the other?...

If the work of the Spirit is as essential to salvation as the work of Christ, an atonement having been made for all, brings no one nearer to the kingdom of God, for without the sovereign efficacious work of the Spirit, there is an absolute impossibility of a sinner’s salvation; so that [the Amyraldian’s professed] opening a door of hope for all, is only [like physically]<sup>329</sup> uncovering a grave that the dead may come forth; it is [like physically] lighting a candle that the blind may see; it is [like physically] opening a door for a man without legs to walk out of prison.

In other words, it does not do the job. As Haldane went on to explain:

It is not for a moment supposed that either system<sup>330</sup> is free of difficulty... Both schemes agree in maintaining that the elect, and the elect alone, shall be saved; but while the adherents of the one [that is, Amyraldians] maintain that the atonement was made for *all*, they hold that it does not remove the guilt of *any* [of the non-elect], but merely lays a foundation for the general invitations of the gospel, which, they allege, could not have been made had not a universal atonement been offered [by Christ]. To this it is replied [by me – JH, DG and others], that an atonement which does not cancel guilt, is no atonement – it is a contradiction in terms; that, in order to preach peace to sinners through Jesus Christ, there is no necessity for a universal atonement, since, by the gospel, sinners are merely [simply] invited and commanded to trust in the blood of Jesus for pardon and eternal life – and thus the elect are separated from the reprobate by the gospel, which is to the one the power of God unto salvation, and to the other a stumbling-block and foolishness... It is evident that if the general invitations of the gospel are inconsistent with limited atonement, they must be equally so with personal election. It is admitted on both sides that none ever did or will

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

receive the love of the truth, excepting the elect; to what purpose, then, preach the gospel to all? The answer is: God has been pleased to appoint that by the gospel the elect should receive repentance unto life. Is there any greater difficulty in holding that those for whom the atonement was offered [by Christ on the cross] are made manifest precisely in the same manner?...

I am not careful [concerned] to vindicate the consistency of the exhortations and threatenings addressed to mankind [in the gospel], and I have very little anxiety about justifying the propriety of all being invited to receive salvation, while the atonement was made only for a part of mankind... Although I could give no explanation of the consistency of the two, I would hold both upon God's authority... While the Scripture declares that the death of Christ will be found amply sufficient for all who come to him, we never read of an indefinite sufficiency, which is so much insisted on by the advocates of universal atonement... All who come under the sound of the gospel are freely invited, warned and encouraged to flee from the wrath to come. None who come to Christ shall be rejected; but none do come except the Father draws them. All others reject the counsel of God against themselves... As to the question of the consistency of God's sovereignty and man's responsibility, I am fully satisfied with knowing that both are true, but I am not called [by God] to reconcile them.<sup>331</sup>

Reader, in all this, have I been straining out a gnat? Certainly not! Indeed, nothing could be further from the truth. As Haldane put it:

The difference between those who hold [to] particular redemption, and the advocates of the [Amyraldian] system, is highly important. So far from being a strife about words, it involves the very essence of the gospel. A universal atonement, by which all are not saved, is no atonement... If atonement were made for all, and yet many perish, none are saved by the atonement [*per se*] – they owe their salvation to something else... If Christ made atonement for sin, and if this atonement is universal, either all are justified, or the atonement has proved insufficient.<sup>332</sup>

In short, a universally sufficient but conditional redemption is not the basis of the free offer.

**3. The general principles applied to the Owenite's objection: The free offer is based on a redemption which is sufficient for all because of its infinite worth**

My reply starts as for the previous two objections. That is, I categorically deny that the basis of the free offer is the intrinsic sufficiency of Christ's redemption. And I challenge all who think it is to produce one biblical example of a gospel invitation or command based upon it. Where in Scripture are we told that, since Christ's death – because of the worth of his person – is sufficient for all, we must preach the gospel to all? May we be given the scriptures where, on that basis, sinners are exhorted to come to Christ? It cannot be done, for *it is no part of the gospel offer to tell sinners that Christ's death is sufficient for all men, and that on that basis they are to trust Christ*. The only ground for making the free offer is God's command. It has nothing to do with the extent of the atonement; it certainly is not based on a universally-sufficient atonement.<sup>333</sup>

But still the objector insists it is; or, at the very least, insists that it is strengthened by such an atonement. Who says? The Owenite. Why does he say it? Because his logic tells him it must be so. It tells him that a sincere free offer – which is to all – needs an atonement which, because of the infinite worth of Christ's person, is sufficient for all; otherwise, it is said, the offer is without foundation; the free offer is grounded on this supposed sufficient redemption. In effect, as with the hyper-Calvinist and the Amyraldian, the Owenite demands – or, at least, seeks – reconciliation of the free offer with the extent of atonement. I repeat what I said earlier: 'O man, who are you to reply against God?' (Rom. 9:20). Particular redemption and the universal offer *are* biblical doctrines, and it matters not that we cannot reconcile the two. We have to accept what God says, and obey him in his word. This, and this alone, is the warrant for and basis of the free offer. Its 'sufficiency' does not come into it.<sup>334</sup> Those who would try to rationalise what the Bible reveals, but does not explain, must of necessity go outside Scripture. It ought not to be done; it must not be done. And to treat this rationalisation as the warrant for faith,

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

and to preach it as such, is to introduce a dreadful distraction at the most sensitive point in the process of a sinner coming to Christ.

Cunningham:

Some [the Owenites]... are accustomed to say that the ground or warrant for the universal or unlimited offers of pardon, and commands to believe, is the infinite intrinsic sufficiency of Christ's atonement, which they generally hold, though denying its universal intended destination or efficiency; while others profess to rest the universal offers and commands upon the simple authority of God in his word [my position precisely] – [he, God] making them himself, and requiring us [in our turn] to proclaim them to others.<sup>335</sup>

Having set out these two views, Cunningham exposed the flaw in the Owenite position:

In regard to the allegation often made... that this act of God is warranted by, and is based upon, the infinite intrinsic sufficiency of Christ's atonement, we would only remark... that we are not aware of any scripture evidence that these two things – namely, the universal intrinsic sufficiency and the unlimited offers – are connected in this way – that we have never been able to see how the assertion of this connection removed or solved the difficulty, or threw any additional light on this subject.

Just so. Cunningham drew the right conclusion:

Therefore, we think it best... to be contented with believing... that God in this, as in everything else, has chosen the best and wisest means of accomplishing all that he really intended to effect; and to be satisfied... with showing that it cannot be proved that there is any inconsistency or insincerity, that there is any injustice or deception on God's part in anything which he says or does in this matter, even though the intended destination of the atonement was to effect and secure the forgiveness and salvation of the elect only – even though he did not design or purpose, by sending his Son into the world, to save any but those who are saved.<sup>336</sup>

Cunningham was right,<sup>337</sup> the device does not resolve the paradox. It is as I have said; however fine it sounds, the concept of a redemption sufficient for all is, in the end, meaningless. It adds nothing to the gospel offer.<sup>338</sup> In fact, it detracts from it, because it detracts from the nature of the atonement. All this is grievous, and



*General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

has serious consequences for the preaching of the gospel. What do I mean?

William Rushton:

Whenever the Scriptures speak of the sufficiency of redemption [do they speak of it in the terms of this debate?], they always place it in the certain efficacy of redemption. The atonement of Christ is sufficient because it is absolutely efficacious, and because it carries salvation to all for whom it was made. It is sufficient, not because it affords men the possibility of salvation, but because, with invincible power, it accomplishes their salvation. Hence the word of God never represents the sufficiency of the atonement as more extensive than the design of the atonement, which Mr Fuller [and many another] has done. The Scriptures know nothing of a sufficient redemption, which leaves the captive to perish in slavery, nor a sufficient atonement which never delivers the guilty; but they [always] speak of a redemption every way sufficient and efficacious... which triumphantly accomplishes the salvation of all its objects.<sup>339</sup>

This is right. Nothing must detract from the *effective* nature of the atonement, from the redemption it *accomplishes*. After all, we are talking about the salvation of sinners; the atonement which accomplishes this is effective – or it is nothing.

Furthermore, the Owenite ‘sufficiency’ argument actually has a nasty aspect to it, totally unintended, of course, by those who use it. When addressing sinners, we have, apparently, to tell them of a redemption which is sufficient for all of them, pleading with them on the basis of this sufficiency, but, in so doing, make it clear that this redemption is quite out of reach – unless they are among the elect. This is tantamount to taunting the sinner. The conditional sufficiency of the Amyraldian at least provides a salvation sufficient for every hearer, *and within reach on condition that he believes* – it is a theoretical possibility in Amyraldian terms – but the Owenite theory of intrinsic sufficiency is a mere academic contrivance – with a gaping hole in it! It does not work for the preacher, since he knows – as much as he tells sinners of the sufficiency of redemption – it is not effective for all. And it certainly does not work for any sinner who is concerned about the particularity of redemption; he might be persuaded of the intrinsic sufficiency of Christ’s redemption, but his problem remains: ‘Sufficient, Christ’s redemption is, but is it *effective* for me? was it

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

*designed* for me?<sup>340</sup> How will this help an anxious soul? ‘If I am not elect, the atonement, though sufficient for me, is totally out of reach. It was never intended for me’. It has introduced an unscriptural notion, and gained nothing. It has, in fact, weakened the atonement and introduced problems which ought not to be brought into the conversion process.

Not least, in the misguided search for a logical justification of the free offer, the Owenite use of the sufficiency formula may even have encouraged those who hold to universal atonement – whether the Arminian or Amyraldian – to persist in their view.<sup>341</sup> It certainly has done nothing to make them think again. Haldane put it this way:

There is, perhaps, no argument upon which the advocates of universal atonement more confidently rely, than the inconsistency of the unlimited invitations of the gospel with [particular redemption]. The opinion that Christ died for the whole human race, has... been... received by not a few, from the mistaken idea that a limited atonement is incompatible with the unlimited proclamation of pardon through faith in Jesus. This has, perhaps, been partly owing to some who, holding scriptural views respecting the extent of the atonement, have founded the general invitations to those who come under the sound of the gospel upon the [supposed] sufficiency of the atonement for all [that is, Owenites]... This [the supposed sufficiency of the atonement for all mankind] is a subject, however, on which the Scripture is silent. It represents the atonement as being amply sufficient for all who come to the Saviour, however aggravated their guilt, but it never speaks of an indefinite sufficiency in the atonement as an inducement to sinners to rest on it for salvation.<sup>342</sup> God is uniformly represented as having a *specific* purpose in the gift of his Son... It is remarkable that so much stress should be laid upon the indefinite sufficiency of the atonement – a question upon which the Scriptures never enter. We have already seen that the word of God furnishes us with a simple ground for preaching the gospel to every creature; namely, his own commandment, illustrated by the example of the inspired apostles. With such a warrant, it is surely altogether superfluous [and arrogant] to dispute upon what principle the commandment rests. We are taught to walk by faith; ‘the commandment is a lamp, and the law is [a] light’.<sup>343</sup>

Let me say a little more on my use of ‘meaningless’. When a preacher uses Owen’s device, he knows it doesn’t actually

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

accomplish anything. And the thinking sinner also sees through it – he knows he still has to have been elected, and Christ has to have died for him. In fact, it makes things worse – it can only tend to make some sinners feel they are left out of the invitation. As has been said: ‘How does the sufficiency of Christ’s death afford ample ground for general invitations, if the design was confined to the elect people? If the benefits of his death were never intended for the non-elect, is it not just as inconsistent to invite them to partake of them as if there were a want of sufficiency? This explanation seems to be no other than shifting the difficulty’.<sup>344</sup> Quite! In the free offer, sinners are to be told that Christ died and earned salvation, and all are invited. Yes, the redemption is particular, but since no one but God knows or can know who the elect are, all are equally invited. It is the classic ‘double-blind’; neither the preacher nor the hearer knows who the elect are. Above all, it is the way which is set out in God’s word. Thus the preacher can be free in offering Christ, *and so can the sinner in coming to Christ*. And there is nothing merely sufficient about the redemption Christ accomplished, and which is offered to the sinner. The sinner should not concern himself as to whether or not he is elected, or Christ has died for him in particular. He must come to Christ as he is – as he, the sinner, is, and as Christ himself is. And if he comes he will be saved.

Although the warrant for the sinner’s coming is not a redemption sufficient for all, he should, of course, be passionately told of Christ’s ‘all-sufficiency’.<sup>345</sup> Yes indeed! In coming to Christ, the sinner must be persuaded that Christ can and will save him – save him completely and forever – if he comes!<sup>346</sup> Thus he is encouraged to come; ‘encouraged’, I emphasise.

As Gillespie said:

The true and safe grounds of encouragement to faith in Christ are these: First, Christ’s all-sufficiency. If he will, he can [*cf.* Mark 1:40]. He is able to save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). Are you a sinner to the uttermost? His plaster is broad enough to cover the broadest sore. As God’s mercy, so Christ’s merit is infinite...<sup>347</sup> This is a good strong foundation of comfort, if a soul, convinced of its own sinful state, and of the vanity of creature comforts, so far settles its thought upon Christ, that as he is the only Saviour, so an all-sufficient Saviour. Then is the sinner so far encouraged... as to resolve: There is virtue enough in the blood of Christ to cleanse my crimson sins, even mine. There is no

## *General Principles Applied to the Three Forms of the Objection*

help for me out of Christ, but in him there is help for all that come unto God by him. It is a great part of true faith to believe that Christ is able and all-sufficient. Therefore he himself said to the blind men (Matt. 9:28-29): ‘Do you believe that I am able to do this?’ They said unto him: ‘Yes, Lord’. Then touched he their eyes, saying: ‘According to your faith be it unto you’... So every poor sinner that comes unto Christ as sufficient and believing that Christ, and Christ only, can purge [cleanse] him from all sin, and save his soul, has a true... faith... The soul believes the all-sufficiency of Christ, and that he only is the Saviour... [and] his faith... is a true faith, which Christ will not despise... It is [also] an encouragement to believing that we are commanded to believe (1 John 3:23).<sup>348</sup>

Encouraging! Yes indeed. The fact that Christ’s redemption is ‘all-sufficient’, is most *encouraging* to the coming sinner, yes – and so is God’s command. But, I say again, it is God’s command which is the sinner’s *warrant* for coming.

Above all, stressing the ‘nice point’ yet again, the warrant for inviting and commanding sinners to come to Christ – the free offer – and the warrant every sinner has for responding to that free offer, and coming to Christ in repentant faith, is not any supposed universal sufficiency – ‘sufficient for all’ – of Christ’s redemption; rather, it is the plain word of God. God’s command to sinners to repent and believe – this is all the warrant which is needed and given.