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SALVATION IS ALL OF GRACE

Vic Reasoner

John Wesley said that Methodism ascribes all good to the free grace of God. It denies all natural free will and all power antecedent to grace, as well as excluding all merit from man, even when done by the grace of God. But while early Methodism held at least that much in common with Calvinism, it differs on four important points.

Salvation is possible for everyone

Despite all of the double-talk, in the end Calvinism does not believe that the atonement of Christ so extends to all men as to make salvation possible for them. However, Adam

Clarke argued that if humanity is of one race and if Christ took on himself the nature of man and in human nature made expiation for the sins of nature, then redemption is general and the benefits of his death must necessarily apply to every human being who has descended from Adam. All who share the human nature have a right to apply to God, by virtue of that redemption, for remission of sins

Calvinism typically resorts to the response that God has two wills, a revealed will and a secret will. According to the revealed will of God, he desires that all mankind be saved. According to his secret will, it is *not* his will that all the lost be saved. As Jack Cottrell has pointed out, “Assigning the first desire to one level of God’s will and the second to another level of his will does not remove the contradiction: it is the same God in both cases, and the desire is sincere in both cases.”

Calvinism teaches that the depraved sinner is not capable of faith. Therefore, he is saved by the sovereign decree of God — if God has chosen him. But this effectual grace can only be realized by the elect. It is little comfort for the reprobate to be assured that God loves them, yet has decreed their damnation from all eternity. Calvinists tend to talk about “sovereign grace,” but the emphasis is always more on sovereignty than grace. Wesley rejected the view that

The greater part of mankind God hath ordained to death. Them God hateth; and therefore, before they were

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born, decreed they should die eternally. And this he absolutely decreed; because so was his good pleasure; because it was his sovereign will. Accordingly, they are born for this: to be destroyed body and soul in hell. And they grow up under the irrevocable curse of God, without any possibility of redemption; for what grace God gives, he gives only for this, to increase, not prevent their damnation.

God grants to us the power of contrary choice

While Calvinism affirms the freedom of the will, no one else holds their definition of freedom. They hold that mankind does not have the ability, naturally or supernaturally, to choose anything other than sin.

John Fletcher asked the Calvinist, Augustus Toplady, this question which cuts through all of the double-talk. "Is the will at liberty to choose otherwise than it does, or is it not?" Ultimately, their "freedom" is compatible with

determinism. Everyone else calls that "bondage."

True freedom is the power of contrary choice. A large

part of being created in the image of God is self-determinism. Yet God does not relinquish his sovereignty. He has predestined the consequences of our free choices. A. W. Tozer said a god less than sovereign would not bestow moral freedom upon his subjects. He would be afraid to do so. Yet our freedom does not overrule God's sovereignty.

God enables us to believe

Both Calvinism and early Methodism affirm man's total inability to save himself. According to Calvinism, since man is totally depraved, salvation is the unilateral action of God. He sovereignly and irresistibly regenerates the elect who are passive in the process. But there is a difference between being drawn and irresistibly dragged.

Arminius and Wesley both affirm man's sinful condition. Arminius taught that while we did not lose our will, we lost the power to will any good thing. Wesley echoed that same understanding. He described the sinner struggling to break loose from sin.

But though he strive with all his might he cannot conquer; sin is mightier than he. He would [gladly] escape; but he is so fast in prison that he cannot get forth. He resolves against sin, but yet sins on. Such is the freedom of his will — free only to evil. Thus he toils without end, repenting and sinning, and repenting and sinning again, till at length the poor sinful, helpless wretch is even at his wit's end, and can barely groan, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"

At first reading, it might appear that these statements describe the compatibilistic, Calvinistic freedom. It is true that we are so bound by sin, that left to ourselves, our choices are always evil. But God has not left us to ourselves. His preliminary grace breaks the determinism of Calvinism. Early Methodism emphasized the preliminary grace of God which enables the sinner to turn from sin and toward God. We are not saved by free will, but by free grace which frees our will. Augustine was right before he was wrong. Early in his writings he declared, "He that made us without ourselves, will not save us without ourselves."

However, the sinner cannot recognize his true condition unless the Holy Spirit awakens him. Yet the Scripture commands the sinner to repent and believe. He cannot repent of his sins, however, unless the Spirit empowers him to do so. He cannot turn toward God unless the Spirit enables him. He cannot exercise faith to believe unless the Spirit creates faith in him. While faith is the gift of God, believing is the act of man. Clarke stated clearly, "Without the power no man can believe; with it, any man may."

We are not saved by free will, but by free grace which frees our will.

It is preposterous to argue that this saving faith is a meritorious human work which earns salvation. It is quite the opposite. It is complete trust and rest in the finished work of Christ on the cross. Faith is not the exact equivalent of righteousness, but God accepts it as sufficient for him to impute righteousness to us. This condition of faith is stated in Romans 3:25 and Galatians 3:14. According to 1 Timothy 4:10, Christ has provided universal salvation, but it is realized only by those who believe.

But we cannot choose salvation at our convenience. We can respond only when we are drawn and enabled by the Holy Spirit. God must initiate the process of salvation. Thus,

the window of salvation is temporary; but the opportunity comes at some point

to every person. Wesley said that most stifle this preliminary grace, but if we will yield, it will increase more and more.

Calvinism denies this doctrine of preliminary grace. They teach that the elect receive effectual grace, while the reprobate merely experience common grace. Thus, Calvinism actually teaches that the atonement provides universal benefits. Unfortunately, salvation is not one of them.

Actually, it is preliminary grace, not regeneration which is irresistible. We may resist the call to salvation, but we cannot avoid receiving the call. While Methodism embraces the concept of common grace, Allan Coppedge explained,

The difference between Wesley's preventient grace and the Calvinists' common grace was that while both provided a restraining influence on the evil in human beings so that society could exist, preventient grace also restored the capacity of every man to accept salvation, whereas common grace did not.

God delivers from sin

Wesley rejected the idea that the death of Christ was substitutionary in the sense of ful-

filling all righteousness so that we do not have to live righteously and holy. The obedient life of Christ is not imputed to us in lieu of our obedience of faith. The life of Christ did not purchase redemption for us. This was done through his death in our stead.

Christ has fulfilled the law of God, but that does not mean he discontinued the role of the law. Freedom is not realized by escaping God's law. Rather it means that the law brings us to Christ as the only way I can be justified, and Christ sends me to the law to teach me how to live the Christian life. The opposite of law is not grace, but lawlessness. The Holy Spirit empowers the Christian to keep God's commands.

Therefore, we affirm that the atonement of Christ is extensive. It is available to all. And the atonement is intensive. It delivers from all sin. Christ saves to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). The grace of God extends as deeply as we are tainted by sin. There is freedom from the guilt, the bondage, and the power of sin, as well as cleansing from the pollution and nature of sin. Ultimately, there will be deliverance from the very presence of sin. Thus, the preliminary grace of God works freely in all men, justifying grace extends potentially to all men, and perfecting grace can deliver from all sin. However, human goodness was Wesley's goal, not his starting point. He declared, "Since the fall, no child of man has a natural power to choose anything that is truly good."

Tragically, this Wesleyan-Arminian theology of grace has been distorted. In the shift from a God-centered theology to a man-centered theology, free grace was replaced by free will. Preliminary grace was replaced by natural ability. Salvation became a human decision and sanctification was reduced to consecration.

In 1840 Phoebe Palmer began to teach a "name-it-and-claim-it" presumption, instead of the gift of faith which enables us to believe. She taught that salvation and sanctification were both accomplished through an act of human will. She also replaced the divine assurance which accompanies saving faith with a

logical syllogism. Historians say her view won out by 1894.

Charles Finney's systematic theology, first published in 1846, rejected total depravity and scoffed at any need for preliminary grace. Finney taught conversion was a change of mind and that we are sanctified through the power of our will. He even claimed that revival "is nothing more than a new beginning of obedience to God."

When Daniel Whedon, the editor of the *Methodist Quarterly Review* from 1856-1884, wrote his influential essay "Doctrines of Methodism," published in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, April, 1862, he began with the doctrine of free will. He never referenced prevenient grace in his overview of Methodist doctrine.

In 1879 John Miley wrote his treatise on the atonement, claiming that early Methodist theologians had conceded too much to Calvinism. Thomas Langford wrote, "Miley intended to preserve the theme of prevenient grace as the ground of choice, but he did compromise the immediate priority of grace by placing emphasis on human ability in decision-making." Robert Chiles wrote:

In his defense of depravity, Miley has retreated to the last outpost. What he defends is only a pale image of the mass of corruption, the body of death, that is central to orthodox doctrine. Further, it is difficult to understand how he could square the inheritance of a depraved nature, prior to any action of man, with his Arminian principle of free personal agency. His efforts to

do so make depravity represent little more than the possibility of defection required by the freedom of contrary choice.

By 1890 Milton S. Terry had published the third edition of *Biblical Hermeneutics*. He eliminated an entire chapter on the divine inspiration of Scripture. Ultimately, in *Methodism and Biblical Criticism* (1905), he argued that Methodism had no doctrine of biblical inspiration except "We think and let think."

Mainline Methodism has continued to concede its heritage to liberalism. But the American holiness movement embraced a more conservative form of humanism, seemingly unaware that they have departed from Wesley at many major doctrinal points. The result is the belief that anyone can get saved any time they choose. God has done his part. Now you must do your part. Salvation has been reduced to a human decision, and sanctification is claimed by presumption. The law of God has been replaced by extra-biblical standards, grace has been eclipsed by a performance trap, and rationalization has been substituted for divine assurance. If Wesley returned, he would not recognize the doctrine preached by most who claim to be his theological heirs.

Wesley saw salvation from beginning until end as a work of God's grace. He ascribed all good to the free grace of God and excluded all merit from man. We need a grace awakening. The statement of faith for many holiness denominations makes little reference to grace. We will never move forward until we rediscover our own Methodist heritage.

THOR VS CHRIST: A MARVEL OF A BATTLE

David Martinez

In 2011 Marvel Studios released the first of several popular films featuring Thor, the "god of thunder" who later joined *The Avengers*. A year later, both superhero-movie geeks (like me) and comic-book geeks (like my friend

Sam) alike flocked to theaters and squealed with excitement when Thor fought Iron-Man and duked it out with The Hulk later in the film. For several years these characters have captivated the imaginations of a movie-watch-

ing generation. Then something dawned on me: Thor was once seriously respected, a true contender for the allegiance of the hearts of men. Venerated in Germanic mythology and worshiped by the Vikings, Thor was a god that struck fear into the minds of his worshipers. But all that changed with the Jesus-event.

In the eighth century, Saint Boniface evangelized the Germans. In the town of Geismar there stood a large oak tree that the town believed belonged to Thor and consecrated it as such. Nobody dared disrespect the tree for fear of angering Thor. But Boniface wanted to declare there was a new *Avenger* in town (Psalm 35). In the name of Jesus, Boniface cut the tree down before the eyes of the people and used the wood to build a church. Not only did "Thor" remain silent, but many people came to Christ, concluding that he rules. In the words of Richard Watson:

If the dagons of Greece and Rome could not stand before the ark, but "fell and were broken," neither shall the gods of China and Hindostan. If we worship Thor and Odin no longer; if, in these islands, the light [of the Gospel] has penetrated the gloom of druidical forests, and put to shame the abominations of our forefathers, the crude mythology of Africa and the South-

ern Isles shall not resist its penetrating beams and consuming energy.... The arm of God is awake, that arm which of old shook the gates of hell, and bowed down the throne of Satan.

Indeed. Christ is not the Iron-Man, but the Rock of Ages and the chief cornerstone (1 Peter 2:7). He is not the Hulk, but he is always angry with sin (Psalm 7:11). Christ doesn't have a Hawkeye, but he is always on target (ask Goliath). He is our Vision (Psalm 34:15) and there is no War Machine he cannot defeat (2 Chron. 20:6). As Christians, we don't go to war carrying a vibranium shield, but something better: The Lord himself is our shield (Psalm 28:7) because, unlike Thor, he actually thunders (Amos 1:2). Is it any wonder that without an Infinity Gauntlet, he made all your sins disappear (Micah 7:19; John 1:29)?

I sure love the Avengers, but I can't help but smile at the fact that the gospel has taken Thor, a once-revered god, and turned him into mere entertainment for movies we don't really take seriously. In the end, what destroyed our enemies was not Thor's hammer, but Christ's cross. And like wielding Mjölnir, only one was worthy to do so: the Captain, not only of America, but of the whole world. Before you today is not a hammer, but a cross...and *in the name of Jesus* you can lift it!

A BLOW TO THE ROOT: THE NECESSARY CONNECTION BETWEEN INERRANCY AND ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION IN RECENT WESLEYAN THEOLOGICAL DISCUSSION *Part 1*

William Ury

There are few concepts in theological discussion which raise more immediate concerns and qualifications than the doctrines of inerrancy and entire sanctification. When one attempts to tie them together, reservation can

quickly turn to dismissiveness. A contemporary scholar will seal one's future in some academic circles who affirms one of these doctrines. The joining of the two might find one cast into outer darkness. John Wesley was often

accused of disdain for theology and bringing forth theological novelties, but nothing could be farther from the truth. He cared deeply about theological integrity and was vigilant to exclude whatever might “strike at the root of Christianity.” While most Wesleyan/Holiness institutions have extremely strong statements about Scripture in their particular statements of faith, if they have not been softened in the late twentieth century, it is also the case that they often retain the rudimentary elements of an equally robust commitment to entire sanctification as a second definite work of grace. An interesting study might be found in the advertisement of holiness-related educational institutions as propounding “inerrancy” as the actual expressed commitment of the faculties of said institutions. One wonders if the denominational/congregational support from these institutions would continue undebated or unabated if the actual commitments were to

surface clearly. The locus of the most debate on these issues from the particular vantage point of the pan-Wesleyan world, of course, has

There has never been a reformation of holiness in the church or society without a high view of Scripture.

been the influential gathering of scholars from the various sectors of the Wesleyan theological family, primarily the Wesleyan Theological Society.

As a student of the history of Christian thought it is quite clear that there has never been a reformation of holiness in the church or society unless there is also resident a significantly higher view of Scripture than that of the surrounding culture to which that ecclesial community speaks. While the issue of biblical authority was not nearly as overtly volatile in the eras preceding the Enlightenment, one would be hard-pressed to find any place where the Word of God was challenged as being the actual communication of God through the inspired text and at the same time knew a spiritual dynamic which expressed the presence and power of God in a sustained manner. In fact,

it might be nigh impossible to find any place where Scriptural authority was diminished that produced anything lasting or transformative in the church for the sake of the surrounding culture.

From its beginnings there has been a consistent concern with the sectors of the Wesleyan holiness movement of influencing society through the church as a community of heart integrity and compassionate love. While that is happening in many ways, it is my contention that the increasing bifurcation of the church’s clearest and strongest understanding of the Bible in the twentieth century, namely, inerrancy, given all the potential misunderstandings of that word and concept, from an equally redolent doctrine of sanctification is a major factor in the loss of a strong moral voice from that same tradition to the church and hopefully then to the world. If honesty allows a comparison between multi-faceted revivals led by 18th century Wesleyanism and 19th century American Holiness denominations and the relative impact we are having on Western culture, we must admit that, at present, we have little to say to a world that needs a clear message of Truth that originates from outside of our experience epistemologically and ontologically.

The continued importance of the doctrine of sanctification is directly tied to maintaining the highest conception of revelation possible, no matter what era, or acceptable language, or scholarly culture, in the midst of which the church finds itself. The alignment in recent days, especially among the ranks of Wesleyan scholarship, with modern equivocations on the actual veracity of the original texts of Scripture is troubling. Though there are suggestions that an ongoing debate might be advantageous, nothing of any substance has occurred along these lines. Polarization has occurred, and it shows no sign of abating. If the adherents to Wesleyan/Holiness theology in all of its inclusive grandeur do not come to a basic agreement regarding these two doctrines and their relationship, the anticipated death of the “movement” will come.

For my part, the life-time and energy it consumes to stand as an inerrantist who believes that God can entirely sanctify a human heart, is worth it only if the issues point to the most central realities of Christian dogma. They must actually share in that which is essential, not primarily historically-based but grounded in the nature of Triune ontology. This trinitarian dogma is the only worthy ground from which we receive the grace of: incarnation, revelation, anthropology, salvation, ecclesiology, and eschatology as inseparable and dynamically interrelated. Whatever our arguments may be, it is the Holy One who offers the only hope for a re-engagement with reality in the present generation. The loss of a clear voice on the authority of Scripture and its ultimate revelation for the purposes of God recreated in his image strikes at the very root of the existence of the Wesleyan tradition.

With the necessity of a fundamental humility it is at least rational to state that the God of holy love would have us know him and

that he would choose the potentially pervertible vehicle of human language to convey himself to us. If reality is at all accessible to the human mind and heart, then we ought to be able to discuss the confident reception of divinely created, crafted, and inspired and miraculously transmitted words that were offered in a very unique way to us by the Holy Spirit through and to the very beings that are most loved by God. Without being dragged into the quagmire of fideism versus intellectualism, there must be some way for the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition to not cut ourselves off at the knees by capitulating to non-supernatural ideologies. There are quite enough theologies opposed to ours to keep us sharp and orthodox. If we cannot clearly offer a non-rationalistic dogma, one that we do not have to squint at because it does not meet the naturalistic requirements of an historicistic scientism, we cease to have anything objectively truthful and personal to offer both the human mind and heart.

CALVINISTIC ASSUMPTIONS *Part 6*

Gil VanOder

Calvinists believe that the primary reason God created humans was to glorify himself. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* declares, “The chief end of man is to glorify God.” John Piper said it this way, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy displaying and magnifying his glory forever.” Jonathan Edwards wrote, “It appears reasonable to suppose, that it was God’s last end, that there might be a glorious and abundant emanation of his infinite fullness … and that the disposition to communicate himself, or diffuse his own fullness, was what moved him to create the world.”

Notice that Edwards used the word “reasonable” rather than “biblical” for his supposition. The Calvinists’ argument is that by creating man, God was able to show both his justice (by sending sinners to hell for their sins) and his mercy (by electing some for eternal life).

If the only way God could accomplish this was by creating man, then God needed man for his desired purpose. Yet, God is in need of nothing. On the other hand, if God did not need to display his glory in this way, then he decided to use man in this way for his personal pleasure. God created certain people whom he preordained for hell in order to display his justice. Such people are pawns God uses for his self-glorification. Thus, he cares more about being able to display the fullness of his glory than he does about the eternal torment of people. Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). If gaining glory for himself is the primary reason God created people, then he is more interested in taking from others than in giving.

Furthermore, according to Calvinism, God is more interested in displaying his wrath and

justice than he is in demonstrating his love. He condemns to hell far more people than he displays his mercy toward. It wouldn't take very many to display his judgment, but he eternally torments the overwhelming majority of people whom he creates while saving only a small minority. This doesn't square with 1 Corinthians 13. At the very least, you would expect God to show both justice and mercy equally. But, according to Reformed Theology, he doesn't. He is interested in displaying more justice than love.

While glorifying God is extremely important, the Bible doesn't assert that man's primary purpose is to glorify God. If it was, then Jesus would have answered the question of what the greatest commandment was by saying it was to glorify God. Instead, Jesus said it was to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." The second most important thing man can do is to "love your neighbor as yourself." Thus, glorifying God can, at best, only be the third most important thing man can do. It certainly isn't "the chief end of man."

Calvinists might argue that God is glorified by loving him. While that may be true, it is not in the receiving of love that God is most deserving of glory, but in his giving of love. The Father did not send his Son to die because he wanted more glory for himself. It was done because of God's great love for his lost sheep. John 3:16 tells us Christ sacrificed his life because he so loved the world. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that God so desired the manifestation of his glory that he gave his only begotten Son. God should be glorified for offering redemption to sinners, but that was not the primary reason he did so. Love was. Love was also the reason he created humans. God is not self-centered. He is selfless.

God doesn't need more glory or love. He doesn't need anything. What he wants most is not more self-glorification in the world but more love. Despite what Calvinists assume to be true, God's desire in creating humans was not to *get* more glory for himself, but to provide him more opportunities to *give* love. God is not a selfish taker, but a loving giver.

FIFTY YEARS OF UNBROKEN COMMUNION COMMUNION WITH GOD

Marion Brown

My mother, Carrie Evelyn Brown, was born May 28, 1919 in Harrison County. She attended school in a one room school across the road from her maternal grandparents. She was a bright child and could recite her abc's and selected poems by the age of two years. She remembered reciting them for the doctor who was in attendance of her younger brother's birth. She graduated from high school at or near her sixteenth birthday. She attended Bryant and Stratton Business College and worked for the Louisville, Kentucky department of welfare. She met and married

Charles Brown and to that union were born five children.

The spiritual part of this life began in her mother-in-laws' prayers. The local Methodist church had experienced a six-week long revival in the late 20s. Since the community could not afford an evangelist, the pastor of the local United Brethren church did the preaching and then it was to follow that the Methodist pastor would preach a revival at the United Brethren church. My dad recalled that he missed his mother and went searching for her and found her in an empty upstairs bedroom sitting on

the floor weeping. Such a presence was there that he became afraid and would have left, except his mother quieted him with these words, "Come here, your mother is alright; your daddy is going to get saved tonight." He fondly recalled of that night, "When I saw my dad take off his denim coat and start for the mourner's bench, I knew my mother had been in contact with another world." By the way, my grandfather never veered from his path to the celestial city and had a very definite role in encouraging yours truly during the greatest trial of my life. Grandad saw it and was there and with a few words steadied me when I needed it most!

Fast forward to Heidelberg (the Methodist church of the late 20s revival). The date is

April 1950 and Heidelberg is engaged in another revival effort. The pastor was Mode Powell Jr. and the evangelist

was Dr. Warren C. McIntire. Charles and Evelyn live on a farm on the hill overlooking the whole neighborhood. They have lived there eight years, attending church only on special occasions. The pastor had called, but no response. Granny, the paternal grandmother, and others began fasting and praying for Charles and Evelyn. The lady who was entertaining Bro. McIntire recounted that he would sit at the breakfast table and pray, "O, Lord save that young couple on the hill." Charles' uncle saw him plowing in the field and stopped and invited him to the revival meeting.

Here is an account of the exchange which Charles often fondly recounted. His uncle asked, "We would like you to come to the revival," to which my dad replied, "Aw, they are a bunch of hypocrites that go there; I am about as good as they are." His uncle replied after a little pause, "No, you are better than most that go up there, but that is not the question; the question is, are you saved?" Daddy reflected, "He had me. I couldn't say that I was saved." They ended their conversation with Daddy stating that we might come Friday night.

She never doubted since that morning that she was born again

Friday comes and my paternal grandmother called my maternal grandmother and told her not to miss the revival tonight. "Charles and Evelyn are going to get saved. I cannot be there as I must do the chores as Herschel (my grandfather) is working in the river bottoms." She also called her sister-in-law and stated, "God can save them even if I am not there."

Both my parents sought God and Daddy gave a clear testimony of his salvation, but Mother stated that she went home under a cloud. She said that the devil said to her that if she went to the mourner's bench she could never go to the movies again. She stated, "I settled that issue on the way to the altar!" However, she stated that she went home "under a cloud." On the Tuesday following she was washing the breakfast dishes and told the Lord that she didn't want to be a hypocrite and wasn't going to profess something of which she was not sure. Out the north window was a lilac bush that had never bloomed for the eight years they had lived there. She looked out that morning and it was in full bloom! The Lord spoke to her and said, "That is just like your life. Until now you have been barren; now you are in full bloom." She often noted that she never had a doubt since that morning that she was born again.

In the late spring of 1954 a mumps epidemic swept through the communities surrounding Corydon and mother contracted the mumps in her fifth month of pregnancy. As a result her fourth child was born with life-threatening birth defects. Nine babies were born with similar defects during that time period. Five died shortly after birth and three lived a short period of time. Providentially, her family doctor was not attending the birth, a substitute was there who had seen this condition and discovered that this child had this life threatening condition. He performed emergency surgery that was life-saving.

One year later the child was taken to Children's Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky where the head surgeon gave only a 50/50 chance of survival. He later confessed that had he known

how severe the defects were that he would not have given that much. But the child survived and thrived and is now a college prof finishing his PhD in Old Testament interpretation and Hebrew.

During this time their income was severely reduced by a vindictive person who was trying to settle a grudge. Mother related this occurrence to me when she was in her eighties. The Lord awakened her in the night with these words, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." She did not know the reference and the impression was so strong that she looked up the reference, Job 1:22. The scripture followed her for days so she asked the Lord what he was trying to tell her. The Lord replied that when you went through the darkest trial of your life that you did not sin nor charge God foolishly. She remarked to me, "Marion, I never once thought that God was responsible."

I want to relate an incredible testimony that she gave me at the kitchen table looking out that same north window. Just her and I talking about Christian living and me gathering preaching nuggets from my aging mother. Bobby Brush recounted this testimony of an evangelist in his church. Rev. Glenn Stewart, while preaching, stated that he had walked with God over fifty years and had not grieved God once. "The Lord knows it; the devil knows it, and my wife knows it." When someone questioned him he replied "Well, it's the truth!"

Later, when they had decided to extend the meeting, Bro. Stewart asked permission to call his wife and tell her of the change of plans. At the end of the conversation Bro. Stewart said to his wife, "The pastor wants to ask you a question," and handed Bro. Brush the phone with the words, "Ask her." Bro. Brush then recounted what Bro. Stewart had said and his wife replied, "He is the most incredible man. I have lived with him over fifty years and never heard a word or saw an action or detected a wrong attitude ever come from him." I related this to my mother and she replied, "Well, Marion, I have walked with God over fifty years and have not knowingly grieved him in any way!"

Editorial Note —

From the first issue of The Arminian Magazine in 1778, John Wesley, the first editor, included extracts and original treatises on universal redemption. His design was for it to deal with theological controversy — "principally as an engine of polemical theology." The original Arminian magazine was described as more of a sword than a trowel, and Wesley's preface in the premiere issue was described as a declaration of war.

However, he also included biographical sketches because Methodism emphasized both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Wesley said, "Our people die well." That is because they lived well. According to historian David Bebbington, evangelicals nurtured the ideal of a "good death." Deathbed scenes were a staple feature of evangelical literature down to the 1870s. Last words were carefully recorded. Thus, Joseph McPherson's book, Our People Die Well: Glorious Accounts of Early Methodists at Death's Door (2008), is significant.

Wesley edited his magazine until his death in 1791. His final words were, "The best of all is, God is with us." George Story became the new editor. The account of his life is in volume two of Wesley's Veterans. Just before he died, Story said, "I feel Christ to be more precious to my soul than ever." Joseph Benson served as the third editor for eighteen years.

In 1798 The Arminian Magazine became The Methodist Magazine. In 1822 The Methodist Magazine became The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine. In that 1822 issue the editor, Jabez Bunting, stated one of the purposes of the magazine was to publish biographies of ministers and memoirs of eminently pious people who were deceased.

The Fundamental Wesleyan Society began publication of our magazine in 1980. There is no official connection or editorial continuity between the original Arminian Magazine and ours. Nor do I, as current editor, hold any illusion that I am Wesley's successor. We are an interdenominational fellowship who are committed to advancing the hope of a Christian world through a return to Wesleyan-Arminian orthodoxy and orthopraxy.

But God still has saints in our day. That is why I requested this account be written about an unassuming farm wife who raised three preachers: Marion, David, and Joe. Since there is great variety in the manner and time of God's bestowal

of grace, we should not seek another person's experience nor come under condemnation if our experience differs. But most of us are living beneath our Christian privileges, and this account demonstrates the possibilities of grace.

THE UNIVERSAL ATONEMENT IN 1 JOHN 2:2, *Part 2*

Justin Gravett

Perhaps the most common alternative to this specific interpretation is to say John's intention is not to suggest a universal scope of Jesus' atonement, but rather John merely wants to include the believing Gentiles in the purview of elected individuals atoned for. Interestingly, even granting this response, limited atonement is not necessarily entailed; for if the passage is indeed talking of Christ atoning for both Jews and for Gentiles (as in Rom. 11:12, 15, for example), it does not follow that John is saying that only *some* Jews and *some* Gentiles are atoned for. The text would still be possibly read as teaching a universal atonement of Christ dying for (all) Jews and (all) Gentiles.

However, A.W. Pink writes, "When John says, 'He is the propitiation for *our* sin' he can only mean for the sins of *Jewish believers*....

When John added, 'And not for ours only, but also for *the whole world*' he signified that Christ was the propitiation for the sins of Gentile believers too."

No doubt there was a Jewish tension with the Gentiles in the early church, and vice versa, but this response is lackluster for a number of reasons.

The primary weakness is that there is little to no internal evidence John is speaking to issues of racism or discrimination from the Jewish and/or Gentile audience he is addressing. The letter of 1 John is written to counter Docetism, to explain how to discern genuine

teachers, and to prove the centrality of love in the Christian faith. Unlike a letter like Galatians, for example, there is little about the friction seen at times between believing Jews and Gentiles. In Galatians, Paul continuously teaches that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile (Gal. 3:28). 1 John makes no such claim, as that is not one of the letter's concerns. To import this topic into 1 John is thus a dubious move, and to suggest that 1 John 2:2 is speaking to this issue not found in the epistle is unwarranted.

Furthermore, it is likely that the audience to whom John was writing was not primarily a Jewish one, which would have been the typical suspects of pretentiousness against Gentiles (see Matt. 3:9; John 8:33-47). Daniel Wallace explains, "The audience was almost certainly made up mainly of Gentiles" due to the Gentile-focused heresies addressed by John (Antinomianism, Docetism, etc.) and due to the final admonition (5:21), which would have been relevant for Gentiles and hardly for Jews. But if this is the case, then the limited atonement advocate has little to no support for his alternative reading of 1 John 2:2, as the audience is *Gentile*, and hardly would need to be reminded that Christ died for the rest of the *Gentile* world; they already know that Christ died for them!

A second response often given is to suggest that *even if* the universal reading is more likely here, it would lead to the irrational and unbiblical notion of Universalism—that all are saved—and thus must be discounted. This is because a universal propitiation would lead

The objection greatly confused atonement accomplished and atonement applied.

necessarily to a universal salvation, says the limited atonement advocate.

The objection, however, greatly confuses and conflates atonement *accomplished* and atonement *applied*, a distinction even most limited atonement advocates acknowledge. The atoning sacrifice was made for all and is sufficient for all, but is effective only for the faithful. It is accomplished for all, but applied and efficacious only for believers, that is, the elect. Theologians like William Shedd — himself a Calvinist — agrees and writes, “Atonement in and by itself, separate from faith, saves no soul.... It is only when the death of Christ has been actually confided in as atonement, that it is completely ‘set forth’ as God’s propitiation for sin.... It is not the *making* of this atonement, but the *trusting* in it, that saves the sinner.” Norman Douty — also a Calvinist — puts it well: “Without these acts [repentance and belief], even the elect are only potentially the recipients of these benefits.” Until then,

“all of Christ’s saving work is theirs only potentially.... His death has only provided these benefits for them; the application of them is contingent on their repentance and faith.”

He continues, “Indeed, the cross saves, and in the same sense in which a remedy cures.... The cross is the gracious means which the sovereign God has devised for human salvation, just as the compounded medicine is the merciful means the kind physician has devised for bodily healing...the blessings purchased by the blood of Christ do not become our own until, and unless, we put our trust in Him.... Faith, therefore, is represented in Scripture as the means by which all the purchased benefits are conferred on us.” Douglas Moo, a Calvinist scholar, puts it perfectly: “The ‘price’ connoted by the word ‘redemption’ was ‘paid’ at the cross in the blood of Christ, the redeeming work that the payment made possible is, like justification, applied to each person when he or she believes.”

To affirm that Christ is the atoning sacrifice for all is not to say he is the Savior of all.

Commenting on Romans 3:25, where Paul talks of Christ as the propitiation for sins, Moo writes of the phrase “through faith” and says, “The phrase modifies *hilastérion* [propitiatory sacrifice] and indicates the means by which individuals appropriate the benefits of the sacrifice.”

Ben Witherington says, “Paul believes that Christ died for the sins of all, not just for some subset of humanity called the elect. Christ’s death is a sufficient atonement for the sins of all human beings, but it is effective only for those who appropriate its benefits through faith, as v. 22 makes evident. God’s saving righteousness, which is also his mercy through the death of Christ, does not automatically benefit a person. A person must believe to receive this benefit.”

All Christians must maintain that *even the elect* were at one time enemies of God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21) and children of wrath (Eph. 2:3), and thus did not have the atoning benefits applied. This proves that the atonement, as accomplished and as applied, are two distinct categories. This is the case even if one holds to unconditional election and/or irresistible grace.

Lightner correctly notes, “The Bible does not teach that Christ’s death saves apart from faith. The accomplishments of the cross must be appropriated by those who would be saved, and until such a time as faith is exercised the elect are just as lost as the nonelect.” He continues, “The cross does not apply its own benefits.... No elect person was saved at the time of Christ’s dying. All men, including the elect, live some part of their lives in open rebellion to God, thus demonstrating that the finished accomplishments of Calvary must be applied by faith to reach an individual before any saving value comes to that individual.” In fact, if the cross alone saves, without or prior to faith, as some limited atonement individuals seem to think, then the regenerating, convicting, enlightening work of the Spirit is completely superfluous and the centrality of faith is removed, which is a biblically untenable conclusion.

The Bible is clear that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6) and

he has chosen to “save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21) through the atoning work of Christ (Rom. 3:25). Thus, to affirm with the biblical data that Christ is the propitiation and atoning sacrifice for all is not to say he is the Savior of all. Only to those who believe are the atoning benefits applied.

Other objections are found from limited advocates like James White. He begins correctly when he says, “And John’s writings would be studied to see how he uses the phrase ‘the whole world’ and what other phrases/descriptions could be paralleled with it.” Strangely, instead of surveying how the same epistle and author uses the word, White turns to a different book, Revelation, which has a different genre, a different audience and a different context. He cites Revelation 5:9-10, which speaks of Christ

Anyone can be called a child of God and gathered into the church through faith.

only purchased and atoned for those individuals. Of course, this simply is a non sequitur — to say that Christ purchased certain persons does not suggest that he did not propitiate for others. Paul says that Christ “loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20b). Obviously, it does not follow that Christ *only* died for and loved Paul. It is a narrowing down for emphasis, here and elsewhere. A restricted statement does not invalidate a universal one. To suggest otherwise would fall prey to the negative inference fallacy.

Furthermore, White is seemingly conflating atonement *accomplished* and atonement *applied*, as discussed above. It is possible that Revelation 5:9-10 is addressing those to whom the atonement is applied and speaks nothing of its extent. This may be why John speaks of Christ as the *propitiation* for all in 1 John 2:2, and the actual *purchasing* of individuals who are faithful in Revelation. The former being atonement accomplished or provided, and the latter being atonement applied.

Alternatively, it is quite possible to say Christ purchased or bought someone whose end is to be destroyed (c.f. 2 Pet. 2:1). One can possibly be bought and still have eternal life. Thus, to say Revelation 5:9-10 teaches that the elect are bought (or atoned for) does not prove that others are not also bought (atoned for).

White also brings up John 11:49-52 as a passage to shed light on 1 John 2:2. Interestingly, these verses prove nothing of a limited atonement. In the passage, the high priest Caiaphas says, “Jesus was going to die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but in order that he might also gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (John 11:51-52). The nation spoken of is all ethnic Israel (vv. 48, 50). Ethnic Israel was Jesus’ initial *modes operandi*; he was sent to save his people, the Israelites, from their sins (Matt. 1:21), and initially commanded his disciples *not* to go to the Gentiles (Matt. 10:5, 6) and only later commanded that they preach to all persons (Matt. 28:18-20). John 11:49-52, then, teaches that Christ died for the *entire nation of Israel*, which included believers and many nonbelievers — with only believers benefiting from his death (John 1:12).

In addition to this, however, Caiaphas says that Jesus will “gather together into one the children of God who are scattered abroad” (v. 52). Who are the “children of God” spoken of here? Plausibly, these are the *faithful* individuals who are thus named children of God. One need only look earlier in the same book to see this: John 1:12, “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.” Those who receive God in faith are the children of God. Paul says the same in Galatians 3:26, “for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith” (see Matt. 5:9). The children of God are believers, and this is shown in contrast to what even the elect were before belief: “by nature children of wrath, even as the rest” (Eph. 2:3) and “sons of disobedience” (Col. 3:6).

Therefore, there is nothing in this passage supporting limited atonement. Caiaphas says

that Jesus will die for *all* of ethnic Israel, not merely some elect group within Israel. Then he speaks of Jesus gathering all the faithful Jews and Gentiles (Gal. 3:28), the children of God, into one (whether that means in the current church age or in the eschaton). This passage goes to show the unlimited scope of the death of Christ, as *all* of Israel is included, and *anyone* can be called a child of God and gathered into the church of Christ through faith.

Robert Yarbrough, another limited atonement defender, begins his objection to universal atonement by noting Christ's seeming propitiation for the whole world and writes, "Such a reference should not be surprising given John's stress on Christ's ministry to the world at large in the fourth Gospel (e.g., John 1:9, 10, 29; 3:16, 17, 19; 4:42; 6:14, 33, 51)." He notes the offer of the gospel, like the blessings in the Old Testament, is offered to all, even if all did not

accept them. Christ's atonement "provides the basis throughout all human history for God the Father

to extend patience and forbearance to those who merit his rejection" — likely referring to passages like Romans 3:25.

Concerning the extent of Christ's propitiatory work, Yarbrough says that Christ died for both the elect and the world, each in its own sense. He explains the salvific benefits of the atonement are only given to the elect through the gift of grace and by faith. But affirming the atonement's application by faith is obviously held by all camps, including those in the universal atonement position. Thus, Yarbrough's point is moot concerning the extent of the atonement, and hardly germane to the present discussion. Furthermore, Yarbrough makes the mistake of assuming if unconditional election is true, then somehow this necessitates limited atonement. Even granting the position of unconditional election, it simply does not follow that Christ's death is thus limited to those whom he has chosen to save. It is perfectly rational to hold that Christ died for all, yet God

only elected some of those to salvation. There are many Calvinists who hold to this view.

Yarbrough cites Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in John 17:9 and says, "If the Son does not mind specifying that he prays for only a certain group given to him by the Father, it is not hard to imagine that in the same sense his cleansing blood is applied in its fullest sense only to that group." If by the "fullest sense" Yarbrough simply means atonement applied, then this is uncontroversial. But if he is suggesting Jesus' specific prayer implies limited atonement, this is clearly a non-sequitur. Even granting Yarbrough's interpretation of John 17, it does not follow that Christ's death did not extend beyond his prayers at that moment. After all, Jesus prayed even that his enemies would be forgiven (Luke 23:34; see Rom. 9:3).

Robert Picirilli says, concerning John 17, "There is no a priori reason to assume that Christ could not desire the salvation of all, and plan to die for all, and yet offer intercessory prayers for those truly his." Yarbrough cites John 11:51-52, which was addressed above, and goes on to say there is a wideness in the atonement (Heb. 2:9), but there is also an "undeniable particularity." Strangely, instead of making the distinction of atonement accomplished and sufficient for all, and efficacious and applied to believers, Yarbrough concludes by saying the whole world in 1 John 2:2 "refers to believers scattered everywhere and in all times." No exegesis is provided for this conclusion, and the alleged support texts provided do not warrant this reading. Nothing is said of the other uses of *kosmos* in this epistle or elsewhere, and nothing is said of the diametrically opposed language in 1 John between the world and believers.

Yarbrough argues there are "certain positive benefits" for the non-elect, which are provided through the atonement — benefits such as common grace for the reprobate and the ability to preach and offer the gospel to all. Yarbrough never explains how God and others can call all persons to repentance (Acts 17:30; see Isa. 45:22; 2 Cor. 5:20) when in fact there is no atonement to apply to them if they so

The possibility of forgiveness is cosmic and universal.

choose. He does not explain how God can be genuine and sincere in his call to be reconciled to him when there is no reconciliation made or available. Yarbrough's and White's objections, therefore, are simply not compelling.

Far more accurate is Constantine Campbell in his commentary on 1 John 2:2 in which he writes, "This is a bold declaration of the universal scope of Christ's propitiatory act; he faced God's righteous wrath toward the sins of the whole world." In response to the suggestion that Christ merely died for the elects' sins, Campbell explains, "A chief difficulty for the limited-atonement reading of 2:2b is that there is nothing in the context to support it." Indeed, one might even go further and suggest that the context supports just the opposite. Campbell rightly says, "In John's writings the 'world' normally refers to humanity in total opposition to God." Colin Kruse, in his own commentary, concurs and says, "When the author says that Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for the 'sins

of the whole world,' that includes not only our sins (i.e., the sins of believers) but the sins of the unbelieving world as well." Kruse summarizes how this systematically fits within the broader biblical data: "Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world because his death was sufficient to deal with the sins of the whole world, but that his sacrifice does not become effective until people believe in him."

I. Howard Marshall puts it well when he writes, "The possibility of forgiveness is cosmic and universal." Therefore, these common objections fail to provide grounds for rejecting the interpretation previously given of 1 John 2:2. There is a plethora of internal evidence for interpreting *world* as the unbelieving contingent of humanity, and a lackluster amount of evidence that John was merely speaking of the remaining *Gentile* world, or that atonement accomplished for all necessitates atonement applied to all. Thus, the universal atonement position stands as the more likely reading.

REVIEWS

Robert E. Picirilli, *Free Will Revisited*. Wipf & Stock, 2017. 140 pages. ISBN 978-1-5326-1846-8

Dr. Picirilli defends libertarian freedom against compatibilistic freedom. His method is to respectfully interact with the three most influential books which reject libertarian freedom. He begins by summarizing Martin Luther's *Bondage of the Will*, which was written against the Roman Catholic position. Then he moves to John Calvin's work, *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will*, which was written to refute Pelagianism. Finally, he summarizes Jonathan Edwards' *Freedom of the Will*, which was written to refute Arminianism.

The arguments of Luther and Calvin are similar, and Picirilli rebuts them by arguing that divine foreknowledge does not imply predestination. Thus, the option of open theism is not necessary. He affirms the doctrine of total depravity, but argues that the doctrine

of prevenient grace makes Calvin's monergism unnecessary. Finally, Picirilli demonstrates that divine sovereignty does not negate the freedom of the will. God is sovereign. He permits, but does not concur with our sin.

Thus, Picirilli defines libertarian free will as self-determinism, which is a major part of what it means to be in the image of God. This capacity of self-determinism was not lost in the fall. Left to ourselves, however, we are unable to turn toward God because we are blinded by sin. We are so bound by sin that our choices are always evil. But Picirilli affirms that God has not left us to ourselves. Thus, Picirilli avoids the error of semi-Pelagianism.

In contrast to the theology of Luther and Calvin, Edwards presented a rationalistic argument that the

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will is free, but free only to choose evil. For Edwards a will can choose without being free. Thus, his concept of freedom is compatible with determinism. But a free will that is compatible with determinism is not free since it is the only choice possible. William James called it a “quagmire of evasion” which involved stealing the word “freedom” to hide the determinism beneath it.

Edwards’ book, along with Luther and Calvin, also advocates the bondage of the will even though he has redefined bondage as freedom. In response, John Wesley wrote, “There is no blame if they are under a necessity of willing. There can be no moral good or evil unless they have liberty as well as will, which is entirely a different thing. And the not adverting to this seems to be the direct occasion of Mr. Edwards’s whole mistake.”

The basic argument of Edwards is that self-determination is logically inconsistent. If human freedom is self-deterministic, and if the will must first choose its own actions in order to determine them, then there must be a choice preceding the choice. Edwards argued

that the decision preceding the first choice could not have been self-determined without an infinite regression. But Picirilli argues that our freedom goes back to a self-existent God who created us with the power of contrary choice. And so, in 134 pages Picirilli succinctly refutes the concept of compatibilistic freedom.

While Picirilli prefers the label of Reformed Arminian, and I would identify myself as a Wesleyan-Arminian, I agree with his conclusions. Beginning with John Miley and Daniel Whedon, who were eighteenth-century Methodists, there was a shift toward semi-Pelagianism. They abandoned prevenient grace for an emphasis on free will that taught we can choose salvation through our natural ability. Thus, Picirilli also articulates the orthodox Wesleyan-Arminian position, without adopting that label, while many “Wesleyan” theologians today are actually semi-Pelagians or open theists. Before you reject Arminianism, read this book. You may choose not to do so, but that choice was not predetermined. —*Vic Reasoner*

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