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# THE BLUE BANNER

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*For Christ's Crown & Covenant*

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## In this Issue.

**Murray on the "Free Offer": A Review by Matthew Winzer** ❀ **James Sinclair on the Gospel and the Free Church Declaratory Act of 1892"** ❀ **Bacon on Whosoever Will May Come** ❀ **Rutherford on Gospel Faith.**

*by Richard Bacon*



*The Blue Banner* started out in 1992 as little more than a sessional newsletter sent to a few of our friends. This fourth quarter issue marks the third consecutive year in which we have delivered 144 pages of reformed writing to you, our subscribers, and marks the conclusion of nine years of sending our newsletter from Texas to both coasts and many places in between. We give all praise to the Lord for this opportunity to minister to you in this way, and hope that *The Blue Banner* has been a blessing to you.


This current issue deals with the question, somewhat controversial in our day, of how and why we preach the gospel to "every creature under heaven." Does God have a longing for the reprobate to repent? Does God have a saving, but conditional, love for all persons without exception? Is the Covenant of Grace conditional and for all who will, of their own volition, participate in it, or is it unconditional and for the elect alone?

Westminster Larger Catechism answers thirty-two and sixty-eight have been set forth by some as teaching a conditional covenant, i.e. conditioned upon the faith of men. Larger thirty-two speaks of faith as "the condition to interest them [i.e. sinners – RB] in him." Does this statement imply a covenant conditioned upon human faith? Second, Larger sixty-eight speaks of some who are "outwardly called by the ministry of the word, and have some common operations of the Spirit." Should we understand here the Westminster divines to be speaking of an abstract work of the Spirit by which he absolutely, but not concretely, desires sinners to come to Christ? (Continued on Page 2).



(Continued from Page 1) Matthew Winzer of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland located in Grafton-Brushgrove, Australia, has written a masterful review of *The Free Offer of the Gospel* by Professors John Murray and Ned Stonehouse. Their article, a report submitted to the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is now several decades old. However, it has recently been posted on the world wide web together with a new introduction, and so *The Blue Banner* staff asked Mr. Winzer to write a review of the original report by the Professors.

James Sinclair, author of the critique of the Free Church of Scotland's *Declaratory Act* of 1892, was for many years the editor of *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*. The historical significance

of the *Declaratory Act* is that it was the formal reason for the separation of the Free Presbyterians from the Free Church of Scotland in 1893. The first issue of *The Free Presbyterian Magazine and Monthly Record* declared in May 1896, "We, in fact, find in the Declaratory Act errors of Arminianism, Pelagianism, Voluntaryism, and Romanism." (p. 4) The Rev. Sinclair, in the editorials reprinted here from Volume One, pp. 121ff. and 161ff. of *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, demonstrates that the modified "Calvinism" of the Declaratory Act is, in reality, no gospel at all. As Mr. Sinclair concluded, "The Free Church, by adopting this clause, puts a dagger into all true missionary effort." 

## Two Sermon Tape Series

See also our advertisements on page 21 for the Comprehensive Psalter, 35 for bound volumes of *The Blue Banner*. See page 29 for copies of *The Mediatorial Kingdom and Glories of Jesus Christ* by Samuel Davies. Order Form, page 36.

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# Murray on the Free Offer: A Review

*The Free Offer of the Gospel*, by John Murray; with a new preface by R. Scott Clark, D. Phil., Associate Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary in California. Available online at: [http://public.csusm.edu/public/guests/rsclark/Free\\_Offer.html](http://public.csusm.edu/public/guests/rsclark/Free_Offer.html)

by Matthew Winzer



The work now under review<sup>1</sup> is essentially a report submitted to the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church by one of its distinguished professors, John Murray of Westminster Theological Seminary, who penned the report with the editorial assistance of another distinguished professor, Ned B. Stonehouse of the same institution. It appears that a dispute had arisen with regard to a previous report on the subject which had predicated “that God *desires* the salvation of all men.”<sup>2</sup> Prof. Murray was confident that such a desire could be predicated of God, and set about to establish a Biblical case for the position.

## THE PREFACE

The preface written by R. Scott Clark introduces the material to the public. Special consideration needs to be given to one particular remark which he has made, as it is not contained in the report. It is to be found in paragraph 4 to the effect that the rejection of the free offer of the gospel, as including a *desire* of God for the salvation of all men, is to be equated with rationalism. He states: “They are rationalists inasmuch as they reject

this doctrine fundamentally because they find it unreasonable.”

It should be noted that Prof. Murray would himself have rejected his doctrine had he discerned the unreasonableness with which the opponents of the doctrine charge it. He endeavoured to clear his position of the slightest hint of contradiction, ensuring his readers that by predicating a desire in God for the salvation of all men he was not referring to the decretive will. “For to say that God desires the salvation of the reprobate and also that God wills the damnation of the reprobate and apply the former to the same thing as the latter, namely, the decretive will, would be contradiction.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, the very author whom Mr. Clark is recommending to the reading public was himself at pains to avoid the unreasonableness for which his doctrine is rejected; and when it is considered, as this review shall endeavour to show, that Prof. Murray failed in his attempt to divorce the desire of God from the decretive will, the rejection of his position because of its unreasonableness can hardly be charged with rationalism.

Clearly, then, the charge of rationalism is unfounded. That distasteful appellation is usually reserved for those who dare to reject divinely inspired teaching on the basis that it is inconsistent with what *unaided* human reason already knows. If the rejection of Prof. Murray’s formulation of the gospel offer proceeds on the basis that it contradicts what Scripture explicitly teaches, that rejection is free from the charge of rationalism and must be accepted as Biblical truth. As Mr. Clark himself states in paragraph

<sup>1</sup> Matthew Winzer with his wife Kathleen and nine children attend the Grafton-Brushgrove congregation in Australia of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Matthew has a B.Th. (Hons.) and is currently pursuing a M.Th. under the direction of Prof. Allan Harman of the Presbyterian Theological College in Melbourne, Australia. The major thesis is on “The Theological Composition of the Psalter.”

<sup>2</sup> P. 1. As the online document does not contain pagination, and is simply an unedited reproduction of the original publication, this review shall refer the reader to the pagination of the article as it is found in *Collected Writings of John Murray* Volume 4 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), pp. 113-132.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*



12 of his preface in connection with the use of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language:<sup>4</sup> “This sort of language has always been interpreted by the catholic Church to be metaphoric or symbolic not because of pagan *a priori* notions of God, but because of clear Biblical propositions about God which have been used to interpret the narratives in which God reveals himself anthropomorphically... To do otherwise is to reduce the God of Scripture to an incompetent and worse to an idol.”

Those who reject Prof. Murray’s predication of a desire in God for the salvation of all men, do so for this very reason: because his report does not give proper regard to the anthropomorphic language of Scripture. Consequently, it represents God, not as incompetent to obtain what He desires, but as unwilling to have what He apparently desires and is fully competent to obtain. Hence, the rejection of Prof. Murray’s formulation proceeds, not on the basis that it contradicts the light of nature, but that it contradicts the light of Scripture. Moreover, the Scriptural references which Prof. Murray has alleged in favour of his formulation, do not teach what he has endeavoured so earnestly to extract from them.

There are a multitude of deliverances given in the Scriptures with regard to this subject. Commissions to preach the gospel to all without exception as well as commandments to believe on the name of Jesus Christ and to repent. There are promises to the effect that whosoever will may come, that he who thirsts may drink of the water of life freely, that they who are weary and heavy laden are invited to come to Christ that He might give them rest. We even have examples of the preaching both of the Lord Himself and of His apostles. Surely, if there were such a *desire* in God with regard to the salvation of all men without exception, that desire would be expressed in those places which have more particularly to do with the gospel offer! Such a

desire, however, is not so much as insinuated by those places. On that note we may proceed to an examination of the report’s introduction.

## THE INTRODUCTION

The introduction of the report seeks to outline what is essentially being contended for in the statement that God desires the salvation of all men. The word, *desire*, we are informed, does not have reference to the decretive will of God, but to the revealed will of God in “the free offer of the gospel to all without distinction.”<sup>5</sup>

This distinction between a decretive and a revealed (or preceptive) will of God is both sound and necessary, and one to which all orthodox Calvinistic divines have had recourse. To quote Francis Turretin: “The first and principal distinction is that of the decretive and preceptive will of God... The former relates to the futuration and the event of things and is the rule of God’s external acts; the latter is concerned with precepts and promises and is the rule of our action.”<sup>6</sup>

Such a distinction must never be understood as implying that God has two wills. For it is clear from the above definition that the word *will* is being used in two different senses, i.e., equivocally, having two distinct points of reference. It is only the will of decree which is the will of God in the proper sense of the term, as an act of volition, for therein God has decreed what *shall* be done. Samuel Rutherford expresses this well in his own inimitable manner: “that *voluntas signi*, in which God reveals what is our duty, and what we ought to do, not what is his decree, or what he either will, or ought to do, is not God’s will properly, but by a figure only; for commands, and promises, and threatenings revealed argue not the will and purpose, decree or intention of God, which are properly his will.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* Volume 1 (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1992), p. 220. C.f. John Owen, *Works* Volume 10 (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), p. 45, for a similar but fuller treatment of the distinction.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himself* (Glasgow: Samuel and Archibald Gardner, 1803), p. 480.

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<sup>4</sup> The Greek derivatives *anthropos* = man, *morphe* = form, and *pathos* = feeling. Because the infinite God is without “parts or passions,” the language of Scripture is said to be anthropomorphic or anthropopathic when it reveals Him in the finite *forms* and *feelings* of man.



The will of precept has no volitional content, for it simply states what God has commanded *ought* to be done by man. Whether man wills to do it is absolutely dependent upon whether God has decreed that he shall do it. So it is quite inappropriate to say that God wills something *to be* with reference to His will of command, for the preceptive will never pertains to the *futurition* of actions, only to the *obligation* of them.

With this distinction in mind we are in a position to interpret properly those portions of Scripture which speak of God desiring compliance with what He has commanded. The desire has respect solely to what *ought* to be done by man, not to what *is* to be done. So the Lord has revealed that He desires truth in the inward parts, Ps. 51:6, and that He desires mercy, and not sacrifice, i.e., that the Israelites show mercy to their brethren in need, and not simply attend to the ceremonial aspects of their religion, Hos. 6:6. By such statements, we are to understand that God delights in requiring these things from man. Whether or not man shall perform them depends solely on whether God has decreed them to be done.

Consequently, the report's suggestion that the words, "God desires," are to be referred to the revealed or preceptive will, creates a misnomer. If God desires something *to be*, in accord with the proper understanding of the distinction which Calvinistic divines make between the decretive and the preceptive aspects of God's will, we are bound to acknowledge that the desire has reference to the will of decree, because it is a desire for the futurition of an action, not the obligation of it.

Had God decreed the salvation of all men, it would be possible to predicate "that God desires the salvation of all men." Since, however, God has not decreed the salvation of all men, but has only commanded that all men be saved, and since God's preceptive will only commands what *ought* to be done, the most that can be said is that God desires that all men be under an *obligation* to be saved.

So while the report has endeavoured to note the distinction in name between the decretive and the

preceptive aspects of God's will, it has not accredited the correct nature to this distinction. What is worse, the report proceeds upon the assumption that it has correctly distinguished these two aspects, and continually attributes decretive characteristics to the preceptive will. The result is that the report implies what it adamantly denies, that God both wills and does not will, in the same sense, the salvation of the reprobate.

At most, all that can be affirmed is that God desires that such and such *should* be done by man, not that God desires that such and such *shall* be done. Any desire or delight in God with regard to the performance of what He has commanded is entirely hypothetical, or conditional upon the falling out of events in accordance with His foreordination of them. To posit a desire in God that something shall fall out which He has determined shall not fall out is absurdity. This divides God, by introducing contrariety into His nature. It supposes what the Remonstrant Corvinus was ready to grant, "that there are desires in God that are never fulfilled." But as John Owen ably retorted: "Now, surely, to desire what one is sure will never come to pass is not an act regulated by wisdom or counsel."<sup>8</sup>

Next, the report proceeds to state: "that in the free offer there is expressed not simply the bare preceptive will of God, but the disposition of loving-kindness on the part of God pointing to the salvation to be gained through compliance with the overtures of gospel grace."<sup>9</sup> Having qualified that the desire predicated of God is not to be regarded as referring to the decretive will, but to the revealed or preceptive will, the report somewhat anomalously asserts that the desire is not to be traced to the bare *preceptive* will of God.

Is there another distinction to be made in the will of God that is not either decretive or preceptive? The Remonstrants were accustomed to speak of a conditional will of God, wherein God desired this or that on the condition that men perform this or that command. The Amyraldians,

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<sup>8</sup> John Owen, *Works*, Volume 10, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> *Writings*, p. 114.



in their hope of finding some middle course between Arminianism and Calvinism, hypothesised a general decree that all men be saved upon condition of faith and repentance which preceded the particular decree to choose some men to eternal life and to grant them the faith and repentance necessary for obtaining salvation.

Perhaps Prof. Murray did not have this type of *speculative* will in mind when he referred to “the disposition of loving-kindness on the part of God pointing to the salvation to be gained through compliance with the overtures of gospel grace.” It may be that he was arguing from the will of God to the nature of God. That is, God commands *a*, therefore God must be *a*-like. Such a manner of reasoning is sound in itself, for the moral law of God is of use to all men “to inform them of the holy nature and will of God.”<sup>10</sup>

If this was Prof. Murray’s method of argumentation, it is not without fault. For he has not strictly reasoned from the will of God to the nature of God. The nature of God is what God is *irrespective* of the creature. So while the offer of the gospel might very well imply a disposition of loving-kindness on the part of God, that is all it could imply. For it is the eternal decree of God which has determined the mode in which He shall express His nature towards the creature.

This is an aspect of the eternal decree which is too often overlooked. The nature of God is what God is *in se* — in Himself — not what He is with respect to anything outside of Himself. It is the eternal decree which has determined not only what shall be, but also the *relation* and *action* of God towards the creature. We may note what Francis Turretin states in this connection: “There are acts immanent and intrinsic in God, but connoting a respect and relation (*schesis*) to something outside of God (such are the decrees, which are nothing else than the counsels of God concerning future things outside of himself).”<sup>11</sup>

For the Biblical substantiation of this point one need only advert to the usual texts cited by

Calvinists in defence of the doctrine of unconditional election. To reference but two, Eph. 1:4 states that God’s act of choosing before the foundation of the world determines that the elect shall be “holy and without blame *before him* in love;” and Rom. 9:10-13 alludes to the pre-natal relation of Jacob and Esau before God as a result of the eternal purpose of election, “Jacob *have I loved*, but Esau *I have hated*.”

Hence, it is the will of God’s decree which has determined the relation and action of God towards the creature. The proponents of universal love in John Owen’s day argued that God “by his infinite goodness was inclined to desire the happiness of them, all and every one, that they might be delivered from misery, and be brought unto himself.” As the report has put forward the same argument, the cogent response of Dr. Owen is worthy of our attention. “That God hath any natural or necessary inclination, by his goodness, or any other property, to do good to us, or any of his creatures, we do deny. Everything that concerns us is an act of his free will and good pleasure, and not a natural, necessary act of his Deity, as shall be declared.”<sup>12</sup>

To suppose that God has a disposition “pointing to” anything which concerns the creature, be it salvation or otherwise, is to predicate something of the Divine decree. So that any hypothesis with regard to the expression of God’s nature towards the creature is no longer a statement about the nature of God, but about the will of God. In the final analysis, whether Prof. Murray was attempting to accredit some other aspect to the will of God or not, he has succeeded in affirming a *speculative* will as espoused by Remonstrants and Amyraldians alike.

This, surely, is the crux of the matter. Scripture speaks expressly on the relation and action of God towards the reprobate, as it has been determined by His eternal and immutable counsel. They are vessels of wrath fitted to destruction (Rom. 9:22), enemies of the cross of Christ (Phil. 3:18), delivered unto thralldom to obey Satan as their god, (2 Cor. 4:4), ever learning, and never able to come to the

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<sup>10</sup> The Westminster Larger Catechism, answer 95.

<sup>11</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes* Volume 1, p. 311.

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<sup>12</sup> John Owen, *Works*, Volume 10, p. 227.



knowledge of the truth (2 Tim. 3:7). Any goodness they experience from the hand of God is a bitter sweet. It serves to inure them and to prepare them for the day of wrath (Rom. 2:4, 5). God has been pleased to leave multitudes of them without the fragrance of the gospel, and of those that do come under its aroma, the gospel becomes a savour of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:16). Its promises were never intended for them, having only been purchased by Christ for the elect (2 Cor. 1:20); and its commandments are odious to them, for they are never graciously renewed by the Holy Ghost (Rom. 8:7). And when they stumble at the word, continuing in their disobedience, it is because that is whereunto they were appointed in accord with the good pleasure of God (1 Pet. 2:8).

In the light of such express testimony, the report's attempt to discover a favourable or loving disposition on the part of God to the reprobate, and that in but a few Scriptures which do not speak to the point in dispute, is futile. The attempt can only succeed in advancing the unfounded notion of a speculative will in God which never finds fulfilment because its conditions are never met by man.

More could be said by way of expounding the Calvinistic doctrine of the eternal and immutable decree of God, and each principle brought before our view would militate against accepting the report's notion of a loving disposition and desire in God towards the reprobate as well as the elect. We shall briefly advert to two of these principles. 1. The decree ensures that the divine attributes are expressed in accord with their *simplicity*, so that the perfections of God are *harmonious* in their manifestation to the creature. If one of God's perfections were to manifest itself towards the creature in a way that is contrary to the decree, it could only have the effect of dividing God against Himself. 2. The decree ensures that the divine attributes are expressed in accord with their *ultimacy*, so that the perfections of God are *glorious* in their manifestation to the creature. When it is considered that the decrees of God are "for His own glory,"<sup>13</sup> if any perfection in God

were to point towards what was contrary to His decrees, that would be a disposition to not manifest God's glory. And it is preposterous to think that God desires that which is not for His own glory.

In this reviewer's opinion, it is the failure of modern Calvinists to comprehend properly the nature and import of the eternal decree, especially as it concerns the reprobate, which has encouraged aberrations with regard to God's *disposition* towards them. Too often the reprobate are represented as simply being the "non-elect," "passed over," and "left without mercy." These descriptions are true in their context, but they are not the whole truth. There is a positive decree which has been issued, and is being executed, with regard to the reprobate, such that it is necessary to think of those whom God has not elected as "fitted to destruction," of those who are passed over as "hated," and of those who are left without mercy as "hardened." And all this, as John Calvin expressed it, "as yet undefiled by any crime."<sup>14</sup> For reprobation, like election, is apart from works, lest God's will be conditioned on anything in the creature.

Some might ask, if this be the relation which God sustains to the reprobate, why does He allow them to be partakers with the elect in the generous invitation of gospel promises and in the ingenuous proclamation of gospel commands? This question is appropriately answered with another question. If God did not send gospel promises and commands to them, would that be proof enough that He had no desire or love for them? The report gives an uncertain sound in this regard. It sometimes asserts that God's desire and delight is for all men to be saved, but at other times it is restricted to "those to whom the offer comes."<sup>15</sup> It is difficult to defend the hypothesis that God desires the salvation of those whom He deprives of the message of salvation.

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<sup>14</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III. xxii. 11 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d.), 2:946.

<sup>15</sup> *Writings*, p. 114.

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<sup>13</sup> The Westminster Shorter Catechism, answer 7.



But to give a positive answer to the question, it is for the elects' sake, as Samuel Rutherford argued:

How then cometh the Gospel to them? *Ans.* It comes to them, 1. Not from *Christ* as their Surety, since he prays not for any Mediation of his own towards them: But 2. for the Elect's sake: so Paul, Act. 13.26. *Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and who among you feareth God, to you... is the word of salvation,* to you and for your cause, that ye may be saved, is the Gospel, *sent.* 2 Corin. 4.15. *For all things,* our suffering, our dying, *are... for your sake.* 2 Tim. 2.10. *Therefore I indure all things... for the Elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Jesus Christ, with eternall glory.* Hence, there is no salvation but that which is in *Christ Jesus our Lord,* the Author and Cause,... and meriting Procurer of eternall salvation, Hebr. 5.9.<sup>16</sup>

The gospel cannot be regarded as having any intention of benefit for the reprobate simply because the benefits it holds out to its hearers were only procured by Christ for the elect. If there were any benefit to be obtained by the reprobate, why do they not all hear the gospel? No, their hearing of the gospel must be due to the fact that those who are sent to publish it are "unacquainted with [God's] particular purpose,"<sup>17</sup> and cannot distinguish between the elect and the reprobate. The Lord, in His providence, sends the gospel to wherever He has His elect that they might be made partakers of the benefits revealed therein; and this gospel is published indiscriminately to all, lest the restricting or limiting of it should result in any of the elect not hearing, and so, not obeying its message.

Herein something might be predicated of the genuine expression of earnest desire to be sounded forth to all men without exception: it is by the ministers of the gospel who are sent forth to preach to every creature and to beseech men to be reconciled to God. As Augustine has moved,

and as John Calvin has seconded: "For as we know not who belongs to the number of the predestined or who does not belong, we ought to be so minded as to wish that all men be saved.' So shall it come about that we try to make everyone we meet a sharer in our peace."<sup>18</sup>

Thus, having shown the inappropriateness of predicating a desire of God for the salvation of all men, and having, rather, assigned the desire that all men be saved to its appropriate place, namely, to the ministers who preach the gospel, the remaining space may be spent examining the Scriptural references adduced by the report.

### **MATTHEW 5:44-48; LUKE 6:27-36**

Matthew 5:44-48, in conjunction with Luke 6:27-36, is the first reference provided to support the position that God desires the salvation of all men. We are told that it is referenced, not because it deals with the overtures of grace in the gospel, but because "it does tell us something regarding God's benevolence that has bearing upon all manifestations of divine grace" and that "all without distinction, reprobate as well as elect, are the beneficiaries of this favour."<sup>19</sup> Specifically, the report deduces from these texts "that the kindness bestowed in sunshine and rain is the expression of divine love, that back of the bestowal there is an attitude on the part of God, called love, which constrains him to bestow these tokens of his lovingkindness."<sup>20</sup>

The method of argumentation for establishing this conclusion is quite simple. Since men are commanded to love their enemies, and since they are also commanded, as a motive to the exercise of this love, to imitate the Father in heaven's perfection, it necessarily follows that it is a part of the Father in heaven's perfection that "he loves his enemies and that it is because he loves his enemies that he makes his sun rise upon them and sends them rain."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened* (Edinburgh: Printed by Andro Anderson, 1655), p. 341. The breaks in the text are merely the omissions of original Greek words, and as their meanings are provided, the sense is not distorted.

<sup>17</sup> John Owen, *Works*, Volume 10, p. 300.

<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes* III. xxiii. 14; Volume 2, p. 964.

<sup>19</sup> *Writings*, pp. 114, 115.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*





One dare not argue with logic. But we may test the conclusion by applying the same logic to the other imperatives which Jesus gave, such as “bless (speak well to) them that curse you” and “pray for them which despitefully use you.” Are we to conclude that a man speaking well to his enemies is in imitation of the Father speaking well to His enemies? Or, that a man praying for those who despitefully use him imitates the Father praying for those who despitefully use Him?

Putting the question in this manner should help us to see that while the logic seems sound enough, the reasoning fails to account for the distinction in *being* between the Creator’s infinitude and the creature’s finitude. The commandments given to man are suited to his creatureliness, and whatever perfection a man might attain to, it can never be greater than creaturely perfection. God’s perfection is omniscient and omnipotent. He knows who are the elect and who are the reprobate, and it is in His power to act in accord with the purpose He has for each one. Bearing this in mind, we may understand Jesus’ commandment in its Biblical context. Hatred and vengeance is not in your power. It belongs to God to repay. Therefore, determine to do good to your enemies, and thereby show that you are more virtuous than publicans. For such virtue imitates your Father’s perfection, and demonstrates that you are His sons. That is, the perfection which Jesus calls upon His followers to imitate is not the Father’s actions, but the virtuous quality which characterises His actions.

Hence, the report’s inference from this text is inadmissible. The conclusion, however, deserves examination in the light of traditional reformed thought on the subject of God’s love. For it is noteworthy that some reformed divines, those strictly so-called, were not averse to referring to a benevolence in God towards all men, elect and reprobate alike. So Francis Turretin, whilst explaining God’s love of Jacob (the elect) and hatred of Esau (the reprobate), distinguishes it from “God’s general love and the common

providence by which he is borne to all his creatures.”<sup>22</sup>

The reason for adopting this terminology appears to have been the original relation which God sustained to the creation prior to the fall of man. It is in consideration of the fact that the creature is the perfect work of His own hands, and man in particular is made in His image and after His likeness. Sin has certainly been introduced into the created order so that the creature is now subjected to vanity and man as the image of God is defaced. Yet, the Scriptures sometimes speak of the Creator relating and acting towards the creation as considered in its original condition, as when the shedding of man’s blood and the cursing of a man’s person is forbidden because man is still regarded as the image of God (Gen. 9:6; Jam. 3:9). Hence, some warrant seems to be afforded for the view that God bears a *general* love to the creature as His creature; and that not on the basis of a disposition or tendency of the Divine nature, but because of the eternal decree to be disposed in this way towards the creature.

What should be kept in mind with regard to this love as expounded by these divines is its *generality*. If it is appropriate to say that God bears a general love to the creature as His creature, such a love must, by its very nature, be without reference to particular persons or any special purpose. In other words, it is God’s love to mankind considered as a whole, or as the apostle describes it, as a lump of clay (Rom. 9:21). But as God did not only decree to create man, but also “of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour,” the one to love and the other to hate, it is impossible to speak of God’s love to this or that man for this or that purpose without predicating something of God’s *special* electing love. As John Knox has said: “You make the love of God common to all men; and that do we constantly deny, and say, that before all beginning God hath loved his Elect in Christ Jesus his Sonne, and that from the

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<sup>22</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes* Volume 1, p. 400.



same eternitie he hath reprobated others.”<sup>23</sup> Consequently, the question as to whether God loves the reprobate becomes rhetorical. The answer must be “no,” because the very nature of the question requires an answer with respect to God’s special purpose to love or not to love particular persons.

It is in this sense that the report’s conclusion is out of accord with those divines who suggest that it is appropriate to think of a general love of God. It does not refer to a general love and providential care which God exercises over His creation as such, but to a special love with regard to “reprobate as well as elect.” Moreover, it suggests that this love “is exercised towards them in their ungodly state” and has some bearing “upon the grace of God manifested in the free offer of the gospel.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, it is not a *general* love to the creature as a creature, but a *special* love to the creature as a lost, miserable sinner who stands in need of salvation. All reformed divines, however, are adamant that this love to sinners is restricted to elect sinners.

The report has adduced a text of Scripture which does not speak to the issue of the divine love being manifested to the sinner in the gospel. It has relied solely upon an incidental statement to demonstrate its claims; and that in itself cannot be regarded as legitimate when it is considered that the subject being dealt with lies very near the heart of the Bible’s message. What of all the Scriptural statements which speak perspicuously to the issue? Prof. Murray was unable to refer to these because they all, each and every one, speak of the divine love being manifested to the sinner in the *giving* of the Lord Jesus Christ *for* the sinner, i.e., in terms of a particular redemption. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). To quote Samuel Rutherford:

In this grammar of the Holy Ghost, observe we, by the way, for resolution, The wisdom of God, in framing the words of the gospel. It cannot be said that God loved all the world in Christ his beloved; and all, and every sinner, and all the race of mankind. Yet, laying down this ground, that God keepeth up in his mind, the secrets of election and reprobation, till he, in his own time, be pleased to reveal them; the Lord hath framed the gospel-offer of Christ in such indefinite words, and so general (yet without all double-dealing, lying, or equivocating; for his own good-pleasure is a rule both of his doings and speeches).<sup>25</sup>

Hence, the love of God to sinners is manifested only generally in the gospel, and does not become a particular manifestation to this or that person until God is pleased to work faith in those whom He has chosen, whereby they become partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ. Scripture does not warrant the extending of this manifestation any further than the extent of the atonement. For whom did Christ die? It is those to whom the love of God is manifested and commended. This point is made very eloquently in a sermon by Dr. John Kennedy:

‘But,’ it may be asked, ‘how are we, who hear the gospel, related to the Father’s love?’ Not so, that we have any warrant to conclude, because of what the gospel tells you of His love, that it now, and as you are, embraces you. It speaks to you of that love, it exhibits the glorious proof given of the sovereignty, freeness, and riches of that love, in the mission and death of the Son, as the Christ and ‘the Lamb of God,’ but it cannot, by possibility, assure you of being an object of that love till you first come to Christ, and be embraced by it in Him. Aught else would be utterly inconsistent with the mode in which His love was revealed, as well as with the source whence it flows. Love, that could not approach a sinner except through Christ’s rent body and shed blood, cannot, apart from Christ-crucified, be approached by a sinner. It cannot come but through divine blood to you, and you must not attempt to come to it except through the same channel. Let there be movements in desire and faith towards it as it is revealed in Christ, but let

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<sup>23</sup> John Knox, *Works* Volume 5 (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1856), p. 61.

<sup>24</sup> *Writings*, p. 116.

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<sup>25</sup> Samuel Rutherford, *Christ Dying*, p. 509.



there be no attempt to embrace it, as a loved one, till first, as a sinner, you embrace 'Jesus Christ as He is freely offered to us in the gospel.'<sup>26</sup>

Given this affinity between the love of God and the redemption purchased by Christ, and especially the prominence attributed to it by Scripture, the report's attempted exegesis of an incidental statement is most unsatisfactory.<sup>27</sup> One is not at liberty to overlook what the Scriptures positively teach upon the subject in question; for it may be that the express word of Scripture excludes what is being extracted from other portions of Scripture which do not speak so directly and explicitly. And that, as has been demonstrated, is true in the case before us.

The Scriptures explicitly refer to God's love as efficaciously bringing the objects of it into an estate of salvation, and that this estate, reciprocally, is the sole evidence that one is beloved of God. When the Shorter Catechism states that assurance of God's love is a benefit which accompanies justification, adoption, and sanctification, and that these in turn are benefits which pertain to those that are effectually called,<sup>28</sup> it is accurately representing the Scriptural presentation of the divine love as it respects sinners. There can be no personal assurance of God's love in the outward call of the gospel. Such assurance is spurious and delusive.

<sup>26</sup> John Kennedy, *The Father's Drawing* (Westminster Standard booklet, n.d.), n. p.

<sup>27</sup> In a separate article entitled 'The Atonement and the Free Offer of the Gospel,' Prof. Murray stated: "The atonement in none of its aspects can be properly viewed apart from the love of God as the source from which it springs." *Writings*, Volume 1, p. 62. The article goes on to provide a similar exegesis of Matthew 5:44-48 as that which is here being reviewed, and arrives at the same conclusion. Subsequently, on the basis of the affinity between God's love and the atonement, and having concluded that there is a sense in which God loves all men, the article asserts that there is a sense in which "Christ died for non-elect persons" (p. 68). As this is not a review of that article, it would not be appropriate to commence an examination of that assertion. It suffices to say, that the holy Scriptures are completely silent with regard to any non-saving benefits which flowed from the atonement to the reprobate; and those who presume to be teachers of the holy Scriptures would do well to imitate that silence and not set about to build such a doctrinal superstructure upon the foundation of an incidental statement.

<sup>28</sup> The Westminster Shorter Catechism, answers 36 and 32 respectively.

When that call is made effectual by the Holy Ghost working faith in the hearer, he is thereby united to Christ and made a partaker of all the benefits of His redemptive work. Then, and only then, can there be a genuine, personal assurance of God's love.

Obversely, the Scriptures are just as explicit with regard to God's hatred of the reprobate, as was demonstrated previously in connection with the introduction of the report. Whatever temporal benefits the reprobate enjoy as a result of God's providential care of the creature, the fact that the word *reprobate* implies God's purpose of displaying His justice with regard to them as sinners, means that every temporal benefit is a manifestation of God's just displeasure against them. And this may be confidently maintained, not on the basis of an incidental statement, but in the very words of inspiration: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Pet. 2:9).<sup>29</sup> Hence, the reprobate cannot properly be regarded as "beneficiaries" of God's favour. In the purpose of God, the temporal benefits received by the reprobate are the very means He uses to reserve them for punishment. This is what the Westminster Confession of Faith states with regard to God's providential dealings to them:

God, as a righteous Judge... not only withholdeth His grace, whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts; but sometimes also withdraweth the gifts which they had, and exposeth them to such objects as their corruption makes occasions of sin; and, withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan: whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> It might not be out of place to ask, in this connection, that if the temporal benefits enjoyed by the reprobate argue God's love to them, what do the temporal deficits endured by the elect argue? The logical conclusion would be God's hatred towards them. Yet, nobody would be prepared to concede such a conclusion. Why, then, should the argument from temporal benefit to divine love be embraced?

<sup>30</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 5, section 6.



As was stated earlier, the creature as God's creature was created good, and God undoubtedly exercises a providential care over His works, even rejoicing in them (Ps. 104:31). But the reprobate are not considered merely as creatures when God dispenses temporal benefits to them. They are "vessels of wrath fitted to destruction," and God is said to endure them "with much longsuffering" (Rom. 9:22). And this long-suffering is not presented as being in any sense for their benefit, as if He were patiently waiting for them to turn to Him that He might be favourable to them. No, it is so that "he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory" (verse 23). Thus, God's wrathful enduring of the reprobate is for the purpose of mercifully manifesting His glory to the elect. Every temporal benefit, therefore, which comes to the reprobate is not without purpose, but is made effectual to them for their inuring and making meet for damnation.

Psalms 11 makes this point clear in its demarcation of the righteous and the wicked in the sight of the Almighty. The context is the power and prosperity of the wicked, and the apparent defencelessness of the righteous in relation to it (verses 1-3). Yet, God is in heaven. His eyes behold and His eyelids try the children of men (verse 4). What follows is best left to David Dickson to describe, who has captured the very essence of the Psalm:

However he giveth the wicked and violent persecutor to have a seeming prosperity, while the godly are in trouble, yet that is no act of love to them: for *the wicked, and him that loveth violence, his soul hateth...* All the seeming advantages which the wicked have in their own prosperity, are but means of hardening them in their ill course, and holding them fast in the bonds of their own iniquities, till God execute judgment on them: *upon the wicked he shall rain snares...* Whatsoever be the condition of the wicked for a time, yet at length sudden, terrible, irresistible, and remediless destruction they shall not escape: *fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest is the portion of their cup.*<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> David Dickson, *Commentary on the Psalms* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1985), p. 51.

Such is the Biblical and reformed teaching on God's love to His elect and hatred of the reprobate. The next reference adduced by the report is Acts 14:17, but the report states that "this text does not express as much as those considered already."<sup>32</sup> Thus we may proceed to an examination of those texts which are said to imply that God wishes for things that never come to pass.

**DEUTERONOMY 5:29; 32:29; PSALM 81:13; ISAIAH 48:18**

"O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever!" (Deut. 5:29). "O that they were wise, *that* they understood this, *that* they would consider their latter end! (Deut. 32:29). "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, *and* Israel had walked in my ways!" (Ps. 81:13). "O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea." (Isa. 48:18).

"The purpose of adducing these texts is to note the optative force of that which is expressed;"<sup>33</sup> and the subsequent burden of the report's exegesis of these texts is to show the validity of the A.V. rendering of them in the optative mood. As there are good grounds for accepting this rendering, there is no need to give a detailed analysis of the exegesis. It is the conclusion being drawn from the rendering which is pertinent to this review. That conclusion is stated thus: "there can be no room for question but that the Lord represents himself in some of these passages as earnestly desiring the fulfilment of something which he had not in the exercise of his sovereign will actually decreed to come to pass."<sup>34</sup>

It is undoubtedly true that the Lord represents Himself in this manner. The question is, what is the nature of this representation? Prof. Murray did not offer any comment by way of

<sup>32</sup> *Writings*, p. 117.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.



substantiating a literal interpretation of the wording of these texts. Which is somewhat disappointing in view of the fact that John Calvin understood three of these four texts to be God speaking “after the manner of men.” As his comments pertinently state the case for a figurative interpretation of the wording, it might be appropriate to quote these in answer to the report’s assertion that these texts bear upon the point at issue.

In a sermon on Deut. 5:29, he says: “God therefore to make the people perceive how hard a matter it is to keepe the lawe, sayeth here, I would fayne it were so... True it is that here God speaketh after the maner of men: for he needeth no more but wish things done, all things are in his hand.” And a little later on the same text, “And why then doth he pretend to wish it in this text? It is bicause he speaketh after the maner of men, as he doeth in many other places. And (as I said afore) it is to the ende that when there is any mention made of walking in obedience to Godward, we should understand that it cannot bee done without hardnesse, and that our wits should be wakened to apply our selves earnestly to that studie.”<sup>35</sup>

On Ps. 81:13, he comments “The Hebrew particle... is not to be understood as expressing a condition, but a wish; and therefore God, I have no doubt, like a man weeping and lamenting, cries out, O the wretchedness of this people in wilfully refusing to have their best interests carefully provided for.”<sup>36</sup> Similarly, on Isa. 48:18, “This is therefore a figurative appropriation of human affections.”<sup>37</sup>

The appeal to these texts really proves too much. For the optative mood, while it may be restricted to a simple desire or wish, oftentimes carries the connotation of longing after, and that

in a mournful way when it is an unfulfilled longing, as the comment on Ps. 81:13 indicates. Hence, the texts beckon the reader to understand the expressions as God speaking after the manner of men. As David Dickson has qualified, the lamenting of God for His people’s misery “is not to be taken so, as if there were in God any passion or perturbation, or miserable lamentation: but this speech is to be conceived, as other like speeches in Scripture, which are borrowed from the affections of men, and are framed to move some holy affection in men, suitable to that affection from which the Lord taketh the similitude.”<sup>38</sup> Such expressions, then, are intended to instruct the hearers as to what their passion ought to be, not to indicate that God is characterised by such passions Himself.

When understood in this way, the *covenantal* language of the text comes to the fore, thereby enabling the interpreter to see the true intent of such passages. That these verses ought to be understood covenantally is clear from their context and terminology. Deut. 5:29 is Moses’ rehearsal of the covenant ratified at Mt. Sinai (Horeb in the book of Deuteronomy) for the benefit of the new generation which is about to enter into the promised land. 32:29 is the song of Moses which calls upon the heavens and earth to act as witnesses in the covenantal relationship which the Israelites bear to the Lord. It abounds in metaphorical language for this very reason. Nobody takes the language literally with regard to the Lord being a Rock, verse 4, or fearing the wrath of His enemies, verse 27. Why, then, is a literal import inconsistently suggested for the optative mood in verse 29? Both Ps. 81:13 and Isa. 48:17 refer to the hearers in the covenantal designation of “Israel,” with the former of these adding the words, “my people,” and the latter the words, “thy God.” And both similarly proceed to recount the promises of the covenant which the hearers have failed to become partakers of through their disobedience; the former speaking of the subduing of Israel’s enemies (Ps. 81:14), and the latter of the multiplication and preservation of her people (Isa. 48:18).

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<sup>35</sup> John Calvin, *Sermons on Deuteronomy*, Facsimile of 1583 edition (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), p. 260.

<sup>36</sup> John Calvin, ‘Commentary upon the Book of Psalms,’ in *Calvin’s Commentaries* Volume 5 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989), 2:323.

<sup>37</sup> John Calvin, ‘Commentary on Isaiah,’ in *Calvin’s Commentaries* Volume 8 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989), 1:487.

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<sup>38</sup> David Dickson, *Psalms*, p. 57.



It is the covenantal nature of these speeches which required the adoption (*ad extra*) of human thoughts and affections on the part of God in condescension to His people. In the covenant, God *identifies* Himself and His cause with the welfare and cause of His people. The enemies of His people become His enemies, the successes of His people become His successes, and the failures of His people become His failures, as the language of Deut. 32:27 signifies. The Almighty power of God becomes conditioned on the people's obedience or disobedience. At the building of the tabernacle, and later of the temple, His omnipresence becomes confined to the place where He puts His Name. Even His knowledge is sometimes represented as being limited to this special relationship which He has established with His people, and He is portrayed as repenting and changing His mind when He discovers that His people have acted in this or that way.

Such language does not reflect upon the nature of God, but only indicates the nature of the covenant relation with which God condescends to act in accord. Given the unchangeable and unconditional perfection of the Almighty, it is obvious that these types of Scriptural references are to be understood as His condescension to the weakness of man's capacity, as when the apostle spoke after the manner of men because of the infirmity of his hearers' flesh, Rom. 6:19. Thus, when God represents Himself as repenting, or of being unable to do anything more to procure the people's obedience, or expresses a *desire* for that which is contrary to His purpose, the language is to be understood anthropopathically, not literally.

Furthermore, the covenantal context of the speeches should enable us to see the error in the report's conclusion that God has not sovereignly willed what He here desires. The apostle to the Gentiles informs us that to the Israelites belong "the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9:4). His purpose was to assure his readers that the failure of certain individual Israelites does not mean that "the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (verse 6). Divine inspiration here teaches

an infallible rule for interpreting both the Old Testament promises to Israel and the divine expression of desire that those promises be fulfilled. It is that these promises were made to Israel *corporately*, not *individually*. They were made to Israel as elect, as Paul's subsequent teaching on election and reprobation demonstrates. So that the one in whom these promises are not fulfilled cannot be regarded as belonging to the true Israel, for "the children of the promise are counted for the seed" (verse 8). Thus, the divine expression of desire for His commandments to be obeyed and for His promises to come to fruition is not an unfulfilled desire at all. For God undertakes on behalf of elect Israel to put His laws into their minds and to write them in their hearts, so that the promise to be their God and to bless them as His people comes to fruition (Heb. 8:10).

So the report's conclusion from these texts is inadmissible on two accounts. 1. Because the language employed is not to be regarded literally, but figuratively, in accord with its covenantal context, as God speaking after the manner of men; and 2. Because the expression of desire is not with reference to a matter that shall be left unfulfilled, for God's sovereign grace ensures that His word of promise is not rendered ineffectual.

### **MATTHEW 23:37; LUKE 13:34**

The next passage to which the report referred is Matthew 23:37 in conjunction with Luke 13:34, the account of Jesus' lamentation over Jerusalem. By adducing these texts, the report draws attention to the fact that "the will of Christ in the direction of a certain benign result is set in contrast with the will of those who are contemplated as the subjects of such blessing."<sup>39</sup> Jesus *would* have gathered together the children of Jerusalem, but Jerusalem *would not*. This is unobjectionable, but quite irrelevant to the issue. For while Jesus is fully God, He is also fully man. And the expression of *pathos* which is found in this incident is only appropriate to a man. As David Dickson comments: "our Lord, as man, and a kindly minister of the circumcision moved

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<sup>39</sup> *Writings*, p. 119.



with humane compassion for the miseries of his native countrymen, lets forth his love in this lamentation and weeping, while he beholds the desperate obstinacy of the multitude running to perdition.”<sup>40</sup>

It was Prof. Murray’s stated opinion that such an interpretation is untenable, and that because Jesus is speaking as the God-man. Specifically, “In view of the transcendent, divine function which he says he wished to perform, it would be illegitimate for us to say that here we have simply an example of his human desire or will. It is surely, therefore, a revelation to us of the divine will as well as of the human.”<sup>41</sup>

Before commenting on the fallacy of this argument, the absurdity of it deserves some attention. The report would lead us to believe that Jesus, in His divine will, wished to *perform* the ingathering of Jerusalem’s children. Note, it is not a desire for a particular condition which He was unwilling to perform, as in the earlier aspects of the report’s argument. It is not stated that Jesus wished for their ingathering, but that He might *perform* this ingathering. Such a will to perform could only be decretive. Therefore, the report has asserted that the divine will of Jesus willed *to do* something which was not in accord with the divine will *to do*, and so Jesus was unable *to do* it. That is a contradiction in itself.

Then, according to the report, the reason why we are obliged to accept that it must have been the divine will to ingather the children of Jerusalem is because the very thing being willed was only competent to His divine power to perform. Adding this ingenious speculation to the already spicy broth of contradiction, the following is what the report has served up for our consumption. The divine will of Jesus willed to perform something which only His divine power could perform, but because the divine will of Jesus was out of accord with the divine will, He was not able to perform that which only His divine power could perform.

Such is the absurdity of the argument, for which alone it ought to be rejected. But there is a fallacy in it, namely, that only the divine will of Jesus could will what the divine power alone could perform. Our only means of demonstrating this fallacy is to reference the sole account where Jesus is explicitly said to wish something, albeit temporarily, which it was not the Father’s will to perform: His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. This is the *locus classicus* for demonstrating that Jesus did not only have one will, but two, a divine and a human will.

Matt. 26:39 says, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.” It was not in the power of Jesus’ humanity to remove the cup of suffering which He was about to drink down, and this is implied in the word “let.” Upon assuming human nature Christ subjected Himself to do God’s will, both legal and soteriological. This is clear from Heb. 10:7, “Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.” Moreover, it was clearly not the divine will which wished that this cup of suffering might pass from Him. It was the human will wishing that which was in accord with the moral principles of self-preservation. Thus the reasoning must be fallacious which suggests that only the divine will of Jesus could will what the divine power alone could perform. In the garden of Gethsemane the human will of Jesus wished what only the Father’s power could take from Him: that salvific cup of suffering and the bitter dregs thereof.

This fact serves also to refute another argument which the report has commended for the conclusion that Jesus revealed His divine will in the lamentation over Jerusalem. The argument is that there is a “perfect harmony and coalescence of will on the part of the Father and of the Son... To aver that Jesus in the expressed will of Matthew 23:37 is not disclosing the *divine* will but simply his own human will would tend towards very grave prejudice to this principle.”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> David Dickson, *A Brief Exposition of the Evangel of Jesus Christ according to Matthew* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1981), p. 317.

<sup>41</sup> *Writings*, p. 120.

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 121. It is highly inappropriate to refer to Christ’s divine will as *the* divine will and then speak of His human will as *his own* human will. This suggests that His divine will was somehow foreign to Him, while His human will was naturally His.



As the experience in the garden of Gethsemane demonstrates that one may Biblically prejudice the false principle of a perfect harmony between the will of the Father and the human will of the Son, the averment that it is the human will of Jesus which is expressed in Matthew 23:37, is both safe and sound.

### **EZEKIEL 18:23, 32; 33:11**

Ezek. 18:23, 32 and 33:11, with particular regard to the words, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked," are the passages next seized upon by the report. The covenantal context of these passages is clear from such addresses as "Hear now, O house of Israel" (18:25), and "Why will ye die, O house of Israel" (33:11). Thus, the dependence of the report upon these passages might be summarily dismissed by referring the reader to the previous comments regarding God's word not being made ineffectual because it has reference to Israel as elect. Yet, this can be demonstrated to be true with regard to the teaching of the Ezekiel passages themselves, and so it might serve as a more thorough rebuttal to the report if these were investigated in their own right.

The report's exegesis of these passages bore the burden of showing that it is not in the least justifiable "to limit the reference of these passages to any one class of wicked persons,"<sup>43</sup> that is, to the elect who do not die in their sins. The first consideration in support of this conclusion was the assertion that in Ezek. 33:4-9, "the wicked who actually die in their iniquity are contemplated."<sup>44</sup> This is not correct. The wording is conditional: "When... if... then..." The Lord is showing wherein blame will lie in certain hypothetical situations. a) If Ezekiel fails to warn the wicked of their danger, and if the wicked die in their iniquity, their blood shall be required at the prophet's hand. Or, b) if Ezekiel does warn the wicked of their danger, his soul shall be delivered whether the wicked dies in their iniquity or not. Thus, what is being contemplated is entirely hypothetical and solely for the benefit

of the prophet, that he might not shun to declare the whole counsel of God in his ministry. The house of Israel is not contemplated until verse 10 when the Lord entrusts His oracle to the prophet that he might warn the covenant people of their danger. Thus, the report's first consideration fails to support its conclusion.

The second consideration is that the phrase, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked," according to the report, "admits of no limitation or qualification; it applies to the wicked who actually die in their iniquity."<sup>45</sup> The difficulty of answering the report's defence of this statement is the fact that it has pounced upon the general wording of the text, separated it from its context, and proceeded to feed upon it to its own delight. Such a method ignores a fundamental hermeneutical principle. "That indefinite and general expressions are to be interpreted in answerable proportion to the things whereof they are affirmed."<sup>46</sup> By noting the words in their context it may readily be seen that the words are not a general assertion at all, because the word *wicked* is a certain class of wicked person who is being referred to in the surrounding verses.

In the first passage, the prophet is speaking against those who claimed that their punishment was because of their fathers' iniquities. This idea is renounced with the assertion that the wicked dies for his own wickedness, and concrete cases of that generation's wickedness are subsequently provided (verses 1-18). Then, in verses 19-22, the prophet states that *if* the wicked will turn from all his sins, his transgressions shall not be mentioned unto him, but he shall live in his righteousness. The hypothetical nature of the case and the conditional nature of the conclusion are noteworthy.

The significant words are subsequently spoken in the context of this hypothetical situation: "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? (verse 23). The reference is to the wicked *if* he will turn from his wickedness. God is saying, hypothetically, if the wicked will turn from his

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<sup>43</sup> *Writings*, p. 121.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122.

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> John Owen, *Works*, Volume 10, p. 348.





wickedness, I will have no pleasure in his perishing on account of either his father's or his own former sins. And this is borne out by the second half of the verse: "and not that he should return from his ways, and live." That is, God shall be pleased, *if* the wicked meets the condition and turns from his sins, to grant life to him on account of his righteousness, rather than to leave him to perish on account of his own and his father's sins.

Verse 24 obversely presses this same point. The prophet asks that *if* the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, should he be permitted to live? We should note the interrogative corresponding to the question of verse 23. It has the effect of asking, Does God have any pleasure at all that the righteous should live? That is, given the condition that the righteous one has turned to committing iniquity, he ought not to think that the Lord will reward him on account of either his father's or his own former righteousness.

Verses 25-30 press this point home in answer to the accusation that God was not acting equally towards them. The prophet concludes, in verse 30, that the Lord will judge every one according to his ways. Consequently, the house of Israel are exhorted to make for themselves a new heart and a new spirit (such as God promises to give them at the restoration, ch. 36), and not to perish on account of a foolish notion that God has acted inequitably towards them and shall make them perish for their fathers' sins. For God has "no pleasure in the death of *him* that dieth." As with the word *wicked* in verse 23, the word *him* is qualified by the context. It is he that makes for himself a new heart and a new spirit; God will not inflict punishment upon him on account of past sins. Rather, *if* he turns, it will be a repentance unto life, for God shall reward him according to his righteous standing before Him.

The second passage in Ezek. 33 is to much the same effect, but the question of the fathers' sins appears to be left out of view. That might be because this prophecy is spoken in anticipation of the announcement that Jerusalem has been destroyed in verses 21ff. In this context, the "death" referred to in the intervening verses of

10-20 is best understood as a departure of this life before the blessed restoration, while "life" is with reference to seeing and enjoying the blessings of a reconstituted kingdom, such as is presented in chaps. 40ff. Hence, Ezekiel's ministry is to take on a whole new orientation and he receives a new commission in verses 1-9 to that end. His calls of repentance are necessary if Israel is not going to "pine away" under the punishment of their transgressions (verse 10), but become a partaker again in the promised land.

In this context the words of verse 11 need to be understood: "Say unto them, As I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." That is, it does not please the Lord to continue punishing the wicked for past sins *if* he will turn from his wicked ways. Rather, He is pleased to grant life to the turning sinner. Verses 12-13 then reproduce the same reasoning of chapter 18 with regard to the hypothetical case of the righteous turning to wickedness and dying on account of that wickedness. Similarly, verses 14-16 repeat the hypothetical case of the wicked turning to righteousness and living. The importance of this section is the way in which it restates the case of verse 11 with regard to God having no pleasure in the death of the wicked. "When I say to the wicked that he shall surely die, *if* he turn from his sin... he shall surely live." The *if* is conditional, and the case is hypothetical. As God lives, He has no pleasure in the death of that wicked person whom He has condemned to death *if* that wicked person will turn from his wickedness. The conclusion is only realised *when* the condition is met. The reformer, John Knox, in his treatise *On Predestination*, has related this sense of the passage well:

The minde of the Prophete was to stirre such as had declined from God, to returne unto him by true repentance. And because their iniquities were so many, and offenses so great, that justly they might have despaired of remission, mercie, and grace, therefore doth the Prophet, for the better assurance of those that should repent, affirme, 'That God deliteth not, neither willeth the death of the wicked.' But of which wicked?



Of him, no doubt, that truly should repent, in his death did not, nor never shall God delite. But he deliteth to be known a God that sheweth mercye, grace, and favour to such as unfeinedly call for the same, how greivous so ever their former offenses have been.<sup>47</sup>

In this light, the report's disjointed exegesis of the Ezekiel passages misses the mark. The statement, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, does admit of a qualification. It is the qualification imposed by the context that the wicked are being hypothetically considered as turning from their wicked ways. It does not apply "to the wicked who actually die in their iniquity." It applies, hypothetically, to any within the house of Israel who would be of a mind to turn from wickedness and cease from charging God with injustice because of His judgements. Hence, the report's second consideration also fails to support its conclusion. It is justifiable, then, to limit the reference of these passages to one class of wicked persons.

### ISAIAH 45:22

Isaiah 45:22, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," is referred to by the report as expressing "the will that all should turn to him and be saved. What God wills in this sense he certainly is pleased to will. If it is his pleasure to will that all repent and be saved, it is surely his pleasure that all repent and be saved."<sup>48</sup>

That the text expresses "the will that all should turn to him and be saved," there can be no debating; for the word *should* speaks of the *obligation* to turn and be saved. Likewise, there can be no debating with the ensuing sentence: "What God wills in this sense he certainly is pleased to will." For, as was stated in the context of the report's introduction, God's preceptive will is the duty which He is pleased to *oblige* men to. But somehow the report adds 1 to 1 and, instead of arriving at 2, suggests that the answer is 11. For the next sentence says: "If it is his pleasure

to will that all repent and be saved, it is surely his pleasure that all repent and be saved."

The conclusion is inconsistent with what was premised. It was premised that God wills that all *should* turn to Him and be saved, not that God wills *that* all turn to Him and be saved. As with the introduction of the report, there is here discovered an inability to distinguish between *obligation* and *futurition*. The conclusion that it is God's will and pleasure *that* all repent and be saved, is a will and pleasure for the *futurition* of the event, and predicates something of the decretive aspect of God's will. The correct conclusion, given the premises of the syllogism, would thus have been: it is surely his pleasure that all *should* repent and be saved.

Thus restricting the preceptive will to the realm of *obligation*, the report would have been delivered of the error of asserting two contradictory things with regard to God's will. As it stands, however, it has said that God both wills and does not will *that* all be saved. It is to no avail to name one of these wills preceptive whilst accrediting to it a decretive nature. Such a procedure only serves to confuse the issue.

### 2 PETER 3:9

The final text to be reviewed is 2 Pet. 3:9, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." The report states that in the light of what it has already found "there is no reason in *the analogy of Scripture* why we should not regard this passage as teaching that God in the exercise of his benevolent longsuffering and lovingkindness wills that none should perish, but that all should come to repentance."<sup>49</sup> Given the spuriousness of the report's findings up to this point, however, *the analogy of Scripture* would require us to regard this passage as not teaching such an abominable universalism.

It is to be clarified that the text does not say that *in* His longsuffering God wills that none

<sup>47</sup> John Knox, *Works*, Volume 5, p. 410.

<sup>48</sup> *Writings*, p. 127.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*



should perish. The wording is that God is long-suffering to *us-ward*. That is, God acts in a particular way towards the objects of His longsuffering and that is because He is not willing that they should perish. The will here is not a will of command, but of decree. It is God acting for the purpose of procuring what He has willed. And the word *should* cannot signify obligation in this context. In the original, the infinitive is employed — *to perish* — so that a more accurate rendering would be that God “is not willing for any to perish.” So, once again, the report has predicated that God both wills and does not will that all be saved, and this in the same sense, decretively.

It is impossible to generalise the last clause of 2 Pet. 3:9 for the purpose of making it inclusive of all men. The clause is subordinate and the construction, *eis* plus the infinitive, is best understood as a final or purpose clause. As it is a subordinate clause, it is dependent upon a principal clause for its interpretation. The principal clause in this passage is the longsuffering being displayed to *us-ward*. It is being displayed to *us-ward* for the purpose that all might come to repentance. The *all*, therefore, must be *all of us*, for it is qualified by the principal clause. God is longsuffering to *us-ward* so that all of us might come to repentance.

Four considerations are suggested by the report for applying this Scripture to a universal context, but as the third and fourth are dependent upon the second consideration, it is only necessary to address the first two.

The first consideration is that the delay of the coming of judgment should be acknowledged as a manifestation of God’s longsuffering with sinners in general. This is in contradiction to the very evidence which the report produces. It says that long-suffering (*makrothumia*) as an action of God is only instanced in one other place (Luke 18:7), and “it probably relates to the elect.”<sup>50</sup> The text reads: “And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them.” Next, it alleges that Rom. 9:22 “presents a clear instance where it has in

view an attitude of God towards the reprobate; he ‘endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath.’”<sup>51</sup> True, but the enduring is *of* them, not *towards* them. Verse 23 states that the enduring with the reprobate is for the purpose “that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy.”

The second consideration relies upon a variant reading of “you” instead of “us.” God is longsuffering to *you-ward*. The reading of the Received Text has excellent support, and need not be altered. However, for the sake of the argument and in order not to become side-tracked onto another issue, the report’s adoption of this corrupted reading shall be addressed at face value. It states: “Even if the ‘you’ is restricted to professing Christians, one cannot exclude the possibility that reprobate men were also in view.”<sup>52</sup>

Besides the fact that “possibilities” have never been regarded as a sound basis for the exegesis of any text, it is to be observed that whether there were reprobate men amongst the readership of Peter or not, they are not addressed as such, and so may not be regarded as being in view. As John Owen insightfully remarks: “Neither is it of any weight to the contrary, that they were not all elect to whom Peter wrote: for in the judgment of charity he esteemed them so, desiring them ‘to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure,’ chap. i. 10; even as he expressly calleth those to whom he wrote his former epistle, ‘elect,’ chap. i. 2, and a ‘chosen generation,’ as well as a ‘purchased people,’ chap. ii. 9.”<sup>53</sup> To which might be added the substantiating evidence that the second epistle of Peter was written to the same audience as the first, which is clear from 2 Pet. 3:1, “This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you.” And just prior to the verse being disputed, the apostle has repeated this denomination of his readers as *beloved* (3:8). Clearly, then, the *you-ward* (*us-ward*), are the beloved, who are referred to as the

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>53</sup> John Owen, *Works*, Volume 10, p. 348, 349.



elect who must give all diligence to make their calling and election sure.

**CONCLUSION**

Herein concludes the review. The report has suggested that the desire being predicated of God for the salvation of all men applies to the preceptive will and not the decretive will of God. Our review has demonstrated that this is in name only because the desire for something *to be*, is a desire for its futuration, and so applies to the decretive will.

The report has suggested that there is a disposition of loving-kindness towards all men expressed in the gospel. Our review has replied that there can be no disposition *towards* the creature which is not decreed.

The report has suggested that the temporal benefits which the reprobate enjoy are an expression of God’s love and favour. Our review has answered that if it is appropriate to speak of a general love of God it must of necessity be restricted to the creature as a creature, not as a sinner or a reprobate. The disposition of God towards the reprobate which these temporal benefits express is conditioned by His decree of reprobation to hate the vessels of wrath and to reserve them, by means of these benefits, for everlasting damnation.


The report has suggested that the Divine employment of optatives expresses a desire on the part of God for that which never comes to pass. Our review has commented that these can only be understood covenantally, as God speaking after the manner of men in order to act in accord with the covenant relationship He bears to His people. Moreover, according to the Scripture’s own testimony, these expressions of desire are not made of no effect, but do come to pass in the elect, their proper point of reference.

The report has suggested that our Lord’s lamentation over Jerusalem was an expression of the divine will. Having shown the absurdity and fallacy of the argument presented in support of this, our review counteracted that the *pathos*

being expressed was only suitable to the human will.

The report has suggested that the Ezekiel passages are to be understood as God having no pleasure in the death of the wicked generally, and absolutely. Our review has contextually exegeted those texts and concluded that the passage speaks of a hypothetical case wherein the wicked is presented as fulfilling the condition of turning from his wickedness.

The report has suggested that the command in Isa. 45:22, to look unto God and be saved, indicates God’s pleasure *that* all be saved. Our review has found that the conclusion was not a logical inference from the premises, but another confusing of the ideas of obligation and futuration, of the preceptive and the decretive aspects of God’s will.

Finally, the report has suggested that 2 Pet. 3:9 is to be universalised so as to suggest that God is not willing for anyone to perish but for everyone to come to repentance, and that his longsuffering is towards sinners in general. Our review has evidenced that the structure of the sentence requires the *all* to be qualified by the principal clause so that it refers to the objects of God’s longsuffering, and that the objects of God’s longsuffering are the readers who are addressed and regarded as elect. 

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# The Gospel and the Free Church Act of 1892.

The following originally appeared in *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* in 1896 as “Explanatory Criticism On the Declaratory Act (v. 1 #4, 121-125, continued v. 1 #5, 161-167) and continued in several more articles. See *The Free Presbyterian Magazine and Monthly Record Volume 1* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, [c.1999]) 121-125; 161-167. The following are reprinted as they apply to the current issue of *The Blue Banner*. Copyright © 2000 Free Presbyterian Publications.

*by James Sinclair*

## PART ONE

s we believe there still exists, in many quarters, much ignorance as to the exact nature of the doctrinal views embodied in the Free Church Declaratory Act of 1892, we purpose to give, in part at least, in this article, an explanatory criticism of the Act, clause by clause, in as brief a manner as the extent and importance of the subject will allow. Before doing so, we make a few observations in regard to the affirmed necessity for a Declaratory Act. We find that it has been widely proclaimed by speech and pen that a Declaratory Act was necessary for the good of the Church, as many persons had difficulty in taking office, because of certain expressions of doctrine contained in the Confession of Faith. It is very apparent, however, to all observers that the present age is distinguished for great laxity of opinion on religious subjects in general, and that men, from lack of reverence to any authority in heaven or earth, but their own narrow reason, are ready to kick against all fixed doctrinal standards even though these should be clearly supported by the unerring Word of God.

We, therefore, maintain that if ever there was a time in which it was necessary to hold forth in clear and uncompromising terms the great unchanging and unchangeable doctrines of the Word of God as embodied in the Confession, the time is now. Instead of this, the Free Church, in order to please the fickle tastes of carnal men has traitorously lowered the standard of accepted truth, and weakened down the saving doctrines

of the Gospel, so that they shall be powerless for any spiritual good to this or future generations. Instead of a Declaratory Act in favour of the weak and erroneous doctrines of Arminianism, we as a generation stood much more in need of an Act that would give forth a bold and unflinching testimony for the strong and life-giving doctrines of Calvinism. When the enemy comes in like a flood, it is not to adopt his standard that the Spirit of the Lord leads the true Church, but to raise a standard against him. At the Disruption of 1843, great popular interest was aroused in the doctrine of Christ's headship over His Church. The rights of the Christian people to choose their own pastors were interfered with by the State. The whole body of the people rose as one man to shake off the fetter of patronage. But what has happened now? We have fallen into such a low condition that the greatest apathy prevails even when the very life-blood of the Church — those doctrines with which are bound up the salvation of immortal souls — is being filched away. People complain they do not understand the doctrines of the Declaratory Act; but if they were truly exercised as to the foundation of their hope for eternity, they would know the difference between a false and a true doctrinal foundation.

We now proceed to consider the Declaratory Act of 1892 in its various sections. The Act opens as follows: — “Whereas it is expedient to remove difficulties and scruples which have been felt by some in reference to the declaration of belief required from persons who receive licence or are admitted to office in this Church, the General



Assembly, with consent of Presbyteries, declare as follows: — I. That, in holding and teaching, according to the Confession, the divine purpose of grace toward those who are saved, and the execution of that purpose in time, (*a*) this Church most earnestly proclaims, as standing in the forefront of the revelation of grace, the love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, to sinners of mankind, manifested especially in the Father's gift of the Son to be the Saviour of the world, in the coming of the Son to offer Himself a propitiation for sin, and in the striving of the Holy Spirit with men to bring them to repentance."

The preamble of the Act sets forth that it was framed to "remove difficulties and scruples which have been felt by some in reference to the declaration of belief required" from candidates for office in the Church. The Confession of Faith is a document of almost unparalleled merit for lucidity and fulness of doctrinal statement, and there is not the slightest doubt that the difficulties and scruples referred to have arisen, not from any ambiguity or obscurity in the Confession, but from the natural opposition of the human heart to the gospel truths therein contained. In this assertion we are borne out by the kind of objections that have been raised during recent years to the Confession and also by the character of the remedy provided in this Act to remove these objections.

The Act, instead of casting light upon the doctrines of the Confession, does its best to shroud them in obscure and ambiguous language. The language, however, while tending to obscure the Calvinism of the Confession, is a fit vehicle for expressing the doctrines of Arminianism. The remedy that has thus been provided for difficulties and scruples is more dangerous than the disease. Truth is the only cure for difficulties. If error becomes the cure the individual is in a worse case than ever. That this is the nature of the remedy provided in the Declaratory Act will appear in the course of our exposition. After the preamble, the first topics treated of are the sovereignty and love of God. These are included under the first three paragraphs of the Act, one of which we have given above. In this paragraph the framers have

divorced "the purpose" from "the love" of God. They announce that in holding and teaching the purpose of grace "this Church most earnestly proclaims, *as standing in the forefront of the revelation of grace*, the love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to sinners of mankind." The love of God to sinners of mankind is represented as something distinct from, and something more prominent than the purpose of grace. Now we find that no such distinction is observed in Scripture. The purpose of grace and the love of God have reference to the same objects. It is they whom God the Father "predestinated to be conformed to the image of His Son that He might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29) whom, in the language of the Apostle John; He also loved. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God." (1 John 3:1).

The purpose of grace in predestination and the love of God have reference to the same blessings to be conferred and the same objects for whom these blessings are destined. The intention of the framers of the Act was evidently to hide the decree of predestination as much as possible out of view, and to bring to the front the love of God as something more attractive in the eyes of men. It is further evident that the love of God, of which the Act speaks, is not that love which actually stands in the forefront of the revelation of grace. The love of God, which stands in the forefront of the revelation of grace, is not His universal benevolence to His creatures, whereby He makes the sun to shine and the rain to fall upon the evil and the good. It is a love certainly to sinners, but it is a love to those who were "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world." It is the electing love of God which stands on the forefront of divine revelation. This is a love which He bears to special objects; not in virtue of any merit in them — for they equally with all others have none — but solely of His free good pleasure.

We are told in Eph. 5:25 that "Christ *loved* the Church and gave Himself for it." It was the same love which was in the Son that was in the Father, and this love had special reference to the Church for whom, and not for all men, He gave Himself. We regard it therefore a serious deviation, not



only from the doctrine of the Confession, but also from that of the word of God, to declare any love as standing in the forefront of the revelation of grace but the sovereign and electing love of God. It is quite evident, from further expressions in the Act, that it is a universal love to sinners of which it speaks, for the Act goes on to say that this love is “manifested *especially* in the Father’s gift of the Son to be the Saviour of the world.”

The emphasis in this clause rests upon the word “especially,” which we have italicised. The use of this word clearly implies that the love spoken of is manifested in other ways besides in the Father’s gift of the Son. In a word, the gift of the Son, which the Scriptures as in Rom. 8:32, 33 evidently declare as proceeding from the Father’s love to the elect, is set forth as proceeding from God’s general love or goodness to mankind. This latter is a doctrine which has no foundation in Scripture, but seriously affects the whole scheme of redemption as revealed. We further take strong exception to the use of the expression “the Saviour of the world.” This expression is quite scriptural in itself, but as it stands in the Act it lacks its context. The immediate context and the analogy of Scripture explain to what extent the expression “world” may be taken — namely, not to all men, but to men in every age and country of the world, irrespective of rank or moral character. Common sense further tells us that the Lord Jesus is not the actual Saviour of the whole world, for many who heard the Gospel will be found on the left hand at last. The use of the expression, however, as it appears in the Act clearly implies that we are to take the words literally, as no explanation is appended. This gives the false impression that the Father gave the Son, not to be the Saviour of the elect only, but of the world at large.

The next clause confirms our belief in the Arminian character of this section of the Act. The love of God the Father is said to be manifested “in the coming of the Son to offer Himself a propitiation for sin.” We have here again the use of the general word “sin,” which, being given without any explanation such as the context of Scripture affords, we are fully warranted in understanding as inclusive of all sin whatsoever.

On the atonement of Christ, for the Church or the elect only, the Scriptures are very explicit. He “loved the Church and gave Himself for it.” “The Church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” “Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity.” (Titus 2:14). The latter verse clearly proves that He gave Himself for special individuals, not to procure merely possibility of redemption, but actually to redeem them from all iniquity. Such passages set forth that Christ died only for the elect. The statement of the Act in the use of the word “sin,” sets aside these passages, and practically affirms a universal atonement. But the last clause of this section of the Act proves, as clear as noonday, that the love spoken of *is universal in its character*. The love of God the Holy Spirit is said to be especially manifested “in the striving of the Holy Spirit with men to bring them to repentance.” This is so plainly contradictory to the teaching of Scripture that it almost refutes itself. In Titus 3:4-6 the love of God is declared to appear, not in striving, but “in the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” The goodness of the Spirit appears in His striving with sinners, but His love, beyond all contradiction, is manifested in the work of regeneration. He strives, and yet men perish for ever in their sins. But when He regenerates the soul He applies the redemption purchased by Christ, and the sinner is saved with an everlasting salvation. Herein verily is the love of the Spirit especially manifested. It is quite apparent that the love of the Holy Spirit, according to the Act, is a general and not a special love. If He loves all with whom He strives then He loves all who hear the Gospel, many of whom are lost for ever. But that He loves all men is plainly at variance with the Word of God and general experience, for if that were so He would regenerate and save all.

In concluding our observations in this section of the Act, we point out that the love of the Spirit as here spoken of sheds light upon the way in which we are to view the love of the Father and of the Son, as stated in the preceding clauses. The love of each person in the Godhead must necessarily be equal in strength, for the Three Persons are





the same in substance equal in power and glory. The love revealed in Scripture “is the love of one God, and, therefore, the same in each Person of the Godhead. If, therefore, the love of the Spirit amounts only to an ineffectual striving with men, and does not absolutely secure the salvation of any, then the love of the Father and of the Son is of the same character. The love of God, therefore, as stated in this Act is not a love unto salvation. It is simply a mere sentiment of goodwill that does not secure the salvation of anyone in particular. The whole result depends upon some act on the part of the sinner, so that salvation, according to this theory, is of man and not of God. To show that the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost is a love that infallibly secures the salvation of its objects, we need only point our readers to passages already quoted. The love of the Father is revealed in Eph. 1:4, as choosing sinners to Christ that “they should be holy and without blame before Him in love,” the love of the Son in Eph. 5:25, as giving Himself for the Church, “that He might sanctify and cleanse it,” and the love of the Spirit in Titus 3:5, is spoken of as “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost.” The soul that lays hold of any other love for salvation than this electing, redeeming, and renewing love embraces a delusion, and not the sure foundation laid in Zion. What serious consequences such delusive teaching as is contained in this Act has upon men’s minds we shall not at present enlarge upon.

## **Part Two**

We now proceed to examine the second paragraph under the first section of the Act, which runs as follows: — *(b)* “That this Church also holds that all who hear the Gospel are warranted and required to believe to the saving of their souls; and that in the case of such as do not believe, but perish in their sins, the issue is due to their own rejection of the Gospel call. That this Church does not teach, and does not regard the Confession as teaching, the foreordination of men to death irrespective of their own sin.”

This paragraph, to begin with, deals with the general call of the Gospel. We are fully agreed that all who hear the Gospel are under obligation

to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation. But this obligation, we hold, rests upon the direct command of God, and the suitableness of the Gospel provision to men as sinners, and not upon supposed universal love, or universal atonement, as seems to be the case here, from the close connection between this and the preceding clause, which we have already dealt with. The Arminian Gospel is, “God loves all, Christ died for all, and the Holy Spirit strives with all,” and this is almost verbally the Gospel we find in the Declaratory Act. The command to believe, referred to in this clause, is evidently grounded upon such universal propositions as these, which afford a false and unscriptural basis for faith. We also observe, that no reference is made here to the person of Christ as the object of faith. The command of the Gospel is, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.” Many may believe the Gospel, as they believe a piece of history, and remain spiritually ignorant of Christ. On the other hand, saving faith in Christ springs from a revelation to the soul of His divine glory, sufficiency, and suitableness as a Saviour. No one, therefore, savingly believes the Gospel, except he is enlightened by the Holy Ghost as to the person and work of Christ. To believe unto salvation is not something which men can do, upon invitation, as easily as a common task, but can only be performed after the reception of spiritual life and enlightenment by the Spirit of God. This all-important aspect of the Gospel appears here to be lost sight of in the haste to emphasise the universality of the Gospel call.

We also regard as unsatisfactory the reference to those who “do not believe, but perish in their sins.” It is said, “the issue is due to their own rejection of the Gospel call.” Whilst we can so far agree with this statement, we feel that it is written so as to hide from view the solemn, but nevertheless indisputable fact referred to in ch. 3, sect. 7, of the Confession, that God has in strict justice for sin passed by some of the human race, whilst He has chosen others unto salvation. It would also seem from the language of the Act that man, without special grace, was quite capable of receiving the Gospel, and that everything depended upon free will. Probably this



the framers might deny, but we see nothing expressed that would prevent such an interpretation, and they ought to have been as careful to guard against error as to expound what they imagined to be truth.

In conclusion, we do not think that the universality of the Gospel call was an aspect of the truth that required any special emphasis at the present time. Our fathers, both in the near and remote past, never failed to give due prominence to this aspect of the Gospel, and it is only an insult to the living and the dead to bring it forth in the way done in this Act, as if it were hidden or obscured until now. The best Scottish Calvinistic Theology is full of it. Who could give a freer and more liberal offer of Christ to sinners than Samuel Rutherford, one of the leading framers of the Confession of Faith?

We now take up the second clause of this paragraph, which is to the effect: — “that this Church does not teach, and does not regard the Confession as teaching, the foreordination of men to death, irrespective of their own sin.” This clause deals with the relations of foreordination and sin. The emphasis lies upon the words, “their own,” and the meaning appears to be that men are not foreordained to death, temporal, spiritual, or eternal, irrespective of their own personal sin. This teaching is in direct contradiction to the truth as stated in the 5th chapter of the Romans. We are told there that “by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned.” Adam stood not only for himself but also for his posterity, and so by his sin death passed upon all men. “By the offence of one many be dead.” It is also written in I Corinthians 15:22, that “in Adam all die.” Temporal death is one form of this death. The Act therefore denies, for example, that the temporal death of infants takes place on account of Adam’s sin, a fact evidently asserted in Rom. 5:14. It does more however; it denies that the spiritual death under which all men are born is in consequence of the imputation of Adam’s first sin. It may even be taken as denying that we are born in a state of spiritual death at all, for it associates death only with one’s own personal sin. If the Act refers however, as some affirm,

only to everlasting death, the omission of the word ‘everlasting’ is a serious one, for the clause, as it stands, embraces temporal, spiritual, and everlasting death. But even in this latter case the teaching is quite erroneous.

If Adam stood for all his seed, then by his sin all were made liable not only to temporal and spiritual, but also to everlasting death, for the wages of sin involve the curse of God which eternity alone can exhaust. “Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.” (Gal. 3:10). “Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.” (Matt. 25:41). The logical consequence clearly is, that in Adam the whole race merited by his sin the curse of God, which is everlasting death. But if, according to the Act, men are not foreordained to death, “irrespective of their own sin,” then Adam’s sin did not merit for the race everlasting death, which consequently implies either that Adam did not stand for his posterity, or that his sin deserved less than the curse of God. The latter alternative may be regarded as too absurd a conclusion. We are therefore justified in affirming, in virtue of the former, that the Act, by implication, denies that Adam stood for his posterity. The denial of this doctrine may appear to some of little consequence, but, if the subject is carefully studied, it will be seen that a denial of Adam’s federal headship not only unhinges our views in regard to man’s natural state, but also seriously affects our views of Christ’s federal headship as the second Adam, and of the way of salvation through Him. If it is unwarrantable to say that Adam stood for his seed, it is equally so to say that Christ stood for His people. The denial therefore of Adam’s representative character has consequences of a serious and far-reaching character upon the welfare of men. For it is only by right apprehensions of the truth about sin and salvation that men will be converted from the error of their ways, and the cause of Christ advanced in the world.

We now pass on to consider the third paragraph under section I: — (c) “That it is the duty of those who believe, and one end of their calling by God, to make known the Gospel to all men everywhere,



for the obedience of faith. And that while the Gospel is the *ordinary* means of salvation for those to whom it is made known, yet it does not follow, nor is the Confession to be held as teaching, that any who die in infancy are lost, or that God may not extend His mercy for Christ's sake, and by His Holy Spirit, to those who are beyond the reach of these means, as it may seem good to Him, according to the riches of His grace."

In the opening words of this paragraph it is declared to be "the duty of those who believe to make known the Gospel to all men everywhere." It has been always held by the Church of Christ that it is the duty of believers to make known the Gospel to all men by their life and conversation, but it has never been held that it is their duty to preach or conduct religious services. According to this clause, it is "one end of their calling by God" to preach or declare the Gospel. For the expression "make known" is evidently general enough to embrace this as well as other forms of setting forth the Gospel. We think this doctrine is of the essence of Plymouth Brethrenism, and is inconsistent with the system of pastors and teachers, which God has instituted in His Church. In the Presbyterian Church scope has certainly been given to Christian laymen to exercise their gifts both in public prayer and public address, but it has never been affirmed that it was the duty of all such thus to make known the Gospel. Many excellent men have lacked special gifts, especially in the direction of public address. It is further evident that this clause gives full liberty to women to declare or preach the Gospel, for it is said to be "the duty of those who believe," — men or women, without distinction — "to make known the Gospel to all men everywhere." Women are at liberty, according to the Scriptures, to be helpers in the Gospel, but it is not their duty to occupy the position of preachers. This position the Declaratory Act gives them full liberty to assume. The words, "to all men everywhere," clearly indicate that liberty is given to these and all others to make known the gospel, not only in private, but also in public. We think, therefore, that this provision is wise above the revealed will

of God. For persons who have no Scriptural call or fitness thus to engage themselves, this is to adopt expedients upon which the blessing of God cannot be expected to rest. Now-a-days, in connection with the Churches, there are multitudes of "workers" so called, many of whom would be better engaged at home striving to enter in at the strait gate, and seeking to learn the divine art of prayer at a throne of grace.

We further observe that this paragraph affirms "That while the Gospel is the *ordinary* means of salvation for those to whom it is made known, yet it does not follow, nor is the Confession to be held as teaching, that any who die in infancy are lost." The first thing which calls for our attention is that which is said of the Gospel as "the ordinary means of salvation." There is something very suspicious about this mode of expression, and if it is meant that there are some other extraordinary means of salvation available for hearers of the Gospel, nothing could be more contradictory to the plainest teaching of Scripture. Witness the words, "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). The next matter is the reference to infants. The Confession has already spoken with the utmost wisdom and carefulness on this subject. It says, "Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit." It pronounces no opinion on whether all or some are elect, as the Scriptures have given no absolute decision. We would desire, however, to call particular attention to the terms of the Confessional statement. Many people not knowing the Scriptures or their own hearts are ready to ground the salvation of infants upon their early age or supposed innocence. If infants are saved, let it be observed, it is, first, because they are "elect," secondly, because they are "saved by Christ," and thirdly, because they are "regenerated through the Spirit." Nothing more is needed for adult persons, and nothing less is needed for infants. Let no one therefore suppose that infants slip into heaven without requiring any inward change. They are by nature corrupt in heart, and children of wrath. There is nothing in them that a holy God can look upon with complacency. They require,



therefore, a second birth before they can enter the kingdom of heaven. And who would be bold enough to impugn the holiness and justice of God although the whole corrupt human race, both infant and adult, had been shut out of that holy place? We know nothing aright if we do not hold that salvation is of free and sovereign grace both to the infant of days and to the man of mature years. "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." The framers of the Act would have done well to adhere to the careful words of the Confession on this subject. At the present day especially, there is such manifest wickedness and carelessness in regard to the upbringing of the young, and in the lower grades of society, even in regard to their very life, that we little need opiates to dull the consciences of parents and guardians as to their responsibilities.

The closing sentence of this paragraph asserts that the Confession is not to be held as teaching "that God may not extend His mercy for Christ's sake, and by His Holy Spirit to those who are beyond the reach of these means," that is, the Gospel, described above as "the ordinary means of salvation." For this statement there is no warrant in Scripture. The persons spoken of as "beyond the reach of these means" are evidently the heathen, and we think it ill becomes the Free Church that has shown so much missionary activity to speak of any as beyond the reach of the means, or as being saved without the Gospel. Further, the expression "beyond the reach of these means" is not a true statement of the case. There are none in the most remote parts of the earth that are beyond the reach of the means. God is able to send the Gospel by His servants to any corner of the world. This clause, nevertheless, affirms the very dangerous and pernicious error, that "God may extend His mercy" to those who are without the Gospel. This teaching is in the most manifest contradiction to Scripture. We are told in Rom. 2:12 concerning the Gentiles, that "as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law," which plainly declares that the Gentiles, who had not the Jewish revelation, perished in their sins. And the heathen who are today without law or Gospel are in a similar position, and so must likewise

perish. The framers of this Act shut their eyes to the truth as stated in the above passage.


We also find in the Scriptures abundant testimony to the fact that men require to know the Gospel before they can be saved. No other way is once hinted at. The parting message of the Lord Jesus to His disciples was, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark 16:15), unmistakably announcing that no creature in all the world could be saved without the Gospel. We are surprised, in face of a passage such as this, that men can speak of a possibility of salvation without the Gospel. Again, the Apostle Paul by the Holy Ghost thus addresses the Ephesians, "In whom (i.e., in Christ) ye also trusted after ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation." (Eph. 1:13). The word of truth is here said to be the Gospel of their salvation. He also declares in the 2nd chapter of this epistle that in their natural state they were "children of wrath" (v. 3), and therefore liable to perish for ever without the Gospel. It is also written by the Apostle Peter that the Word of God is the seed of the new birth, "being born again of incorruptible seed, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." (I Peter 1:23). Sinners are also said to be "saved through faith," the gift of God. (Eph. 2:7). How does faith spring up? "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." (Rom. 10:17). These passages further confirm the truth that it is by the Word of God, and by it alone, accompanied by the Spirit, that sinners are born again. A passage already quoted sets a final seal upon the necessity of the Gospel of Christ for salvation. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12). The word "name" points out that Christ must be preached in the hearing of men and His person and work made known that they may be saved.

But to show that at least one leading man in the Free Church holds the view contained in this clause of the Act, we may mention that we heard Professor Marcus Dods declare on one occasion from his chair in the New College that there would be many on the right hand at the great day who had had "no knowledge of the historical



Christ.” This conclusion he drew from the answer given by the righteous, narrated in Matt. 25:37, “Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee?” &c. From the King’s reply, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,” he affirmed that in whatever part of the world men are found doing good to their fellowmen, there we find “the spirit of Christ.” All persons who were engaged thus in doing good would be found on the right hand. This is clearly a perversion of the obvious meaning of the passage, and of Christian doctrine in general. But it shows what pernicious views may be held in consistency with the doctrine that God may extend His mercy to those who have not heard the Gospel. We cannot but wonder that the Lord Jesus should have sent forth so many servants in apostolic and later times, who gave their lives for the Gospel, if some other way was

available for the conversion of men. Surely the very end for which the Gospel was given was that its sound might go throughout the world (Rom. 10:18), and those who knew its unspeakable value were willing to sacrifice all earthly comforts, and endure the most cruel deaths, that the Gospel might be known among men everywhere as the power of God unto salvation.

The Free Church, by adopting this clause, puts a dagger into all true missionary effort. If her missionaries hold this view, as we have no doubt some of them do, the Gospel they proclaim, and their efforts to proclaim it, will be detrimentally affected thereby. We have, indeed, no ground for concluding that the Gospel that is now proclaimed abroad is one whit better than that which is preached at home. In fact, the question arises if this clause is true, “What need is there for missionaries to the heathen at all?” 

## Mediatorial Kingdom and Glories of Jesus Christ

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### Christ’s Mediatorial Kingdom

Samuel Davies

“As Mediator he [Christ] is carrying on a glorious scheme for the recovery of man, and all parts of the universe are interested or concern themselves in this grand event; and therefore they are all subjected to him, that he may so manage them as to promote this end, and baffle and overwhelm all opposition. The elect angels rejoice in so benevolent a design for peopling their mansions, left vacant by the fall of so many of their fellow-angels, with colonies transplanted from our world, from a race of creatures that they had given up for lost. And therefore Christ, as a Mediator, is made the head of all the heavenly armies, and he employs them as his ministering spirits, to minister to them that are heirs of salvation. These glorious creatures are always on the wing ready to discharge his orders in any part of his vast empire, and delight to be employed in

the services of his mediatorial kingdom. This is also an event in which the fallen angels deeply interest themselves; they have united all their force and art for near six thousand years to disturb and subvert his kingdom, and blast the designs of redeeming love; they therefore are all subjected to the control of Christ, and he shortens and lengthens their chains as he pleases, and they cannot go a hair’s breath beyond his permission.”

From *The Mediatorial Kingdom and Glories of Jesus Christ* By Samuel Davis, a Virginia preacher of the Presbytery of Hanover in the mid 1700’s.


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# Whosoever Will May Come

But What About Whosoever Won't? The "Free Offer" and Larger Catechism Thirty-Two and Sixty-Eight.

by Richard Bacon

 any today are of the opinion that the teaching of the Westminster Standards that God freely offers Christ in the gospel must mean that God longs for the salvation of the reprobate. Not only is it doctrinally and biblically incorrect to posit the idea that God longs for something that he has not decreed, it is also incorrect to maintain that the Westminster documents support such an hypothesis.

The two places in the *Westminster Larger Catechism* that some adduce to support this idea are answers thirty-two and sixty-eight. Hopefully the following paragraphs will contribute somewhat to our understanding of *Larger Catechism* thirty-two. Following our consideration of *Larger Catechism* thirty-two, we shall then turn our attention to *Larger Catechism* sixty-eight.

## LARGER CATECHISM THIRTY-TWO

Larger 32: How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant?

The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provides and offers to sinners a Mediator, and life and salvation by him; and requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him, promises and gives his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, and as the way which he has appointed them to salvation.

The question this article will consider from *Larger Catechism* thirty-two is this: "in what sense does God 'require faith as the condition to interest' and in what sense may such terminology be allowed or excepted?"

1. A person's "having interest in Christ" implies his right to claim Him as surety and to claim the spiritual blessings of the covenant. It is one thing to say that Christ is Savior; another to say he is *my* Savior. The former is revealed truth; the latter indicates a *personal interest* in that revealed truth.

2. The expression of conditional interest must be qualified and explained without asserting anything derogatory to the glory of God or the *free grace* of the covenant. The term of "conditions" as we consider a *human* covenant is not applicable to the covenant of grace in the same way. Thus when we use such a term as "condition" we must do so without going beyond the bounds of Scripture and it must be in such a sense as is agreeable to the divine perfections such as immutability.

3. Human covenants may have stipulations such that certain things are contingent upon performance of certain conditions as a *quid pro quo*.<sup>1</sup> The non-performance of the stipulation renders the covenant null and void, or may do so. It certainly disqualifies the offending party from receiving the promised benefits of the covenant. By way of application to *Larger Catechism* thirty-two, we must consider whether faith, when it is considered as a condition to interest, is in any way in our power to perform. If it is in the power of men to perform, then it could conceivably be considered as such a stipulation.

4. By way of example, the young man's question at Matthew 19:16 bears directly on the performance of one or more conditions to "have eternal life." Significantly enough, Christ answered the young man in specifically

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<sup>1</sup> A *quid pro quo* is an agreement or pact in which something is given in return for something else.



*conditional* terms: “If thou wilt enter into life, [then thou must] keep the commandments.” At first glance it may seem that Christ was there offering life to the young man suspended upon the stipulation of commandment keeping. However, the actual teaching of the passage is precisely the opposite. Christ placed the preceptive will of God before the young man, in part to demonstrate to him the utter *futility* of trying to enter into covenant with God by meeting conditions (see verse 22). This point was not lost on Christ’s disciples who then cried out “Who then can be saved?” (verse 25). Nor should Christ’s answer be lost on us: “With men this is *impossible*, but with God all things are possible.”

5. Further, when terms are made conditional in a human covenant it is recognized that the person *enforcing* the condition has placed himself under no obligation (no gracious promise) either to assist or to enable the fulfilling of the condition(s). So there is no actual difference between a creditor simply *discharging* a debt and his gift of a sum sufficient to *repay the debt*, which is then immediately *credited to the debtor’s account*. There are some who acknowledge that it is God alone who has promised to work faith in the elect and yet continue to speak of it as a “condition” of the covenant. But this very admission is an acknowledgement that such a promise as God has made to the elect renders the covenant absolute, unilateral, unchangeable, and unconditional in the very way that we propose. The unilateral promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 is not to make regeneration conditional upon faith, but to regenerate those who actually are in need of regeneration *in order to believe*.

6. Normally when anything is required for the fulfillment of a promise it is regarded that such a “condition” is uncertain (i.e. contingent) as to whether it shall come to pass. All human covenants are such because they are all contingent in that they all depend upon the *quid pro quo* of a condition being met. But Larger Catechism thirty-two leaves no room whatever for such a construction. God rather “promises and gives His Holy Spirit to *all* His elect to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces, and to *enable* them unto all holy obedience, as the

evidence of the truth of their faith and thankfulness to God, and as the way which He has appointed to salvation.” There is no real difference between saying that the covenant is *unconditional* and saying that it is suspended upon something that God has himself by an oath promised *unconditionally* to do.

7. The unconditional promise made to all the elect must be made logically prior to their meeting the so-called “condition” of faith. Clearly God does not promise and give His Holy Spirit to the reprobate, as can be inferred from *Larger Catechism* thirty-two. This is also demonstrated by a consideration of the *locus classicus* of Jeremiah 31:31-34. The promise of the covenant of grace is made to the elect considered as *unable to fulfill any conditions*. First, the covenant is regarded as unchangeable in that it cannot be broken. “Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them out of the land of Egypt, *which my covenant they brake*.” The former covenant was characterized by being both breakable and broken. But God specifically asserted that it was in this very particular that the new covenant would differ from the former covenant. This is the point of the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews at 8:7-11, where he stated “if that first covenant had been faultless, then should *no place* have been sought for the second.”

8. Moreover Jeremiah continued to characterize the nature of the covenant of grace as consisting in God doing for the elect individual what that individual could not and would not have done in order to “meet a condition.” The prophet proclaimed, “after those days, saith Jehovah, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.” God thus *unconditionally* promised to do for all the elect, *prior to* the elect meeting any conditions, the very thing that would work faith in them. God did not promise to give a new heart (Ezekiel 36:26) to those who already have a new heart. That idea is an absurdity. He promised to give a new heart to those who previously had *stony* hearts. But it is also clear that those who have stony hearts are altogether incapable of meeting any conditions that *require*



having a heart that seeks after God. The promise must be *unconditional* or else it does us no good. But when the promise is fulfilled in the elect, the faith *thus worked* by the operation of free grace assures the believer that *he* has an interest in Christ as *his* Savior. Here is the importance of recalling the difference between revelation (Christ is Savior) and faith (Christ is *my* Savior).

9. Thus in *Larger Catechism* thirty-two, we speak of faith as a condition *in the sense of a state of being*. But we do not and cannot properly speak of the covenant of grace as though it were suspended upon that condition without retreating from the gospel of full and free grace. Anything that suspends the covenant upon *our* act makes the fulfillment of God's promise *dependent* upon our acts. Both Westminster Calvinists and Three Forms of Unity Calvinists must repudiate such a view of a conditional covenant.

10. We conclude, then, that faith is a condition, an inner qualification or state of being, without which no one has a warrant to conclude his *interest in* or in any way *lay claim to* the blessings of the covenant of grace. We should understand *Larger Catechism* thirty-two, as it uses the term "condition," to refer to that which evidences *to us*, or gives *us* reason to conclude that we are amongst the redeemed and shall enjoy the fulness of God's salvation. But those who have no faith in Christ have absolutely no warrant whatsoever to think that they are amongst the redeemed of God's unconditional promise to be the God of His chosen people, and them alone.

### **LARGER CATECHISM SIXTY-EIGHT**

Moving along to the other place in the Westminster Standards, how does *Larger Catechism* number sixty-eight define "common operations of the Spirit" and is such a definition possible? The answer is "yes" to both of those questions. We can see that the *Larger Catechism* defines such "common operations" in terms of the Scripture passages it adduces to prove the point. When all is said and done, the Scriptures form the only "standard" by which God will judge our theology.

Here are the Scripture passages adduced by the Westminster Assembly to explain what they understood to be the Bible's teaching on the subject of "common operations of the Spirit:"

Matthew 7:22: Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

Matthew 13:20-21: But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.

Hebrews 6:4-6: For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Significantly, regardless of whatever other *false* interpretation anyone may wish to place upon *Larger Catechism* sixty-eight, the people being spoken of in the Scripture passages the Westminster Divines adduced are those false 'church members' who have hypocritically attached themselves to the church.

There is no mention of those passages that are adduced in the Murray/Stonehouse report defending the 'free offer.'<sup>2</sup> Where do we find Matthew 5:44-48 or Ezekiel 18:23, 32? They are not found because some "common grace" or "common love" of God for all mankind is not what is intended by the standards. Rather, what the *Larger Catechism* intended is the fact that there may be some *seeming* evidences in a false professor's life that he has genuinely accepted and believed the gospel. Yet, the false professor, who has *only* the common operations of the Spirit, "dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended" (Matthew 13:20-21).

<sup>2</sup> See Matthew Winzer's admirable critique of the Murray/Stonehouse report elsewhere in this issue of *The Blue Banner*.





The people described in Hebrews 6:4-6 are those who have committed the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.<sup>3</sup> Once again, these people have *some* of the evidences that false professors may have (including even being “made partakers of the Holy Ghost”), but they do not persevere to the end. They fall away, and in their falling away Scripture clearly asserts that it is *impossible* to renew them again unto repentance. An operation of the Spirit that makes it impossible for a person to be renewed should never be called gracious.

How is it that these men (and women as well, we suppose) can give such evidences of “common operations” of the Spirit and yet lack the *fruit* of the Spirit (Eph. 5:9; Gal. 5:22-26)? According to Matthew 7:22, it is because they are depending upon their *works rather than grace* to save them. “Have *we* not prophesied...and done many wonderful works” (Matthew 7:22).


Common operations of the Spirit, then, according to the Scripture adduced by Westminster, refers to such things as casting out devils, prophesying, and working miracles. But that is *not* what Calvin intended by the “divine grace” of God in the portion of his institutes that is often adduced. Calvin did not use the term “common grace” at *Inst.* 2:3:3 in the Beveridge translation. Significantly, the conclusion that Calvin himself drew in the place adduced is this:

“In the elect, God cures these diseases in the mode which will shortly be explained; in others, he only lays them under such restraint as may prevent them from breaking forth to a degree incompatible with the preservation of the established order of things. Hence, how much soever men may disguise their impurity, some are restrained only by shame, others by a fear of the laws, from breaking out into many kinds of wickedness. Some aspire to an honest life, as deeming it most conducive to their interest, while others are raised above the vulgar lot, that, by the dignity of their station, they may keep

inferiors to their duty. Thus God, by his providence, curbs the perverseness of nature, preventing it from breaking forth into action, yet without rendering it inwardly pure.”

The grace of God spoken of by Calvin in *Inst.* 2:3:3, then, has to do with the preservation of the world *for the elect’s sake*. He regards the seemingly pious actions of the reprobate to be a “disguise for their impurity” or a “legal fear.” Some, out of self-interest, will act in an outwardly moral way, but whatever may be the personal motivations of the ungodly, God himself uses those things to curb the “perverseness of nature...without rendering it *inwardly pure*.”

Some people (and the report by Professors Murray and Stonehouse must be included in this number) claim that God’s causing the rain and the sun to come upon the elect and the reprobate together proves a common grace that God exercises toward all men. The problem of such a view is that it presupposes that grace can be found in *things*. In Joshua 10, the sun shone on both the Israelites and the Amorites. When the sun shone upon Joshua and the Israelites, it was by God’s grace that he might bless them. When the same sun shone for the same additional time on the Amorites, it was indicative of God’s hatred toward them and for the purpose of bringing his temporal curse to pass upon them. Grace is not in things: the sun shining upon the Amorite was to further God’s purposes *for the elect nation* and not for the good of the Amorites at all. It led to their defeat (Matthew 5:44-48). It was not common “grace” because grace is not in things.

The terminology has now been turned by some from “common grace” to “common operations of the Spirit” as though because they have the same word (“common”) that the same thing must be intended by both terms. This article demonstrated above that the Westminster Divines used the phrase “common operations of the Spirit” to refer to false (i.e. hypocritical) church members who do not persevere in faith. The divines did not apply the term to all men indiscriminately and it is a significant departure from the right understanding of Westminster to aver otherwise. 


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<sup>3</sup> Tapes concerning this passage are available from *Blue Banner* as the “Avoiding Apostasy Series.” These five sermons are normally \$14.95 plus shipping. Mention this footnote when ordering, and we will include a sixth tape free of charge and also “throw in” the shipping charge.

# Rutherford on Gospel Faith

The following quotations are taken from Samuel Rutherford's book, *The Covenant of Life Opened: or a Treatise of the Covenant of Grace, etc.* (Edinburgh: Andro Anderson, 1655) 9-13.

by Richard Bacon

n his *The Covenant of Life Opened*, Samuel Rutherford (or Rutherford as it is sometimes spelled) was dealing specifically with the question of whether the unbelieving elect were under a law-curse. By unbelieving elect, he referred to those whom God ordained to believe, but at a time subsequent in their lives.

As he dealt with the objections of different groups, one objection was from the group who asserted that faith is accepted by God as a *condition* for the satisfaction of Christ's death. Rutherford opined:<sup>1</sup>

“This comes too near the opinion of these who make faith a cause of satisfaction for sin, as they must teach, who hold that Christ payed a ransome, on the crosse, for the sins of all and every one. For that which added, maketh satisfaction to be counted and formally reckoned as satisfaction, in order to the expiation of the man's sins, so that by no justice he can suffer for them, and which being removed, maketh the payed satisfaction and ransome, though never taken back again by the payer, no more a satisfaction for that man, nor for Devils; Is too near to the nature and to being a part of the satisfaction. If one pay a summe that fully exhausts the debt of such a broken man, upon condition the broken man say *Amen* to the paying thereof, otherwise it shall not be payed, he must take up the summe again, if the broken man refuse to say *Amen* to it, for if he take it not up again, but it be payed and fully satisfie for, and exhaust the debt, the man's debt is payed, and

the Creditor in justice cannot exact one farthing from the broken man.

“Now nothing given to the Justice of God by way of satisfaction for the sins of unbeleever, was ever repeated or taken back again by Christ. Nay but, say they, the ransome was not payed at all for *Judas*, but only upon condition that he beleeve: but he never beleevd, and therefore it was never payed for *Judas*. *Answ.* This is that we say, that Christ gave no reall ransome at all, for the sins of *Judas* by way of satisfaction. But they say that there is as well a ransome payed for all the sins of *Judas* (finall unbeleef excepted) to free him, in justice from eternall stroaks, as for all the sins of *Peter* to free him, only it is not accepted of by the Creditor, because *Judas*, by faith, assented not unto the bargain: But assenting or not assenting, accepting or not accepting, that are posterior to the payment, are nothing up or down to the compleatnesse and perfection of the satisfaction made for the exhausting of Justice, for Justice receives not two satisfactions or ransomes for *Judas*, one upon the Crosse from *Christ*, another in Hell, from *Judas*, yea and it must follow, that reall payment was made to Justice for all the sins of *Judas*, upon the Crosse, and that he suffers for none of them, in Hell, but only for finall unbeleef, which is no sin against the Covenant of Works and the Justice thereof, but only and formally against the Covenant of Grace, so that as yet satisfying of Divine Justice for sins, must be halfed and parted between *Christ* and *Judas*, which the Scripture teaches not.

“Also the Father either accepts the ransome of Christ, because it is intrinsecally, and of it self sufficiently satisfactory: or because *Judas* does beleeve it is so; The latter cannot be said, for

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Rutherford followed his spelling and punctuation (even when seemingly inconsistent — he lived before Noah Webster got all that straightened out).



believing adds nothing to the intrinsic sufficiency of the satisfaction, as not believing diminishes nothing from the sufficiency thereof; Yea and so the Father's formal reason of accepting the satisfaction of Christ, must be terminated upon our poor act of believing, whereas the formal ground of the acceptation thereof is the intrinsic excellency and worth of the sacrifice, *being an offering of a sweet smelling savour to God, (Eph. 5.2)*. And because he offered the ransom of the blood of God-man, of the Prince of life, *Act. 20:28. 1 Cor. 2.8.* and offered himself to God, *Eph. 5:25,26, Heb. 9.14, Mat. 20.28. 1 Tim. 2.6. Rev. 1.5,* nor is there any sufficiency in his death from the worth of believing. And the reason why he accepts it for Peter, not for another, is the election of grace.


"...Nor is it imaginable to say that any act of obedience or believing, can perfect the satisfaction of Christ, and make it sufficient, yea, or causatively make it ours. For God, by no necessity of Justice, but of his own free pleasure, requireth faith as a condition of our actual reconciliation; for beside, that he might have required any other act of obedience, as love, he might have accepted the Ransom without inquiring any act of obedience, on our part, as the Lord bestowed a calm Sea and deliverance from shipwreck, upon the Idolatrous Sea-men, upon the very act of casting *Jonah* in the Sea, without the intervention of any saving faith on their part; As a gracious Prince may send a pardon to free a condemned Malefactor from death, and may command that it be valid in law for him, without the man's knowledge, and far more without his acceptance thereof, on his knees, especially since by a special pacton between the Father and the Son, he restored abundantly more Glory to God by suffering for all, for whom he died, then they took from God by their sins, and that restitution was made to Justice without the interveining of any act of the creature's obedience.

"...For how is it real, and not rather scenical and formal, which may and should be null and in vain, if the creature make it not real, by believing. And especially, if God out of his grace which is absolutely free, work in us the condition

of believing. Can God give his Son as a Ransom for us, upon condition that we believe, if he himself absolutely work the condition in us? They will not admit this."

Interestingly, Rutherford went on in the next chapter to claim that heathens had no more universal (common) grace than the devils themselves. Rutherford, making the Westminster distinction between covenant of works and grace, maintained that the reprobate who have the gospel preached to them have it preached as living under a covenant of works, which they are required to do, but haven't the strength to do.

He went on, "The heathen cannot be said to have any inward calling to Grace and Glory, because there be some remnants of the Image of God left in them, which no more can be called universal Grace, then the same sparkles that are left in Devils can be called Gospel Grace because they believe, *There is one God and confesse the Son of God, Jam. 2.19. Luk. 4.34. Mark 1.34.* Reason may seeme to say that all should have a share of Gospel-Grace, but it may be replied to reason, why should it seeme to be a part of the goodness and bounty of God to will and desire all and every one to be saved, and not to institute such a dispensation as all and every one should actually be saved?"

See, how Rutherford here places the charge of "rationalism" against the opposing party. It is not those who believe free grace who are rationalists, as is often charged, but those who attempt to claim that God really desires the salvation of those for whom he made no provision. 

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