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C0828 – August 20, 2008 – Doctrine Of Missions - Part 3

Alright, we're working with the Doctrine of Missions. We want to make sure we get the main principle and that is the principle of universality. God has a universal intent toward man. What we mean by this term is not *universalism*, *universalism* is the belief that all will be saved in Jesus Christ. There are three forms of this as far as I can see in the literature. First you have moderate universalism, this is the belief that *all human beings* will be saved in Jesus Christ. Some moderate universalists believe that all men will be saved in this present life. Others believe only the elect are saved in this present life and the non-elect will be saved in the future life. The second form is mild universalism. Mild universalism says that *all religious human beings* will be saved in Jesus Christ.ⁱ Only atheists go to hell. So even if you're seeking another God, God will accept that as seeking Him. So you can be seeking Allah or Bah auala, it doesn't matter, God will accept that as truly seeking Him. They assume atheists are non-religious despite the fact that rejection of one set of beliefs is *ipso fact* adoption of another. A third form is extreme universalism, which is called *apokatastasis* from the Greek word for "restoration." This view says *all mortal beings will be reconciled* to God, including Satan and the demons. These and similar ideas have been around since the early church fathers like Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. They all derive, in some degree from an overemphasis of the mercy and love of God. Most believe that what Christ accomplished on the cross was salvation for all. Scriptures used to support this view include Matt 13:33; John 17:2; Rom 5:15-21; 8:19-22; 11:32; 1 Cor 15:22-28; Eph 1:8b-10; Phil 2:8-11; Col 1:19-20; 1 Tim 2:6; 4:10; 1 John 2:2; Rev 5:8. No matter which view is taken they fail to understand that what Christ accomplished on the cross merely provided a salvation sufficient for all to be saved, it did not actually save anyone, God's salvation must be personally appropriated by faith (John 3:18; Eph 2:8-9; Rom 4:1-3; Acts 17:11) in this present life (John 11:25-26) and if it is not then

the person will spend eternity in the lake of fire (Dan 12:2; Matt 25:46; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 14:11; 20:10; 20:11-15). Today universalism is not widely held but it is the official doctrine of the Unitarian denomination. They are an extremely liberal group who believes very little of Christianity or the Bible. So when I say the main principle of missions is universality I do not mean any form of universalism.

Now another thing we do not mean is universal opportunity to hear the gospel. And by gospel here I'm using that very broadly as simply the content a person had to believe in their era of history. That content changed over time until the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Take Abraham, Abraham lived about 2,000 years before Jesus Christ. He didn't believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, that content wasn't available to believe, he had revelation of Creation, who God is, Fall, what sin is, Flood, that God judges sin and saves the righteous, and the Noahic Covenant and apparently that information was sufficient to believe and be justified in his time (Gen 15:6). It's not sufficient today but it was then (John 3:18). Same is true for the apostles before the cross, when these guys believed they didn't believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Fact is Peter tried to stop that event (Matt 16:21-23). So, they had already believed sufficient content but the death and resurrection of Jesus was not a part of the content they originally believed. It wasn't until the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in AD33 that the content we proclaim today became the standard. So when I say gospel I'm just saying, whatever content was necessary to believe at a particular stage of history.

A further point of clarification, by saying this we're not denying that salvation is always on the basis of grace and through the channel of faith. That holds true no matter when you believe in history. It's always by grace through faith. But the content of the faith has changed, what a person had to believe, the propositions they had to believe. Obviously they could only believe the propositions that had been revealed. So as Scripture grew over time the content one had to believe changed until the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now that doesn't change because the canon of Scripture is complete. There is no more verbal revelation taking place. And the point I want to get across here is that, despite the fact that there has always been a definite content that had to be believed in any given era, it's simply not true

that everybody in that era had the opportunity to hear it. People die having never heard the gospel.

Now, the tendency is to think therefore, that for God to remain just He must provide another way for them to get to heaven. So now we're not talking about one way of salvation we're talking about two, ten or as Oprah Winfrey says, an infinite number of ways, all paths lead to God. Now, many so-called Christians get into this, this is being taught right now in our town, in every town. Why? Because they haven't got a clue when it comes to Scripture. Remember what we keep telling you about the OT events that picture judgment/salvation, how they purify your thinking, keep you orthodox. Take the Flood of Noah: How many arks were there? One. This is not rocket science. There weren't hundreds of lifeboats, there was just one boat. See how that keeps you on track when you face a problem like, "Well, what about the hot-n-tots who never heard." Staying with our Flood analogy, think of this, Noah was a preacher of righteousness, he was a missionary to the world at his time. If there were other ways to be saved from the Flood would it have been necessary for Noah to go out on his missionary journeys? Of course not, he would have been invading their personal journey to God. And the analogy holds for today, missions is unnecessary if there are other ways of salvation. Keep your money, don't waste your time, don't bother these people, just let them find their own way to God. Maybe you didn't know it but the doctrine I've just expressed to you is called Hinduism or "New Age Christianity," it's the same thing. Here's a representative of Hinduism, Mahatma Ghandi, here's what he thinks about missions, "After long study and experience, I have come to the conclusion that [1] all religions are true; [2] all religions have some error in them; [3] all religions are almost as dear to me as my own Hinduism, in as much as all human beings should be as dear to one as one's own close relatives. My own veneration for other faiths is the same as that for my own faith; therefore no thought of conversion is possible." Note the last phrase, "therefore no thought of conversion is possible." That's a wholesale rejection of the missionary enterprise. Why? Because all religions are true, despite the fact that they all have error in them. However you reconcile that contradiction. But just because all people do not hear the gospel in their lifetime do we have to resort to this conclusion? Many paths to God? Can God remain just in condemning those who've never heard? First, it's a fallacy because Scripture says everybody has heard. Everybody got off the boat with Noah and carried the truths of Gen 1-9 into every tribe, tongue, people and

nation. But second, Scripture makes the basis of God’s condemnation something everyone has in general revelation, what everyone has in themselves, a conscience and what everyone sees both in themselves and outside of themselves, the creation. That’s the basis of condemnation. All men know there is a God because God has made it evident to them so that they are without excuse. It’s not special revelation of Scripture that is the basis of condemnation, it’s general revelation in creation and conscience. A rejection of the lesser revelation of God in creation and conscience is tantamount to a rejection of the greater revelation of God in Scripture. So God does remain just in condemning those who never heard because if they rejected the revelation of Himself in creation and conscience then they would have rejected the greater revelation of Christ in Scripture. So that’s how the Bible resolves the “What about those who’ve never heard?” issue.

So, two things so far, when we say universality we do not mean universalism, some variant of the everybody gets to heaven approach, and we don’t mean universal hearing of the gospel, not everybody hears the gospel, but everybody does have universal knowledge of God through creation and conscience and that is enough to condemn. What we mean by universality is that God has universal intent toward man. He created man uniquely in Adam such that all men fell in Adam and all men can be saved in Jesus Christ. This happens in such a way that all men who are eternally saved have only God to thank while all who are not eternally saved have only themselves to blame.

So the goal is always the same in missions. God has universal intent. But God’s method, let’s shift to the method, God’s method of reaching men, His tactics differ in the five different epochs of missions.

Scripture	Gen 1-11	12-Acts 1	Acts 2-Rev 3	Rev 4-19	Rev 20
Historical Epoch	World History	Israel’s History	Church History	Tribulation History	Millennial History
Goal	Universal	Universal	Universal	Universal	Universal
Means	Direct	Mediate	Mediate	Mediate	Direct & Mediate
Mediator		National	Supranational	National & Supranational	National

First we said in Gen 1-11, World History, you have a universal goal and the means is direct. God is just working with all men, there are no racial or national distinctions, no mediation, He just works with all men directly. In stage 2, Gen 12-Acts 1, Israel’s History, the goal is still universal but the

means is mediate or indirect, the nation Israel is the conduit or channel to reach the world. So this is a different method and it's a strange method to some until you grasp where God was going with this tactic. Here we have three principles at work. First, **Universal Missions in Israel's Era Requires Separation from the World System.** Gen 12:1, "Go forth from your country, And your relatives, And from your father's house." That's the principle of geographic separation and familial separation. Abram had to separate from the world system. This is counterintuitive at first but why does this have to happen? Why does Abraham have to make a wholesale break with the world system? So he can get trained, so he can be distinct, so he can become salt and light to the surrounding nations. So the nation Israel was called out of the world system to be a distinct people, a separate people. God brought Himself into a contract with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and He's going to stand by His word. Point 2 of this era, **Universal Missions in Israel's Era Requires Serving YHWH.** Key passage: Exod 19:5-6. If the nation Israel obeyed the terms of the Mosaic Contract then they would be a holy people, that is a set apart people, they would look different from the surrounding nations, they would become a kingdom of priests, that is the whole nation would become priests, not just the Levites, not just one tribe but the whole nation would be priests, mediators between the nations and God. Third, they would be God's treasure, God's storehouse of blessing. Now, this was designed to result in a high culture, advanced technology, wisdom, art, music, a great theocratic system that would be so successful it would draw the surrounding nations to come. Come to Israel, come and see the wonders of the God of creation. Now that was the goal, the only generation that got close to reaching this goal was David's. They followed the law, they worshipped God and this positive volition to the word resulted in tremendous prosperity, the fruits of that generation were enjoyed in the reign of Solomon. We'll look at the high achievements of that culture in later studies. But that was the era of Israel when the world was coming to see. Then Solomon went and blew it all. But the main point of this period was that the nation was to be a servant to the nations not by going out but by drawing the nations to come to her. The problem, and the reason this did not work, was simply because they did not have a heart able to obey all the commandments, man is a sinner, man is totally depraved by which we mean every aspect of man's being is warped by sin, we don't mean man is all bad or as bad as he possibly could be or that man is no longer made in the image of God, we just mean that image has been marred by sin. So they failed as a nation. Now, the servant stage

comes to a close with a series of passages in the Isaiah 40's and 50's called the servant songs. The servant songs declare that One Servant will come forth from the nation Israel and He's going to be the source of blessing to Israel and the nations. Of course, the Servant is the Messiah. And His act of Servanthood would be to serve the world salvation. So our third point in Israel's History of missions is that **Universal Missions is Met by *The Servant's Death and Resurrection.***

Now we want to turn to this pivotal event in history as we move to our third stage in mission's history, we've seen World History, Israel's History, now we move to Church History, Scripture references: Acts 2-Rev 3. Now here, once again the goal is universal, always universal but here it's particularly clear, though people want to debate about it, we'll touch some of the debate tonight. But it's clearly universal intent, the words of the Great Commission, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations," is about as universal as you can get. But notice the means, it's not national, Israel is a nation with geographic boundaries, the Church is not a nation, the church is supranational, it transcends national boundaries, geographical boundaries and racial distinctions, it's composed of people from all nations. But we're still dealing with a mediatorial method. Israel was the mediator in the prior stage and the Church is the mediator in the present stage. So both stages God uses mediation but the conduit now is not the nation Israel, the conduit is the supranational Church. And the method is not "Come to" Israel but "Go out" to the nations, so this is a difference.

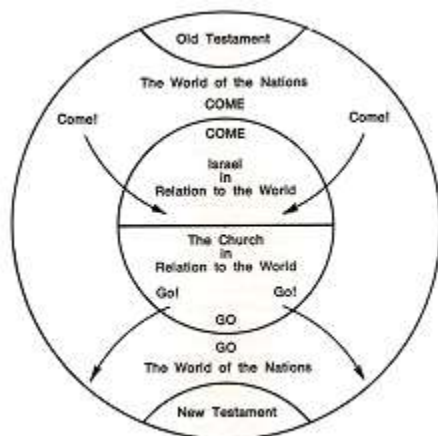


Fig. 1. Missions in the Bible

With Israel the nations were to "Come to" here the church is to "Go out." Now, you always want to keep the Church and Israel distinct. These are not to plans of God but two programs or peoples within His one overarching plan.

So we want to look at this unique stage in God's plan called the Church that starts on the day of Pentecost.

There are lots of points we could make to show universality, lots of verses. Tonight I just want to work with one; that **Universal Missions Rests Upon the Universal Substitutionary Blood Atonement**. What we mean here, and we have to be very careful as noted earlier, this is not universalism, so specifically, theologically, we're dealing with important questions, "For whom did Christ die?" and "What did His death accomplish?" What's the extent of the atonement?" Now, this is an area of debate and if you're not too theologically acute this is going to be difficult, when I wanted to go to seminary these were the two questions I studied in order to decide what seminary I would go to. How you answer these is a theological divide that has a lot of implications. So I've spent a lot of time with these questions, read lots of books, I've read Calvin and Arminius, Owen and Knox, articles on the French theologian Amyraut and the school of Saumur, more modern day men like Nicole and Chafer, Lightner and Clark and I've argued this on the university campus, I've argued this in bookstores and with myself. This is a hot issue, at least with people that are concerned about theology. And I came to a conclusion that I've stuck with ever since, with minor alterations here and there. But this is a watershed issue: it affects how you think about man, how you share the gospel, how you think about God, how you think about the cross, how you think about sovereignty, how you think about responsibility, how you think about chance, how you think about certainty, how you think about Jesus Christ. It's all interrelated. To make this a little easier, before jumping into the verses let me remind you there's a picture of this in the OT. Anyone know what event portrays the Substitutionary Blood Atonement? The Exodus event. That's the key doctrinal fallout of the Exodus. So the tenth plague is the picture. It's an important picture to remember because we get into all kinds of details, propitiation, redemption, reconciliation, it's very involved but if you keep that simple picture of God saying, take a lamb, slaughter it and put the blood over the door and when I send my death angel and he sees the blood He will pass-over and the firstborn son and cattle will be saved. If you think through that picture you see that you're already starting to answer the issue of the extent of the atonement. We're diving into that picture.

Turn to 1 John 2. There are certain texts that teach **Universal Propitiation**. Now I realize that's a big word, propitiation, but it just means "satisfaction," it's a sacrificial word, an atonement word. So when the issue is the nature of God and we're talking about the atonement we use the term propitiation. Something in God's character had to be satisfied and that something was His righteousness, God is righteous, and by that we mean His character is the standard for what is right and wrong in the cosmos. Man transgressed His righteousness and His character doesn't bend, He doesn't say, "Well, that's alright, it was just a little boo boo." No, His character never changes. So He never compromises with sin. Therefore, if men are to be rightly related to Him His righteousness must be satisfied. That's the idea of propitiation. And the only way to satisfy His righteousness is to judge sin. So kicks in the justice of God, God's justice is the execution of His righteousness. And so, putting this all together, what we're saying here is that God's righteous standard was violated and so God sent Jesus Christ to earth and executed justice on Him rather than us, our sin was placed on Him. And Jesus Christ didn't have any sin so His death on the cross satisfied God's righteous requirements. He was a willing, perfect sacrifice.

1 John 2:1. **My little children**," obviously an endearing reference to John's fellow believers, **"I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin."** there's your purpose clause, the prior things, vv 5-10, were written so that they may not sin, **"And if anyone sins,"** 3rd class condition, maybe they will, maybe they won't, but if they do, **"we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;"** so there's a solution if the believer sins and that solution is our Advocate, all believers have Jesus Christ as their Advocate, their Intercessor, their Paraclete, He stands between us and God. So we sin but when we confess that sin He intercedes for us. And we see our word here in verse 2, **"and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."** Now, let's break that down, "He Himself is the satisfaction for our sins;" obviously referring to believers sins but then watch the following phrase, "and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." That extends beyond believers. The debate here has to do with "the whole world," *olos kosmos*. Now I take it very simply, very straightforwardly, that Jesus Christ is the satisfaction for the believer's sins and also for the unbelievers sins. But Reformed folks don't take it this way, the Reformed view is the extreme opposite of the universalist, he says that Christ died for the elect, Christ died

a particular death, Christ died for a subset of men, not all men. Let's make sure we don't misrepresent them. First, *they are not saying that Christ's death is insufficient for the salvation of all men*, they are not saying that, that's not the point of contention, they admit that it is sufficient for the salvation of all men. So they don't limit the capacity of Christ's death to deal with all men's sin, what they are contending is that while it is sufficient for all it is only designed for the elect and if it were designed for all then all would be saved. Second, they are not saying that when you give the gospel you are not making a bonafide offer to men. They believe that as you share the gospel with men it is a bonafide offer, now there are some dissenters to this, namely Gordon Clark, but generally this is the teaching. Nor are they saying that the death of Christ has no relation to the non-elect, they do believe that the non-elect benefit from their associations with the elect and in that way they enjoy some of the fruits of the death of Christ. Take Joseph and Egypt for example. All Egypt they will say accrued benefits by being associated with Joseph. Now, we can agree with some of what they are saying, but when they say Christ died on the cross it was not designed for all men I think the Scriptures disagree. So when they come to 1 John 2:2 what do they do with this "whole world" bit? They say it means "the world of the elect," "all kinds of men," "men from every tribe, tongue and nation," "all nations," "those who will believe," or that "the blessings of the gospel extend to all nations," but not every individual. This is quite unsatisfactory exegesis. Yes, the word "world" can be limited to "the inhabited earth" but the context determines the meaning and in 1 John "world" always means "the world system" which is composed of "unbelievers." So I take it that Christ is a Universal Propitiation for all sin so that sin is no longer the issue with God, God is satisfied by Christ, the sin barrier has been removed once for all. But that does not mean all the barriers between God and men have been removed. Other barriers exist.

Second, there are texts that teach **Universal Redemption**. Turn to 2 Peter 2. If redemption bothers you just replace it with "purchase." It's an economic term, it refers to buying or purchasing something. When we're talking about sin and the atonement we're talking about paying the price for sin. There are several words translated redemption, we'll just look at the one here in 2 Peter 2:1. **But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them,**

bringing swift destruction upon themselves. See the word “**bought?**” That’s the word we’re interested in here. The verse says Jesus Christ bought false prophets who deny Him. The Greek word “bought” is *agorazo*. In the ancient world every city had an *agora*, the *agora* was the marketplace where you could buy and purchase goods, often slaves. Every ruin of the ancient world they talk about the *agora*. I’ve seen about 15 such ruins. The idea here is that the Master purchased false teachers from the slave market. Notice, there’s no removal from the market. He bought them but they were never removed. There’s another word for that in the Greek, *exagorazo* and it means to “buy out” “to deliver” it has the idea of removal from the market. So the point is that the price has been paid for these false teachers, Christ bought them in His death on the cross. So, if the false teachers are unbelievers then Christ bought unbelievers. ⁱⁱ He bought all men but they are not all taken out of the market. So it was a Universal Purchase or Redemption. The Reformed explanation of this, and many have written that this is the most difficult verse to get around, but they explain that this is a hypothetical situation, it’s not real. Hypothetically they were a part of the Church and if that were the case then they would have been bought by Christ but in reality they were not. That’s the rubber Bible approach, a real exegetical stretch. Yes there are hypothetical’s in Scripture but where’s the indication in the text that this is a hypothetical? Now, if propitiation is Godward, directed toward God’s nature and redemption is sinward, directed at paying the price for sin, then our third universal is reconciliation, and it’s manward, it’s directed toward man.

So our third kind of passage is 2 Cor 5, **Universal Reconciliation**. If reconciliation bothers you just use “friendship.” Reconciliation is from the Greek word *katallaso*. Now, this word means “to exchange enmity for friendship.” Two people that have a dispute with one another, they’re angry with one another, there’s hostility and then the issue is resolved and they become friends. Now that’s the idea here, but, importantly, it’s a one way reconciliation. 2 Cor 5:19, **namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.** There’s the missions statement at the end of the verse. We have a responsibility as believers to make know this good news that God has reconciled the world to Himself. The message has to go forth because it’s only a one way reconciliation. God has reconciled the world to Himself but the world has not been reconciled to god, so verse 20, **Therefore, we are ambassadors for**

Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. See, God has befriended the world because of Christ. He's no longer angry at the world because of sin, that was solved in Christ. But the world is at enmity with God. That enmity hasn't been overcome. So it's a one way reconciliation but it is for the whole world. And here's the "world" again. People always want to limit the "world" to "the world of the elect" or "all nations" or something, but that's not what it says.

The problem here, and this is where I want to get down to the issue, the problem with Reformed theology on this point is that in their thinking Christ's death is automatically applied to the elect, that the death of Christ saves. That's not true. The death of Christ saves no man, it must be appropriated by faith. They are not leaving room for the biblical requirement: faith. The Reformed theologian says, "Look, if you say Christ died for all men then logically all men must be saved." We say "No, that's not what Scripture says at all, Scripture says the death of Christ is a sufficient ground for all men to be saved. It says the Holy Spirit convicts of sin, righteousness and judgment, it says the Father draws by the teaching of the word and that salvation is of God and God alone and is applied at the moment an individual believes." Faith is not the cause of salvation it is the channel through which salvation is imparted. You don't get zapped with regeneration so you can believe. Faith is the condition for being regenerated. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved. Which comes first? Faith or salvation? Faith, it's very clear, this is all over the Bible. How then can I be regenerated before faith? That is silly. I know what people are trying to protect, they are trying to protect God's sovereignty, I don't know why people feel compelled to protect Him, He does a pretty good job of it Himself. So I know they're trying to protect His sovereignty, divine election and so forth, want to make sure only the elect are saved, ooh, don't let anybody else in, can't be any other way. Fine, but you're rationalizing, you're trying to put a puzzle together without all the pieces, and you're taking the pieces we do have in Scripture and trying to stretch them to fill in the gaps. I'm just admitting, "Hey, we've got nine pieces, there are twelve in the puzzle, we don't have the whole picture here, I see sort of what it looks like, I can tell that God is the initiator, that man has to have faith, that God alone saves, but in the details I don't know how this happens." But just because we don't know how it all happens doesn't give us

license to stretch the Scriptures into a total picture. The Reformed view doesn't fit. It's a distortion of Scripture.

Now, there are many other passages we could look at (Rom 5:18; 1 Tim 2:3-6; 4:10; Heb 2:9, 17), all of which teach the same basic idea. What Christ accomplished on the cross was a provision of salvation sufficient for all to be saved, it did not actually save anyone, God's salvation must be personally appropriated by faith (John 3:18; Eph 2:8-9; Rom 4:1-3; Acts 17:11) in this present life (John 11:25-26) and if it is not then the person will spend eternity in the lake of fire (Dan 12:2; Matt 25:46; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 14:11; 20:10; 20:11-15). And since this is the case there must be missions, we must preach the gospel for faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God. Not all people will believe but Universal Missions certainly Rests Upon the Universal Substitutionary Blood Atonement. Christ died once for all, solving the sin problem once for all. "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." "Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in me has eternal life." Acts 16:31, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household." It's very simple. Just preach the word. So this is the "Go out" methodology, "Go out" to all the nations and tell them who Christ is and what He has done.

ⁱ From my research this seems to be the view of C.S. Lewis.

ⁱⁱ Constable adds, "In the case of Christian false teachers who departed from the truth they previously embraced, they too brought sudden spiritual ruin on themselves. This ruin would come on them at Jesus Christ's judgment seat (2 Cor. 5:10) if not sooner."ⁱⁱ

[Back To The Top](#)

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