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**A0426 -- June 27, 2004 -- 1 John 2:2 -- Extent of Atonement-Part 4**

As intimated last week the Moderate Calvinist recognizes the fact that the Scriptures broaden the design of the atonement to include all men in a provisional way. The benefits of Calvary are realized and applied only to those who believe, but the provision reaches to every member of the human race. This is the clear testimony of Scripture and especially, Romans 5:12-21 (unlimited redemption); 2 Cor. 5:17-21 (unlimited reconciliation); 2 Peter 2:1 (unlimited redemption); and 1 John 2:2 (unlimited propitiation). It is not by accident that the Scriptures teach the unlimited provision of every aspect of the atonement. Moderate Calvinists are in between the two extremes of Arminianism and Strict Calvinism. We believe that the Scripture certainly teaches that Christ died to secure the salvation of all who believe (the elect) but also that Christ died to provide a basis of salvation for all men. For those who are elect and therefore believe in Christ, the benefits of the cross are applied by God at the moment of belief. For those who refuse to believe, the provision exists to form a basis of condemnation. The eternal destiny of men is not determined by whether one is in Adam, but whether he has believed in Jesus Christ or not (John 3:18).

We reject Arminianism, the idea that Christ *obtained* salvation for all men and provided every man with *sufficient grace* to cooperate with God. We also reject Strict Calvinism, the idea that Christ died to *secure* the salvation of the elect only. If that be true then the cross cannot be a basis of condemnation of those who don't believe (John 3:18). **The teaching of Scripture and that which we believe to be true is that Christ died to provide salvation for all and to make certain salvation for those who believe** (Moderate Calvinism).

**PROBLEMS OF ARMINIAN AND STRICT CALVINIST ANSWERS**

Both Arminianism and Strict Calvinism are stuck with a difficult time trying to harmonize their views with Scripture. As per Arminianism, how do they reconcile the fact of Scripture that man is totally depraved and unable to make a single move toward God. Their attempt is to say that God supplies sufficient grace to all men to cooperate with God in salvation. I

would be an Arminian if I could find just one verse that taught that in the Bible. But the Bible never teaches that God imparts *sufficient grace* to each man that nullifies man's depraved condition enabling everyone to believe. Of course, in all this, the Arminian view rejects that when Adam sinned, we all sinned "in him" and that the sin of all men was paid for by Christ on the cross. This also is totally unbiblical. As per Strict Calvinism, I would join them if it could be demonstrated that the cross applies itself to the elect. But I can't find this in Scripture either. Further, it makes the Bible's insistence on exercising faith as the condition of salvation "virtually unnecessary". If the cross applies itself then why is faith even necessary? But the Bible insists time and again that the condition of salvation is faith, not election or anything else. This downplaying of the necessity of "faith" leads me to reject their answer because it doesn't fit the Scriptures. Strict Calvinism also rejects the biblical teaching that the sin of the non-elect was paid for by Christ. In their view only the sin of the elect was paid for by Christ on the cross. Both groups fear that if Christ paid for an individual's sin then they must be saved. Both fear Universalism (that all will be saved). The Arminian fears Universalism because if Christ *obtained* salvation for all men and all the sin of all men was paid for by Christ then all men of necessity would be saved. So, they reject that all men sinned in Adam and also reject that the sin of all men was paid for by Christ at the cross. The Strict Calvinist fears saying that the sin of the non-elect was paid for by Christ because if the cross *secures* the salvation of men and the sin of the non-elect was paid for by Christ then by deduction the non-elect would also have to be saved (Universalism). However, what does the Bible teach? The fact is that the Bible does teach that all men sinned in Adam (turn to **Rom. 5:12-21**) and that the sin of all men was paid for by Christ (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:24, 25, et. al.) and that the righteousness of Christ is given to men, but only to those men who believe (Rom. 3:21-22; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 10:14). There is an emphasis on the importance and necessity of faith in Moderate Calvinism. It seems to me that this is the only answer that gives Biblical answers and not human ideas.

**The biblical teaching is that man is totally depraved unable to make a move toward God but also that the nature of the atonement was provisional for all and the sole condition for salvation is faith.**

It is abundantly clear in the Bible that a man must believe to be saved. All men, elect included, are lost until they exercise faith in Christ as their Savior. The elect are just as lost as the non-elect. The Bible never puts unregenerate people into the categories elect and non-elect. "Faith" is said to be the sole condition for salvation over 150 times in the New Testament. What this means is that the benefits of the completed work of Christ on the cross are withheld until personal faith is exercised. All men, including the false teachers of 2 Pet. 2:1, were "bought", but this does not imply that all men are "released". The "release"

takes place at the moment a person believes. So, the cross work of Christ must be *appropriated by faith* in order to be enjoyed by anyone. Every elect individual lives in spiritual death and condemnation and may live in open rebellion against God. It should be obvious that the cross of Christ did not *automatically save* the elect, but that God applies the finished work of Christ to those who believe at the moment they believe and not before.

## DOES REGENERATION PRECEDE FAITH?

However, the Strict Calvinist, while he downplays the necessity of faith, does not altogether rule out the necessity of faith. **How he accounts for the Bible's constant insistence that faith is the condition of salvation is to claim that the cross work of Christ purchased faith for the elect, then God gives that faith to them as a gift, which the elect are to give back to God at the point of salvation.** *This, of course, cannot be proved from Scripture.* Wild attempts are made to salvage a few verses to prove that faith is a gift. Usually they begin with **Eph. 2:8-9**. However, Eph. 2:8-9 is not teaching that faith is a gift but that the whole “salvation by grace through faith” package is the gift. This is affirmed by the Greek text which has “this” in the neuter and “faith” in the feminine. The neuter “this” therefore refers to the entire salvation (masculine) by grace (feminine) through faith (feminine) package. Faith is not the gift, faith is instrumental, it is the instrument through which God determined, by His grace, to impart salvation. The fact that faith is the instrumental means by which salvation is imparted by God is part of the gift.<sup>i</sup> But not faith itself; that is a human responsibility! You must receive the gift of salvation. Receiving a gift does not change the nature of the gift at all! When God gives us salvation and we receive it, our faith adds nothing nor detracts anything from salvation which God freely gives. Other passages like Acts 5:31; 11:18; Phil. 1:29; 3:9; Rom. 12:3; 2 Pet. 1:1, 2; 2 Tim. 2:25 and John 6:44-45 are also used to support this false teaching that “faith” is a gift. I don't have the time to look at each of these passages. If you are interested, I can make a copy of a very valuable and short article (2 ½ pages) published in *Bibliotheca Sacra Journal* in 1965 that addresses each verse. The conclusion of this paper is that “Many passages, and whole books of the New Testament, are written to prove salvation is a gift of God and not the reward of good works. But where are the passages to prove saving faith is the gift of God?”<sup>ii</sup> Is this teaching not deduced from their doctrine of election rather than from the clear teaching of Scripture? Strict Calvinists believe this so strongly that they arrive at a very logical conclusion, namely that *regeneration precedes faith*. They say that, since man is totally depraved, man is unable to believe unless first regenerated. This results in a strange plan of salvation (this is very practical stuff). J.I Packer says, “how am I to go about believing on Christ and repenting, if I have no natural ability to do these things?”<sup>iii</sup> His answer has several components.

1. look to Christ, speak to Christ, cry to Christ, just as you are
2. confess your sin, your impenitence, your unbelief, and cast yourself on His mercy
3. ask Him to give you a new heart, working in you true repentance and firm faith
4. ask Him to take away your evil heart of unbelief and to write His law within you, that you may never henceforth stray from Him
5. Turn to Him and trust Him as best you can, and pray for grace to turn and trust more thoroughly
6. use the means of grace expectantly, looking to Christ to draw near to you as you seek to draw near to Him
7. watch, pray, read and hear God's Word, worship and commune with God's people,

Now, I ask you...is that the plan of salvation? Is that what we are told to go and tell the world to do to be saved? This should be a no-brainer. For all their talk about how dead and unable the unbeliever is, "The extreme Calvinist deals with a rather lively spiritual corpse after all. If the corpse has enough vitality to read the Word, and heed the message, and pray for conviction, perhaps it can also believe."<sup>iv</sup> To me there is no need to even state that this is a far cry from the biblical plan of salvation. The Bible nowhere says that a man must do these things as a condition of regeneration before he can believe. The Bible says that you must believe before you can be saved. And at the moment you believe you are regenerated. Regeneration does not precede faith. The Bible conditions salvation on "belief alone" not on any of those many things I read to you from J.I. Packer. The Strict Calvinist conditions salvation on election, so that we might expect to find the Bible saying "if you are elect you will be saved". But the Bible never says "if you are elect you will be saved" but rather, "if you believe you will be saved". Doubtless the two groups are the same, those who believe are the elect and the elect are those who will believe, but election is not ever made the condition of salvation, nor is salvation ever said to precede faith. Instead, the Bible says, **Acts 16:31** "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.*" So, these are false conclusions and real problems for Strict Calvinism because it is another gospel. The Bible does not teach that faith is a gift but that salvation is a gift conditioned upon faith. Lightner adds, "All too often this problem of the relationship of God's requirement of faith for salvation with His electing purposes has been approached by assuming either the Arminian or [*Strict*] Calvinistic view and then forcing the scriptural teaching into the mold."<sup>v</sup> (italics mine) Regardless of the issue, we must allow the Bible to speak for itself even if it does teach something besides our previously conceived ideas.

## **6 BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE CROSS AND SALVATION**

## TOTAL DEPRAVITY

*First*, all men are born spiritually lost and unable to do anything pleasing to God (Isa. 53:6; Rom. 3:10, 23; Eph. 2:1-2). No distinction is ever made between the spiritually lost who are elect and the spiritually lost who are not elect. Elect and non-elect are both equally depraved. Because all men are sinners and God shows no partiality, He cannot arbitrarily remove sin. This is why sin had to be judged by the wrath of God. It was not just His wrath against the sin of the elect that made Christ's death necessary but the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race. It therefore follows that the death was for the whole human race and not just for the elect. The price paid to bring satisfaction to God must be at least as extensive as the wrath of God against the sinfulness of humanity.

## “FAITH” IS THE SOLE CONDITION OF SALVATION

*Second*, the Bible makes clear that the sole condition of salvation is “faith” and that “appropriation by faith” results in the application of the Cross' benefits to the individual. All men must exercise faith in order to be saved (Acts 16:31). Men are condemned for not believing in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:18; John 16:9). But what about those who never hear the gospel (e.g., some tribe in Africa)? Well, they are condemned, without distinction for not believing. Why? Because, there is “no difference between those who have heard and rejected and those who have not heard of Christ but have rejected the knowledge God gave to all men of Himself in nature and the conscience”<sup>vi</sup> (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:20; 2:14-15). To reject the lesser revelation of God in nature and conscience is to reject the greater revelation of God that salvation is in Christ. God commands all men to believe indiscriminately (Acts 17:30, 34).

## THE CALL TO BELIEVE DOES NOT MEAN WE ARE ABLE TO BELIEVE

*Third*, just because all men are called to believe does not mean all men are not totally depraved and unable to make a single move toward God. Scripture clearly teaches that all men are dead and in need of divine life (Eph. 2:1-2) but it never teaches that a man must therefore be regenerated before he can believe. Strict Calvinists rarely if ever explain how it is possible that a regenerate person can have divine life before he exercises faith and yet not be saved until he exercises faith. So, all men are in desperate need of eternal life and that eternal life is conditioned on belief even though they are totally depraved and unable to make a move toward God (that is, they are unable to believe even though that is the requirement). How does God's word reconcile this problem?

## NO ONE WILL BELIEVE UNLESS THE FATHER DRAWS HIM

*Fourth*, the answer is that no one sinner, even though commanded to believe for salvation will believe unless the Father draws him. The Lord makes this very clear in John 6:37, 44, 65. This is the Scriptural solution to the dilemma. First of all, **John 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out."** The one who "comes" is the one who "believes" (John 6:35). "Coming" is equivalent to "believing" in this context (cf. the one who comes "will not hunger", "will not thirst", "will not be cast out", "has eternal life", and "will be raised up on the last day"). All that the Father has given to the Son will believe. Not one more, not one less. Further, each one who believes will certainly not be cast out. The next question is "how does one come?" Since we are totally depraved then how can we ever believe? This is answered in **John 6:44 "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day."** So, the sinner must believe/come, but no one can believe/come in Christ unless the Father "**draws him**". The word for "**can**" is *dunamai*, from which we get the word "dynamite". It means "power" or "ability". What John is saying is that no one has the ability in and of himself to believe in the Son unless the Father who sent the Son draws him. What does it mean for the Father to "draw"? The word for "**draw**" is *helko*. *helko* means "to tug, to drag or to draw". When used of persons it may mean "to compel".<sup>vii</sup> It is used of a magnet metaphorically in classical Greek literature giving it the idea of "opposites attracting" (God = good and man = evil attracting). Plato used *helko* in the sense "of the inner influencing of the will."<sup>viii</sup> The word is used 8 times in the Greek NT (Jn. 6:44 (no one can come to Christ unless the Father who sent Christ draws him); 12:32 (I will draw all men to Myself); 18:10 (Peter drawing His sword) **21:6, 11(Peter drawing the net of fish to land)** Acts 16:19 (Paul and Silas dragged into the marketplace before the authorities); 21:30 (Paul was dragged out of the temple in Jerusalem); Jas. 2:6 (it is the rich who personally drag you into court). This *dragging* or *tugging* takes place through "hearing and learning" (**John 6:45**). "Both the hearing and the learning refer to an inward spiritual process. The outward teaching of Scripture and of Christ Himself was enjoyed by all the people He was addressing; but they did not come to Him. It is therefore an inward and individual illumination by the special operation of God that enables men to come to Christ."<sup>ix</sup> These men could not even hear what Christ was saying. What was Christ saying? Read John 6:46-6:60. By their own admission they can't hear Christ's words? Why? Because they don't have ears to hear. They can't stand what they are hearing. They are depraved. The Father has to make them hear and learn so that they can believe in Christ. Without this particular work of the Father on the individual no one will believe in Christ. Everyone who does "hear and learn" certainly will "believe" and of their own volition. The Father's inward drawing enables a person to hear and learn His word. The word of God is

the instrument God designated to bring one to faith. Now notice vv. **61-66**. How many times have we given the gospel to those whom we love with seemingly no results? How many times have we thought we were giving the gospel clearly and yet nothing? Don't worry and don't give up, give the gospel to them whenever God gives you the opportunity. And don't stop there, when they don't want to hear your lip, show them His majesty and grace with your life. Paul says, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). So, God uses the gospel that you share with those you love. The Father works internally in an individual such that he is enabled to hear, learn and therefore certainly believe in Christ. Men do not have the power in and of themselves; but it is the power of God impressing itself upon the human will in such a way that it ensures that the person will certainly, of their own volition, believe. Martin Luther says of John 6:44, "The drawing is not like that of the executioner, who draws the thief up the ladder to the gallows; but is a gracious allurements, such as that of the man whom everybody loves, and to whom everybody willingly goes."<sup>x</sup> **As mysterious as it may seem to us, the fact remains that men must believe in order to be saved, and yet they do not have the power or ability to believe unless they are drawn by God to do so.** The natural man simply does not have the ability to receive the things of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them (1 Cor. 2). Therefore, for a man to ever come to Christ, the Father must draw him enabling him to have faith in Christ as his Savior. The *common grace* of God in providing rain and food for mankind, as well as His restraining sin coupled and the *Spirit's general conviction of the world* reveals only man's need of salvation (John 16:8-11). It is never enough to result in the actual salvation of a person. The depraved man must have the special grace of the inward teaching operation of God that enables him to believe in Christ at the precise time God has decided. Walvoord says, "If one accepts the Biblical revelation of man's state of spiritual death and total inability, he must accept the doctrine of efficacious grace as the solution to the problem....The Scriptures, however, give adequate witness both to the fact of the effectual call and to the human responsibility to believe in Christ....While in the experience of the individual, faith in Christ is a result of choice, an act of the human will, it is nevertheless a work of efficacious grace. Efficacious grace never operates in a heart that is still rebellious, and no one is ever saved against his will."<sup>xi</sup> Chafer adds, "Men enter consciously into this great undertaking only at the one point of believing, or responding to the efficacious call. Naturally, it seems to them that they, acting in freedom within the restricted sphere of their consciousness, determine everything. Their action is vital, for no link in God's chain can be lacking. The point where misunderstanding arises is with reference to the fact that, so far as their cognizance serves them, they are certain that they act freely; yet every truly regenerate person will testify that he would not have turned to God apart from that all-important divine drawing of his heart...If this seems to some to be taking things out of the hands of men and committing them into the hands of God, it will

at least be conceded that, when thus committed to God, things are in better hands and this, after all, is God's own universe in which He has sovereign right to do after the dictates of His own will. It will also be conceded that the sphere of human action, so far as it can mean anything in the sphere of human consciousness, is left in perfect freedom of action."<sup>xii</sup>

## FAITH ADDS NOTHING TO SALVATION AND DOES NOT SAVE

*Fifth*, the faith exercised by the individual never adds anything to the completed redemption of Christ. Faith does not save; Christ saves and Christ alone. In fact, Jesus' name means "The Lord Saves". Faith must be viewed as the *means* through which salvation is imparted. Salvation is not improved upon or altered upon our exercising "faith".

## FAITH IS NOT A WORK

*Sixth*, Scripture declares clearly that faith is not a work. Turn to **Romans 4:5** "***But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,***". Faith is never said to be God's gift to men which we give back to God. Instead "faith" is always associated with man. Strict Calvinists seek to make faith a gift because they think of faith as a work, as something we add to salvation. If this were true, that faith is something we do, then man is cooperating with God in salvation (Arminianism). However, faith in the Scriptures is always presented not as doing something but as receiving something. Faith is merely empty hands receiving the gift of Christ's salvation.

## CONCLUSION

There have been three answers to the question "Why did Christ die?" The Arminian said that Christ died to *obtain* salvation for all men, thus giving to all men sufficient grace to cooperate with God in salvation, if they will. This is rejected for three reasons; 1) The Bible never says that God imparts to all sufficient grace to believe if they cooperate, 2) the view denies the scriptural doctrine of total depravity and total inability, and 3) the Bible clearly teaches that all men sinned in Adam and that the sin of all men was paid for by Christ on the cross.

The Strict Calvinist answered that Christ died to *secure* salvation for the elect, including the securing of the faith necessary for elect sinners. Strict Calvinists claim that the cross applies its own benefits—the cross saves. This is rejected for 5 reasons; 1) The Bible never says that the cross applies itself, 2) the Bible never says that faith is purchased in the cross,

3) the Bible never says that faith is a gift of God, 4) the Bible never says that regeneration precedes faith, and 5) the Bible never teaches that only the sin of the elect was imputed to Christ on the cross.

Moderate Calvinists, in keeping close to the text of Scripture avoids both of these extremes. In answer to the question “Why did Christ die” he answers that Christ died to *provide* salvation for all men but it is *applied* only to those who believe. The cross does not apply its own benefits but God has conditioned salvation on human faith. Human faith does not improve, add, or detract anything from salvation which is wholly from God. Faith is simply the means by which God decided to apply the benefits of the cross in His all-wise plan. However, the only way a man can exercise human faith is by the drawing of the Father. However, as Chafer said, “*Naturally, it seems to them that they, acting in freedom within the restricted sphere of their consciousness, determine everything. Their action is vital, for no link in God’s chain can be lacking. The point where misunderstanding arises is with reference to the fact that, so far as their cognizance serves them, they are certain that they act freely; yet every truly regenerate person will testify that he would not have turned to God apart from that all-important divine drawing of his heart.*” The cross therefore is the basis upon which all men are either saved or condemned. For those who believe the cross is the basis for *salvation* unto eternal life, for those who reject it is a basis for *condemnation* until he does believe (John 3:18). This we believe to be the most true and excellent plan of God in salvation.

Next week we’ll return to 1 John and continue on with the next section of John’s first epistle.

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<sup>i</sup> For a great evaluation of every passage cited by Calvinists to the effect that “faith is a gift” see Roy Aldrich, *The Gift of God* (Bibliotheca Sacra, v. 122, July-Sept, 1965), 249. Highly recommended.

<sup>ii</sup> Roy Aldrich, *The Gift of God* (Bibliotheca Sacra, v. 122, July-Sept, 1965), 253.

<sup>iii</sup> Owen, John, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ: Introductory Essay* by J.I. Packer, 21. For more of the same see Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Cleveland: Cleveland Bible Truth Depot, 1930), 198-199.

<sup>iv</sup> Roy Aldrich, *The Gift of God* (Bibliotheca Sacra, v. 122, July-Sept, 1965), 248.

<sup>v</sup> Lightner, Robert P., *The Death Christ Died* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 51.

<sup>vi</sup> Lightner, Robert P., *The Death Christ Died* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1998), 52.

<sup>vii</sup> Kittel, Gerhard, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Vol. II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 503.

<sup>viii</sup> Kittel, Gerhard, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Vol. II* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 503.

<sup>ix</sup> Nicoll, W. Robertson, *The Expositors Greek Testament: Volume One* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 756.

<sup>x</sup> Vincent, M.R., *Word Studied in the New Testament* (Florida: MacDonald Publishing House), 442.

<sup>xi</sup> Walvoord, John F., *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 123-124.

<sup>xii</sup> Chafer, L.S., *Systematic Theology Vol. I* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1993), 242.

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