



Dort's Unfeigned Call of the Gospel

Maurice Roberts

The 'Free Offer': "The invitation given by a Christian preacher to all sinners to believe in Jesus Christ, with the promise added that if they do believe they will receive at once forgiveness of all sins and eternal life. Implied in the concept of this 'Free Offer' are these ideas: The 'Offer' made is for all who hear it, whether they be elect or not; The 'Offer' is not to be restricted or modified by the preacher in his presentation; The 'Offer' is an expression of love and grace on God's part towards sinful, unbelieving men; The 'Offer' is sincere on God's part and it is genuinely well meant; The 'Offer' is addressed to sinners as they are and requires of them repentance and faith."

John Murray & Ned Stonehouse

“The question then is: what is implicit in, or lies back of; the full and free offer of the gospel to all without distinction? The word ‘desire’ has come to be used in the debate, not because it is **necessarily** the most accurate or felicitous word but because it serves to set forth quite sharply a certain implication of the full and free offer of the gospel to all. This implication is that in the free offer there is expressed not simply the bare preceptive will of God but the disposition of lovingkindness on the part of God pointing to the salvation to be gained through compliance with the overtures of gospel grace. In other words, the gospel is not simply an offer or invitation but also implies that God delights that those to whom the offer comes would enjoy what is offered in all its fullness.”

John Murray & Ned Stonehouse

“. . . Again, the expression ‘God desires,’ in the formula that crystallizes the crux of the question, is intended to notify not at all the ‘seeming’ attitude of God but a real attitude, a real disposition of lovingkindness inherent in the free offer to all, in other words, a pleasure or delight in God, contemplating the blessed result to be achieved by compliance with the overture proffered and the invitation given.”

John Murray & Ned Stonehouse

“. . . there is in God a benevolent lovingkindness towards the repentance and salvation of even those whom he has not decreed to save. This pleasure, will, desire is expressed in the universal call to repentance. . . . The full and free offer of the gospel is a grace bestowed upon all. Such grace is necessarily a manifestation of love or lovingkindness in the heart of God. And this lovingkindness is revealed to be of a character or kind that is correspondent with the grace bestowed.”

John Murray & Ned Stonehouse

“The grace offered is nothing less than salvation in its richness and fullness. The love or lovingkindness that lies back of that offer is not anything less; it is the will to that salvation. In other words, it is Christ in all the glory of his person and in all the perfection of his finished work whom God offers in the gospel. The loving and benevolent will that is the source of that offer and that grounds its veracity and reality is the will to the possession of Christ and the enjoyment of the salvation that resides in him.”

The First Point of Common Grace

“Concerning the first point, with regard to the favorable disposition of God toward mankind in general, and not only to the elect, Synod declares that according to the Scripture and confessions it is determined that besides the saving grace of God, shown only to the elect unto eternal life, there is a certain kind of favor or grace of God which He shows to His creatures in general. **This is evidenced by the quoted Scripture passages and from the Canons of Dort 2.5 and 3-4.8-9, which deals with the general offer of the Gospel;** whereas the quoted declarations of Reformed writers from the golden age of Reformed theology also give evidence that our Reformed fathers from of old have advocated these opinions.”

Louis Berkhof

“In the first place we would call attention to the fact, that in these points we have no material addition to our Confessional Standards. . . . Our people may be assured that the Synod of 1924 by adopting the three points **added nothing to the essential contents of our Confessions**. She only brought forward and formulated a triplet of truths that are **clearly implied in our Confessional Standards and that are partly emphatically expressed therein.**”

Anthony Hoekema

“. . . the Christian Reformed Church of North America maintains, in agreement with the majority of Reformed theologians, that the preaching of the gospel is a well-meant offer of salvation, not just on the part of the preacher, but on God's part as well, to all who hear it, and that God seriously and earnestly desires the salvation of all to whom the gospel call comes.”

Anthony Hoekema

“In reply to what the Arminians had said, the theologians at Dort stated: “We quite agree with you that God seriously, earnestly, unhypocritically, and most genuinely calls to salvation all to whom the gospel comes. In stating this, we even use the very same words you used in your document: serio vocantur (‘are seriously called’). **But we insist that we can hold to this well-meant gospel call while at the same time maintaining the doctrines of election and limited or definite atonement.** We do not feel the need for rejecting the doctrine of election and repudiating the teaching of definite atonement in order to affirm the well-meant gospel call.”

Anthony Hoekema

Firstly, there must be “a presentation of the facts of the gospel and of the way of salvation. The work Christ has done for our salvation must be clearly and carefully set forth.”

Anthony Hoekema

“Secondly, the gospel call must include “an invitation to come to Christ in repentance and faith. The gospel call must be more than a presentation; . Jesus himself invites people to come to him in repentance and faith: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matt. 11:28).”

Anthony Hoekema

“the gospel invitation is, however, at the same time a command, like a summons which comes from a king. Note how Jesus expresses this point in the Parable of the Great Banquet: ‘And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.’ (Luke 14:23) The gospel invitation is not one a person may feel free to accept or decline, as one might with an invitation to go bowling, but it is an order from the sovereign Lord of all creation to come to him for salvation – an order that can be ignored only at the cost of one’s eternal perdition.”

Anthony Hoekema

Thirdly, the call of the gospel must include “a promise of forgiveness and salvation. The gospel call must also include the promise that those who respond properly to this call will receive the forgiveness of sins and eternal life in fellowship with Christ. This promise is, however, conditional: you will receive forgiveness and salvation if you repent and believe.”

Joel Beeke

“God’s election remains a secret until it bears fruit in conversion. Therefore, the preacher must proclaim the gospel to all who hear him. The canons read: “Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel” (2.5).

Joel Beeke

“The phrase “promiscuously and without distinction” is a pleonasm, meaning the gospel is to be proclaimed to any person and to all alike, and applies to both the promise and the command of the gospel. It implies that the minister has no business trying to guess which unconverted people may or may not be elect, but must press upon all his hearers their duty to turn from sin and trust in Christ.”

Joel Beeke

“The gospel call expresses **God’s sincere invitation for all sinners to come to Christ**. The canons say: “As many as are called by the gospel, are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly shown in his Word, what will be acceptable to Him, namely, that those who are called **should comply with the invitation**. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life, and rest to as many as shall come to Him, and believe on Him” (3/4.8). Christ is truly “offered” in the gospel, though many men who are “called by the ministry of the Word” nevertheless reject him (3/4.9) Thus, the preacher proclaims a sincere call from God that all men should repent, offering Christ to them as the only Savior of sinners.”

Joel Beeke

“God personally, earnestly, sincerely, and seriously calls all men to come unto him and find salvation by trusting in his Son. . . . A Reformed preacher of predestination should offer Christ to everyone who hears the gospel, giving heartfelt calls for them to come to Christ and be saved.”

Joel Beeke

“The Canons of Dort explain the international Puritan and Reformed perspective [on the gospel call] well in head 3-4, articles 8-9 ... The Canons make plain that there is no insufficiency in God’s willingness to save sinners. The invitation does not lie or deceive; it is a true, rich, full, free invitation. **The gospel is a well-meant offer.** Christ has declared Himself ready and willing to receive all who to come to Him and to save them ... The call is based on the condition of faith, but it is a true invitation ... Judgement day will confirm this truth No one will stand before God on the last day and say ... “I received the invitation, but I did not think it was sincere.” The call to come to Christ is a well-meant offer of salvation addressed to every human being.”

Joel Beeke

How does the offer of Christ function in experimental preaching? If Christ is the preeminent subject of preaching, and his righteousness is at the center of salvation, we must freely offer his righteousness and this savior to sinners. We must call and command men to come to him. We must **allure sinners to him** by presenting Christ in his beauty, sufficiency, and mercy.

Joel Beeke

Do not be surprised that there is little experiential knowledge in congregations where the ministers do not often preach Christ. But where Christ is faithfully preached and freely offered, you will often find that, over a period of time, the Spirit cultivates rich Christian experience in those who hear. Thus, the Dutch sometimes ask about a minister, “Is hij een Christus prediker?” (“Is he a Christ-preacher?”) They are not asking merely whether he preaches the doctrines of Christ. They are asking, “Does he offer the riches of Christ and **woo sinners to him?**” There is no more important question.

The Opinions of the Remonstrants

Whomever God calls to salvation, he calls **seriously** (serio vocat), that is, **with a sincere and completely unhypocritical intention and will to save**; nor do we assent to the opinion of those who hold **that God calls certain ones externally whom He does not will to call internally**, that is, as truly converted, even before the grace of calling has been rejected.

The Opinions of the Remonstrants

There is **not in God a secret will which so contradicts the will of the same revealed in the Word** that according to it (that is, the secret will) **He does not will the conversion and salvation of the greatest part of those whom He seriously calls and invites by the Word of the Gospel and by His revealed will;** and we do not here, as some say, acknowledge in God a holy simulation, or a double person.

Canons 2.5

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is, that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified, shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with **the command to repent and believe**, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel

Canons 2.B.6

Who use the difference between meriting and appropriating, to the end that they may instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching, that God, as far as he is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life, and others do not, this difference depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception, and that it is not dependent on the special gift of mercy, which powerfully works in them, that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace.

Canons 3/4.8

As many as are called by the gospel, are **unfeignedly** called. For God hath most **earnestly** and truly shown in his Word, what is pleasing to him, namely, that those who are called should come to him. He, moreover, **seriously** promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him.

As many as are called by the gospel, are **unfeignedly** [serio - seriously] called. For God hath most **earnestly** [serio - seriously] and truly shown in his Word, what is pleasing to him, namely, that those who are called should come to him. He, moreover, **seriously** [serio] promises eternal life, and rest, to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him.

Canons 3/4.9

It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ, **offered** [oblato] therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel, and confers upon them various gifts, **that those who are called by the ministry of the Word, refuse to come, and be converted: the fault lies in themselves;** some of whom when called, regardless of their danger, reject the Word of life; others, though they receive it, suffer it not to make a lasting impression on their heart; therefore, their joy, arising only from a temporary faith, soon vanishes, and they fall away; while others choke the seed of the Word by perplexing cares, and the pleasures of this world, and produce no fruit. This our Saviour teaches in the parable of the sower. (Matt. 13).

Maurice Roberts

Put simply, it is this: God has fixed the number of the elect from eternity past; yet God desires every sinner who hears his gospel offer to receive it and be eternally blessed in Christ. If the question is now asked, “How can both things be harmonised?”, we answer: “In this life we do not know.” Here we face Paradox or Antinomy, i.e. it is an apparent contradiction. But to us in this life it seems to be so. God cannot really have two contradictory wills. But so it now seems to us.

Murray & Stonehouse

“We have found that God himself expresses an ardent desire for the fulfilment of certain things which he has not decreed in his inscrutable counsel to come to pass. This means that there is a will to the realization of what he has not decretively willed, a pleasure towards that which he has not been pleased to decree. This is indeed mysterious, and why he has not brought to pass, in the exercise of his omnipotent power and grace, what is his ardent pleasure lies hid in the sovereign counsel of his will. We should not entertain, however, any prejudice against the notion that God desires or has pleasure in the accomplishment of what he does not decretively will.”