

The Objection Answered: General Principles

What are these general principles? First, I will set out what is *not* offered, and then what *is*. Then I will delineate to whom this offer is to be made. After which I will spell out the warrant for making the offer, showing that we have no need – or business – to try to reconcile the free offer with particular redemption. I hope in this way to show that particular redemption, far from clashing with the free offer, or stifling it, does the very reverse.¹⁹³

1. What is not offered in the free offer?

In the gospel offer, sinners are not told: ‘Christ died for you’.¹⁹⁴ No! John Kennedy: ‘There can be no warrant for saying to all who hear the gospel that... Christ is their... Redeemer’.¹⁹⁵ Such a thing ought not to be preached to sinners, nor are they called upon to believe it.¹⁹⁶ Even if it were possible for the unconverted to believe it, such faith would not be saving,¹⁹⁷ but, as I have pointed out, before conversion, they have no way of knowing it.¹⁹⁸ None but a believer can say: ‘The Son of God... loved me and gave himself for me’ (Gal. 2:20; see also Gal. 1:3-4; Eph. 1:7; 1 Thess. 5:10; 1 Pet. 1:17-19; Rev. 1:5-6 *etc.*); and when he says it, he is using the language of assurance.¹⁹⁹ Only when a sinner has been brought to saving faith, can he know he has been redeemed, can he justly reason that he is elect, and is thus assured.²⁰⁰ But all this has nothing whatsoever to do with the free offer. The free offer is to do with the conversion of an unbelieving sinner, and for that a sinner needs to repent and trust Christ.²⁰¹ To be speaking of the extent of the atonement, is to be dealing with a saint, his edification and assurance; in preaching to bring a sinner to Christ, the extent of the atonement is irrelevant.²⁰²

Preachers who confuse the two, mistake chalk for cheese, with dire consequences. Nothing could be more ludicrous than for a preacher to try to call unbelievers – unbelievers! – to Christ by engaging them in a discussion of the extent of election and the

The Objection Answered: General Principles

atonement.²⁰³ Such questions are not for unbelievers, and it is no part of the gospel call to arouse their curiosity about them.²⁰⁴ They need to be called to Christ. I am not saying that we should not preach the decrees when unbelievers are present, but such preaching must be with care and discretion, showing the right spirit.²⁰⁵ There is a very real danger of preaching the decrees as barriers to faith;²⁰⁶ we must do the reverse, especially showing sinners that no one, *before he trusted Christ*, ever knew he was one of the elect and that Christ died for him.²⁰⁷ In short, there is no need, nor is it right, to debate with unbelievers about limited atonement, unconditional election or irresistible grace. Unbelievers, I repeat, need to be called to Christ.²⁰⁸

John Murray:

This way of stating the case is parallel to what is true of election. Sinners do not come to Christ because they first believe [or know, or are told] that they have been elected. They come to Christ, and only then may they believe that they were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.²⁰⁹ The same is true in the matter of the atonement. It cannot be declared to men indiscriminately that... Christ died for them. The belief of this proposition is not the primary act of faith. Only in commitment to Christ as freely offered may we come to know that he died for our sins unto our redemption... Christ is offered and faith is first of all commitment to him. It is receiving and resting upon him alone for salvation.²¹⁰

I repeat the point: 'It cannot be declared to men indiscriminately that... Christ died for them. The belief of this proposition is not the primary act of faith'. So much for the negative, that which is *not* offered to sinners.

2. What is offered in the free offer?

Christ and full salvation in him are offered to sinners – who are to be commanded to repent and believe, and promised that if they do they will enjoy him and all the benefits he obtained for sinners (Ps. 2:12; Isa. 45:22; 55:1-7; Matt. 11:28; Acts 16:31; 17:30; Rom. 10:4,13; Rev. 22:17 *etc.*) That is what is offered to them all.²¹¹

John Murray again:

The Objection Answered: General Principles

What is freely offered in the gospel?... It is Christ who is offered... It is not the opportunity of salvation that is offered; it is salvation. And it is salvation because Christ is offered and Christ does not invite us to mere opportunity, but to himself.

[Again]: It is not the mere possibility of salvation, nor simply provision for salvation, that is offered freely in the gospel. It is rather salvation full, perfect and free. For it is Christ in all the glory of his person as Saviour and Redeemer, and in all the perfection of his finished work, who is offered to sinners in the gospel... It is salvation with such completeness and perfection that is presented to lost men in the full, free and unfettered call of the gospel.²¹²

I underline this important point. Christ and full salvation are offered to sinners; not merely the *opportunity* to be saved, the *possibility* of salvation, or the *provision* of salvation.

Booth:

Preaching the gospel... is proclaiming glad tidings to guilty, depraved and ruined creatures – tidings of pardon, of peace, and of salvation through Jesus Christ. Preaching the gospel is preaching Christ himself; or bearing a public testimony to his gracious character and perfect work. Preaching the gospel, therefore, is proclaiming salvation by sovereign grace – is exhibiting Jesus, not as willing to supply the deficiencies in upright characters; nor, merely, as granting assistance to persons already in the way to heaven; but as the only, the all-sufficient, the absolutely free Saviour of the condemned – the worthless – the lost.²¹³

Sinners, in Scripture, are never called upon to understand the ins-and-outs of – nor accept – a provisional or sufficient redemption. They are not offered such! They are offered Christ! ‘Trust Christ! This is your business! The extent of the atonement (or who is elected) is irrelevant to *you*; Christ and salvation are offered to *you*; it is *your* duty to repent and believe; if *you* come to Christ, *you* will be saved (Acts 16:31; 17:30)’. We must not stray from this simplicity and directness. The debate about particular redemption and the free offer is all well and good among Reformed theologians – but we are talking about dealing with sinners – and seeing them saved.

The point I am making – that it is Christ and full salvation which is offered to sinners in the gospel – is confirmed by looking at it the other way round. Why are sinners condemned? We know it

is not because they were not elected, or because Christ did not die for them; no, ‘the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness’. God holds them accountable ‘because, although they knew God’ from his works of creation, they ‘did not glorify him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened... and... they did not like to retain God in their knowledge’, with all the attendant corruption this entails (Rom. 1:18-32). Principally, sinners are condemned for not trusting Christ (John 3:18-19,36; 8:24; 16:8-9; 2 Thess. 2:10-12), for rejecting the free offer, for snubbing the Christ who is offered to them, for refusing to repent and believe.²¹⁴ Gill hit the nail on the head:

That [Christ] died for them, is what they are not obliged to believe, that being no part of the revelation made to them; nor will they be condemned for not believing that he died for them, but for their neglect, contempt and unbelief of him and his gospel... [Sinners are not] obliged to believe... that Jesus... died for them, or that he is their Saviour... God might have... justly condemned them for final impenitence, supposing Christ had never died at all, or for any at all... [None] are... condemned for not believing that Christ died for them, but for... the disbelief or contempt of his gospel.²¹⁵

To sum up this point: Christ, with full salvation in him, is offered to sinners in the gospel.

3. To whom is the offer made?

The gospel has to be preached to sinners, obviously! But what kind of sinners? To all sinners, none excepted. And to all of them merely as sinners; *not* as elect sinners, repentant sinners, sensible sinners, redeemed sinners,²¹⁶ prepared sinners, or any other kind of sinners; just sinners: ‘Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16:15). And to preach the gospel is to freely offer Christ and salvation to sinners, all sinners as sinners,²¹⁷ and to call, invite, command and exhort them to come to him.

Election and particular redemption do not come into it.²¹⁸ Of course, only elect sinners, sinners for whom Christ died, will come,²¹⁹ and they will come only because of the inward working of

The Objection Answered: General Principles

God's Spirit (John 3:3,5-8; 6:37,44), but which unregenerate sinners are in that number is beyond our knowledge, hidden in God's secret will, and, as concerning the inviting of sinners, nothing to do with us. What we are considering – all we can and should consider when dealing with unbelievers in the call of the gospel – is his revealed will. And this is plain enough: We have to invite and command all sinners as sinners to trust the Saviour.²²⁰

Kennedy:

If we ever come [to Christ] it must be *as sinners*... It would be well if preachers of the gospel were more impressed with [this] great [fact]... how impossible would they then find it to hesitate about requiring faith from all who hear the gospel! No difficulty arising from the sovereignty of God's love, and from the restricted reference of Christ's atonement, could hamper their minds or straiten their feelings in preaching Christ *to sinners*. All the more free and urgent would they be, as they realised a love, whose purposes must take effect, and a death, that shall not be in vain. And how the light of [this] great [fact] would clear men's views of faith, if only they would admit it into their minds!²²¹

Bunyan:

God... would have *all men whatever* invited by the gospel to lay hold of life by Christ, whether elect or reprobate; for though it is true, that there is such a thing as election and reprobation, yet God, by the tenders of the gospel... looks upon men under another consideration; to wit, *as sinners*; and *as sinners* invites them to believe, lay hold of, and embrace the same. He does not say to his ministers: 'Go preach to the elect, because they are elect...' but: 'Go preach the gospel *to sinners as sinners*...'... The gospel must be preached *to sinners as they are sinners*, without distinction of elect or reprobate; because neither the one nor yet the other, as considered under these [two] simple acts [of God], are fit subjects to embrace the gospel... but the gospel is to be tendered to men *as they are sinners*... Thus you see the gospel is to be tendered *to all in general... to sinners as sinners*; and so [in this way] are they to receive it, and to close with the tenders thereof.²²²

Fuller: 'He that believes in Jesus Christ must believe in him as he is revealed in the gospel, and that is as the Saviour of *sinners*. It is only *as a sinner*, exposed to the righteous displeasure of God, that he must approach him'.²²³ Owen: 'Christ died... only for the elect... Some then tell us we cannot invite all men promiscuously to

believe. But why so? We invite... all men *as sinners*; and we know that Christ died for *sinners*'.²²⁴

4. What is the warrant for the free offer?

Why should we offer Christ and salvation to all? What right do we have? Precisely the same reason and right as doing anything and everything else in the Christian religion. What is the warrant for faith, preaching, baptism, the Lord's supper, and so on? It is not election;²²⁵ it is not the extent of the atonement, certainly not its 'sufficiency'; it is not a knowledge of God's secret will (Deut. 29:29a).²²⁶ So what is it? The warrant for faith and all the rest – in particular, the warrant for making the free offer – is the plain command of Scripture, the revealed will of God (Deut. 29:29b); 'the warrant lies in Scripture alone',²²⁷ 'the simple command and warrant of the word' of God.²²⁸ Let me make my meaning clear: We must obey God in whatever his word commands us to do – whether or not we can fully explain or reconcile the various parts of any particular command. And in trying to understand any principle or practice which God calls us to adopt, we must restrain ourselves to that which Scripture reveals, and not resort to logical contrivances. Let us not 'think beyond what is written' (1 Cor. 4:6). This is what I mean by saying the warrant for the free offer, its ground or basis, is the command and practice of Scripture.²²⁹ I agree with Owen. We know there is:

The infallible connection, according to God's purpose and will, [between] faith and salvation, which is frequently the thing intended in gospel proposals... The Lord has in his counsel established it, and revealed in his word, that there is an indissoluble bond between these two things, so that 'he that believes shall be saved' (Mark 16:16)... Now, this connection of the means and the end, faith and life, is the only thing which is signified and held out to innumerable [sinners] to whom the gospel is preached; all the commands, proffers and promises that are made unto them intimating no more than this will of God, that believers shall certainly be saved; which is an unquestionable divine verity and a sufficient object for supernatural [that is, saving] faith to rest upon, and which not being closed with is a sufficient cause of damnation: John 8:24, 'If you believe not that I am he' (that is, 'the way, the truth and the life'), 'you shall die in your sins'.

The Objection Answered: General Principles

It is a vain imagination of some [that is, Amyraldians], that when the command and promise of believing are made out to any man, though he is of the number of them that shall certainly perish, yet the Lord has a conditional will of his salvation, and intends that he shall be saved, on condition that he will believe; when the condition does not lie at all in the will of God...

The gospel requires a resting upon... Christ, so [revealed] and believed on to be the promised Redeemer, as an all-sufficient Saviour, with whom is plenteous redemption, and who is able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him, and to bear the burden of all weary labouring souls that come by faith to him.²³⁰

Booth, commenting on gospel invitations as recorded in Scripture:

Here we have, not only the apostles of Christ, but Christ himself; and, in his ambassadors, even the divine Father, inviting, persuading, entreating the polluted, impoverished, perishing wretches, to regard the vicarious work of Christ, as the only ground of their justification; and the plentiful provisions of divine grace, as containing all that is wanted for their complete happiness. These invitations, therefore, may be justly considered as a direct and perfect *warrant* for sinners of every nation, and of every character, that are indulged with the joyful news, to believe in Jesus... If the gospel is not a complete *warrant* for the most ungodly to believe in Jesus, it must be either because the grace revealed in it is not equal to their wants; or because they are tacitly forbidden, while destitute of holiness, to treat him as the Saviour.²³¹ Not the former; for the grace revealed is rich, abundant, exceedingly abundant and all-sufficient. Not the latter; for the ungodly... so far from being prohibited, are invited to Christ, and earnestly entreated, by a consideration of his vicarious death, to be reconciled to God (Is. 45:22; 55:1; Matt. 11:28; 2 Cor. 5:20)... Does anyone ask: 'What is my WARRANT [emphasis Booth's] for believing in Jesus Christ?' The answer is... not anything done by you, not anything wrought in you; but the word of grace, or the testimony of God concerning Jesus. Well, reader, what do you think of Christ, and of this gracious *warrant* for the ungodly to believe in him?²³²

William Cunningham:

The sole *ground* or *warrant* for men's act, in offering pardon and salvation to their fellow-men, is the authority and command of God in his word. We have no other *warrant* than this; we need no other; and we should seek or desire none; but on this *ground* alone should consider ourselves not only *warranted*, but bound, to proclaim to our fellow-men, whatever be their... condition, the good news of the

The Objection Answered: General Principles

kingdom, and to call upon them to come to Christ that they may be saved, the Bible affording us sufficient, indeed, abundant materials for convincing them that, in right reason, they ought to do this, and for assuring them that all who do, shall obtain eternal life. But this has manifestly nothing to do with the question, as to the *ground* or *warrant* of God's act in making unlimited offers, and in *authorising* us to make them.²³³

The warrant, as Cunningham said, 'is the authority and command of God in his word'.

Durham:

Christ's death for you is not the formal *ground* nor *warrant* of your faith, nor yet of the offer of the gospel, but [that ground is] the Lord's will *warranting* you to believe, and calling for it from you, and his commanding you to rest upon Christ for the attaining of righteousness, as he is offered to us in the gospel. We are invited by his command and promise, and we are not first called to believe that Christ died for us, but we are called first to believe in him that is offered to us in the gospel; that is our duty. And folks are not condemned because Christ died not for them, but because when he offered the benefit of his death and sufferings to them, they slighted and rejected it. We are to look first to what Christ calls to, and not to meddle with the other; that is, whom Christ [intended] in his death, till we have done the first. The word bids all believe that they may be saved; and such as neglect this command will be found disobedient... Though Christ has not died for all, yet all that flee unto him by faith, shall be partakers of his death; and from this you should reason, and not from his intention in [that is, the extent of the atonement he accomplished in his] dying.²³⁴

As Haldane said: 'The good shepherd laid down his life for the sheep, and for them alone, and at the same time commanded the gospel to be preached to every creature'.²³⁵ What does this mean? Just this:

The invitations of the gospel rest upon the Lord's express commandment [Mark 16:15]... This precept is illustrated by the practice of the apostles... Wherever they went, they addressed men indiscriminately... In like manner, the sinner's warrant to trust in Christ for salvation, is not his own [or the preacher's] speculations about the sufficiency of the atonement, but the positive assurance that whosoever will may come and take of the water of life freely. The word of God alone is the warrant of our faith; his purpose to save few or many is not the rule of our obedience. The invitations of the gospel are [as] free as

The Objection Answered: General Principles

the air we breathe, as the light of heaven; and are to be addressed to all who come under the joyful sound. No qualification is required to entitle us to embrace them; they are clogged with no condition. Not only is the greatest rebel encouraged to come to Christ that he may have life, but he is urged to join in the invitation to his fellow-sinners [Rev. 22:17]... If we believe in Christ – if on the ground of the warrant of the word of God we trust in him for salvation – we have the assurance of being partakers of eternal life, as much as if we saw our names enrolled among God’s elect...

The ground of faith, then, is not the extent of the atonement; it is the promise of pardon and eternal life through Jesus to all who believe, without distinction and without exception. Those for whom Christ did not lay down his life, if they come under the sound of the gospel, have the same warrant to believe as those whose sins were expiated on Calvary, whose names were written in the Lamb’s book of life, and to whom, in the person of their great head and representative, God, who cannot lie, promised eternal life before the world began... The objection that there can be no *bona fide* invitation to sinners to receive pardon through faith in Christ unless atonement has been made for all, is founded on a variety of errors in regard to the gospel. In the first place, it proceeds on the erroneous supposition that God commands sinners to believe that an atonement has been made for their sins. Now, we have seen that the gospel merely invites²³⁶ sinners to trust in Christ, with the assurance that in doing so they shall be saved. Men are never called in the first instance to believe that they are saved, or that they are of the number of the elect, or that an atonement has been made for their sins. The gospel merely [that is, simply] reveals the sacrifice offered upon the cross, with the assurance that reliance upon it is inseparably connected with salvation. This is a truth entirely independent of the extent of the atonement.²³⁷

R.Elliot, in his funeral sermon for Whitfield:

The scripture doctrine of election and predestination as we believe and preach it, is no discouragement to sinners, no bar to anyone’s conversion; for our *warrant* to come to Christ is not God’s secret decree and purpose concerning us, but his inviting, calling and commanding us in his word to repent and believe on Christ. No one indeed can prove or know his election, but by his conversion to God, and obeying the gospel. They that believe aright do not believe in Christ from consideration of their being elected, but from the consideration of their being lost sinners, [that is, the sort] whom Christ came to seek and to save. Neither do they who disobey the gospel, reject Christ and his salvation, from the consideration of their being

reprobated, but because they love darkness rather than light, and voluntarily... choose the way that leads unto death. Nor will anyone be condemned at the last day, because God, in righteousness, sovereignly passed him by, and did not elect him in Christ, but because he would not obey God and come to Christ that he might have life... All true believers are God's elect; and... their believing is the fruit and effect of it. On the other hand, they that willingly continue in sin and unbelief to the last, do thereby prove themselves not to be of the number of God's elect, but of them whom he has justly reprobated. Let none of you therefore, through ignorance, stumble at this doctrine, but be persuaded to come to Christ, and you shall be saved.²³⁸

The warrant for making the free offer, I repeat, has nothing to do with the extent of Christ's atonement. Nothing at all.²³⁹ Certainly, it is not that Christ died for all or that his redemption is sufficient for all.²⁴⁰ As Owen said: 'Ministers of the gospel... being acquainted only with revealed things... are bound to... warn all men... giving the same commands, proposing the same promises, making tenders of Jesus Christ in the same manner, to all... From the general proposition of Christ in the promises, nothing can be concluded concerning his death for all to whom it is proposed'.²⁴¹ John Murray: 'The warrant a sinner has and must have is that which is indiscriminating – the invitation, command, demand, overture and promise of the gospel. The warrant is not any assurance that Christ has saved him'.²⁴²

5. Particular redemption, the free offer, and human logic

Here we come to the root problem in this discussion. How can we reconcile the free offer and particular redemption? The short answer is: We can't! God has not told us how.²⁴³ But this is no reason to disobey God, and not freely offer Christ and salvation to sinners.²⁴⁴ The fact is, as I have noted, our inability to explain the seeming contradiction over the free offer does not stop at particular redemption; total depravity,²⁴⁵ unconditional election²⁴⁶ and irresistible grace, too, it is argued, contradict the free offer, or must be ignored.²⁴⁷ But there can be no contradiction between any of the five doctrines of grace and the free offer, nor dare we ignore any, since God has revealed all of them. There can be nothing in the free offer which compromises the decrees, nor *vice-versa*,²⁴⁸ that is,

nothing biblically. And though men raise rational arguments to play one against the other, we have to argue biblically, not on the basis of human reason. The fact is, God, in his word, has not explained how we are to reconcile the offer and the decrees; *nor has he required us to try*. While we are warranted in going as far as Scripture in explaining their connection,²⁴⁹ we must renounce every attempt to explain away any aspect of these respective truths.²⁵⁰ That a helpless sinner, a non-elect sinner, a sinner for whom Christ has not died, in whom the Spirit will not work effectually, is to be commanded and expected to obey the gospel, and be sincerely offered salvation, seems contradictory to human logic.²⁵¹ But so what? Is human reason to be the great arbiter of what we believe and do?²⁵² Human logic has to fall before Scripture, and the seeming inconsistency left with God.²⁵³ The biblical response to the objection to the free offer – whether it be made on the grounds of total depravity, unconditional election, particular redemption or irresistible grace – is that all five doctrines of grace are part of God’s revealed will, and although sinners are dead in sin, and only the elect will be saved, and Christ died only for the elect, and without the distinguishing irresistible work of the Spirit none will come, nevertheless the Bible teaches that all sinners must be offered salvation.²⁵⁴ The right and proper answer, therefore, to any who would still cavil that the free offer and the other four cannot be reconciled by man, is: ‘O man, who are you to reply against God?’ (Rom. 9:20).²⁵⁵

To be specific and deal with the question in hand, since God has revealed that Christ accomplished a particular redemption, and that a free offer should be made to all sinners – that all sinners should be commanded to repent and believe – so be it. Since God does not give us an explanation of this, but simply states both, and leaves us with a paradox, that should be the end of the matter.²⁵⁶

But still the objector insists that the free offer compromises particular redemption. Why does he say it? Because his logic tells him it must be so. It tells him that a sincere free-offer – which is to all – needs an atonement which is likewise for all, an atonement which is equally effective – or at least sufficient – for all; otherwise, it is said, the offer cannot be sincere.²⁵⁷ The objector, apparently, will not accept any doctrine, or do anything in

The Objection Answered: General Principles

obedience to God, unless his poor feeble mind can reconcile the various parts of God's teaching or command, and until his human logic can sort it all out and understand it all. I dealt very fully with this arrogant spirit in my *Offer*, so I will not repeat my arguments here. But that is what it is; it is sheer arrogance to say something cannot be right unless the human mind can grasp it.²⁵⁸ Man has no right to demand an explanation where God has not provided one. What is more, once we take that path there will be no end of it. Thomas J. Nettles: 'The absolute particularity of the atonement needs no more apology [that is, justification or defence] than does... unconditional election... If the theologian must become enamoured with demonstrating how God's activity releases him from any likelihood of impugnation... election... [will] have to be defended in the same way'.²⁵⁹ And so will irresistible grace.

If the objector is an *anxious* sinner who is on the point of coming to Christ, but is held back because he wonders if Christ died for him, then such a sinner needs kindly to be told some home truths. 'What if Christ has not died for me?',²⁶⁰ must be met with: 'This is none of your business. Do not let Satan torment your mind, diverting your attention over it. No unbeliever has to know that Christ died for him, before he trusts him. Never was there an unbeliever who knew such a thing. The fact is, no unbeliever can know it. And such knowledge would not be saving, in any case'.²⁶¹ What is the sinner's business? 'You are in desperate need. Infinite mercy in Christ is being extended to you. You are invited to come to Christ and be saved. You are not saved by knowledge or understanding, or having all things sorted out in your mind. You need to trust Christ, now! Trust Christ, and you will know he has died for you! Come to him – he will cast out none that come (John 6:37)'. No sinner is saved because he knows he is elect, knows that Christ died for him, and knows that God will work irresistibly in him.²⁶² And it is no part of the free offer to try to get sinners to know it; such things are not knowable before faith in Christ. The sinner's sole responsibility is to repent and believe. 'The sinner's warrant to believe... is not the persuasion that Christ died for him'.²⁶³ The sinner's warrant to believe is God's commanding of him to believe.²⁶⁴

The Objection Answered: General Principles

If the objector is a *defiant* sinner, one who demands to know how the offer squares with particular redemption before he will believe (and, I pause to ask, is this a real case?),²⁶⁵ such a sinner needs firmly to be told some home truths: ‘You must come to God as a beggar, not as an equal demanding satisfaction of your every question before you deign to believe. If you are to be saved, it will be on God’s terms, in God’s way, and only in God’s way. We dare not pander to your demand (indeed, if it really exists) to have every detail of the gospel reconciled to your satisfaction before you will believe. You must submit to Christ in the gospel, not sit in judgement upon God, demanding a justification for what he offers you, and how he offers it.’²⁶⁶ We command you to come to Christ. We warn you of your peril if you will not’. All such talk as: ‘I would believe if I knew I was elect, I would believe if I knew God will effectively call me, I would believe if I knew Christ died for me’, is nothing other than sheer arrogance. Though it sounds spiritual, it is anything but. No unbelieving sinner has ever been told God the Father elected him in particular, God the Son died for him in particular, God the Spirit will work in him in particular, and therefore he in particular must come. For a sinner to insist on such an assurance before he will believe, is an impertinence of the highest order.²⁶⁷ He has no right to make such a demand, and no warrant or promise to expect God to satisfy it. Indeed, it is directly ruled out by Deuteronomy 29:29.²⁶⁸

Not only must we not pander to sinners by trying to answer questions they have no right to ask, and try to justify God – of which God has no need – or offer an apology for him – which is a blasphemy even to suggest – we must not give them such questions to ask. We have no business to light such a fire, and then feed it. And to try to justify God in this matter, to indulge the sinner, and boost his pride, at the very time he needs to be humbled and submit himself to Christ in the gospel, is catastrophic.²⁶⁹ The sinner must not impose terms on God, as to how and what he can offer him, and on what basis. Nor must he be allowed to, or encouraged to.²⁷⁰ The preacher should not be playing the defiant sinner’s game here, fuelling his arrogance. The sinner must submit to God in his word, and bow the knee to him in Christ. If he will not do it now in the gospel unto salvation, as it offered to him, he will do so in the day

The Objection Answered: General Principles

of judgement (Isa. 45:23; Rom. 14:11; Phil. 2:9-11) to his condemnation, and he must be told as much.²⁷¹ This, too, is a part of the free offer. Those who will not submit to God in this, not only show a proud spirit; they hurt their own souls.²⁷²

And preachers who do delve into the decrees with sinners, and refuse to offer Christ to them, seem happy to pluck a harp with only one string: ‘The elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded’ (Rom. 11:7). While this is a truth, it is not the whole truth; and Paul did not preach it, as far as I know, to sinners. I do not say we should not preach it to them, but I do say it is not the sum of gospel preaching to sinners. After all, God, who inspired Paul’s statement (in Rom. 11:7), also declared, in the same context: ‘All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people’ (Rom. 10:21).²⁷³

In short, to fail to preach the free offer because we cannot reconcile it with total depravity, unconditional election, particular redemption or distinguishing grace – or, if the offer is preached, to think these cardinal doctrines will be compromised – is tragically wrong. Such objections are either misguided (though often well-intentioned), or else a gross misuse of the decrees to stifle the offer. When we are told: ‘Sinners have no ability to believe, we do not know who the elect are, we do not know for whom Christ died, we do not know in whom the Spirit will work, therefore we cannot offer Christ to all’, there is but one reply: It is a *non-sequiter*. Of course we do not know any of the afore-mentioned. No preacher knows the secret will of God – in particular whom God has elected and for whom Christ has died – but this is not of the slightest consequence in his addresses to sinners, because such knowledge is no part of preaching the gospel offer.²⁷⁴ The extent of election and the atonement is hidden in the secret will of God, and does not belong to us (Deut. 29:29), but we do know we have to offer Christ to all. How the sovereign God will work it all out, is none of our business. On the day of judgement, we will not be held accountable for our inability to explain all the mysteries of God – but we will be held accountable if we have not obeyed our Master, and preached his gospel as we should (Ezek. 33:1-9; Acts 20:20-27; 1 Cor. 9:16).²⁷⁵

The Objection Answered: General Principles

As I have noted, the demand for a logical resolution of the biblical paradox is the fundamental issue in this debate about the free offer. What is more, reader, this demand has tentacles which reach so far, and so effectively strangle the preaching of the gospel, that, in hope of saying something to encourage the hesitant to break its choking grip, I must trespass a little more on your time. Sadly, some preachers who would like to be able to reconcile particular redemption and the free offer, wishing to be free in their addresses to sinners, are still unsure and nervous: 'Unless the redemption is universal, how can the offer be?' Reader, if you are one such, listen to J.L.Dagg: 'If the difficulty... should perplex us, we may obtain relief, as we are compelled to do... by receiving the whole of God's truth on his authority, even though the harmony of its parts is not apparent to our weak understandings. In this way, theological difficulties furnish an opportunity for the exercise of confidence in the divine veracity; and our state of mind is never better or safer than when, in simple faith, we take God at his word'.²⁷⁶ Just so. We need the humility, *and the faith*, to submit our poor reason to God's sovereign declarations. Nor must we be afraid to tell sinners we cannot reconcile these things. We must let them know that we, like them, have to bow to God in his word, and obey the gospel. And this we gladly do. It matters not that we cannot reconcile it all. We have to accept what God says, and obey him, trusting him through every paradox which this leads us into. This is not only the right course; it is the best; indeed, it is the *biblical* course. God's command and promise is the warrant and basis of the free offer – the warrant for us to offer Christ to sinners, and the warrant for them to receive him.²⁷⁷

Dagg again:

If [since] God's word teaches the doctrine of election, and if [since] it contains commands or invitations to all men to seek salvation through Christ, it is highly presumptuous in us to charge God with insincerity, because we cannot reconcile the two things with each other. We ought to remember that we are worms of the dust, and that it is criminal arrogance in us to judge and condemn [or prescribe to] the infinite God. But, in truth, there is no ground whatever for this charge of insincerity. God requires all men to believe in Christ; and this is their duty, however unwilling they may be to perform it. The fact that they are unwilling, and that God knows they will remain unwilling, unless

The Objection Answered: General Principles

he changes their hearts, abates nothing from the sincerity of the requirement. God proves his sincerity, by holding them to the obligation, and condemning their unbelief. He promises salvation to all who believe in Christ; and he proves his sincerity by fulfilling his promise in every instance. The bestowment of special grace, changing the hearts of men, and bringing them to believe in Christ, is, in no respect, inconsistent with any requirement or promise that God has made... When [men] regard [the call of the gospel] as a solemn requirement of duty, for which God will certainly hold them accountable, they will find no occasion for calling his sincerity in question.

Not only does this apply to total depravity, election and irresistible grace; the same goes for particular redemption:

Some have maintained that, if the atonement of Christ is not general, no sinner can be under obligation to believe in Christ, until he is assured that he is one of the elect. This implies that no sinner is bound to believe what God says, unless he knows that God designs to save him. [Yet] God declares that there is no salvation, except through Christ; and every sinner is bound [obliged] to believe this truth. If it was revealed from heaven, that but one sinner, of all our fallen race, shall be saved by Christ, the obligation [duty] to believe that there is no salvation out of Christ [and this is Christ's and the apostles' teaching (John 14:6; Acts 4:12)], would remain the same. Every sinner... would be bound [obliged as his duty] to look to Christ as his only possible hope, and commit himself to that sovereign mercy by which some one of the justly condemned race would be saved [*cf.* Esther 4:16]. [Now] the abundant mercy of our God will not be confined to the salvation of a single sinner, but it will bring many sons to glory through the sufferings of Jesus, the Captain of our salvation. Yet every sinner, who trusts in Christ for salvation, is bound [obliged as his duty] to commit himself, unreservedly, to the sovereign mercy of God. *If he requires some previous assurance that he is in the number of the elect, he does not surrender himself to God, as a guilty sinner ought.* The gospel brings every sinner prostrate at the feet of the great sovereign, hoping for mercy at his will, and in his way; and the gospel is perverted when any terms short of this are offered to the offender. With this universal call to absolute and unconditional surrender to God's sovereignty, the doctrine of particular redemption exactly harmonises.²⁷⁸

I repeat Dagg's excellent response to the demand for reconciliation of the paradox since some charge God with insincerity in the offer: 'There is no ground whatever for this charge of insincerity'. And

far from trying to justify God, Dagg baldly set out the true biblical warrant for the free offer: ‘God requires all men to believe in Christ; and this is their duty, however unwilling they may be to perform it’. Above all, as I am trying to show at this time, he spelled out the grievous consequences of applying human logic to the offer: Whereas ‘the gospel brings every sinner prostrate at the feet of the great sovereign, hoping for mercy at his will, and in his way... *the gospel is perverted when any terms short of this are offered to the offender*’. In short: ‘With this universal call to absolute and unconditional surrender to God’s sovereignty, the doctrine of particular redemption exactly harmonises’. All talk of not being able to reconcile the offer with the decrees, and to think this means we cannot make a free offer, is wide of the mark. It is tragic.

There is another factor to be borne in mind; an important factor, at that. To admit that we cannot reconcile these things, is not to say the same about God. Indeed, he has no need to reconcile them. There is no contradiction at all. As I said in my *Offer*, and have restated in this work: ‘To God, there is no conflict whatsoever; the conflict is... entirely and only... as it seems to us’.²⁷⁹ *There is no contradiction at all*, I say again.

In short, as Robert M’Cheyne Edgar concluded, there are only two positions. The first is to say this is an impossibility; if the atonement is limited, (and if man is totally depraved, and God has unconditionally elected those who are to be saved), the offer cannot be general and sincere. But there is a second position:

We may believe it possible for the Almighty to reconcile a limited atonement with a general offer, and that he will do so in his own good time, while our duty meanwhile is to proclaim the gospel fully and freely upon the ground of this assurance... It is the attitude of trust. It is the resolve to walk by faith, and not by sight, in this high mystery. The advocates of a universal atonement [whether or not a provisional or sufficient atonement], on the other hand, refuse to give God credit for the ability to make reconciliation between the defined and limited atonement and the general offer of his gospel. They seem to think that the skein becomes too tangled for the divine fingers, that the... [attributes] of God are insufficient as a guarantee against a collision between the electing decree [and/or total depravity, particular

redemption and irresistible grace] and the general offer of the gospel.²⁸⁰

It is not only ‘the advocates of a universal atonement’ who ‘refuse to give God credit for the ability to make reconciliation between the defined and limited atonement and the general offer of his gospel’! Edgar’s comments apply just as much to those staunch advocates of particular redemption who, though right on that truth, nevertheless misapply it to rule out a free offer. And this leads to the final point.

6. Particular redemption does not rule out the free offer – quite the reverse

Above all, to think that free offer is ruled out by particular redemption (or any other of the five points of Calvinism), is to do more than make a tragic mistake; it is to turn the truth on its head,²⁸¹ for it is only within the Calvinistic framework that the free offer can be made.²⁸² These self-same doctrines, far from hindering the free offer, are its very backbone.²⁸³

Not least, I say, particular redemption. John Murray:

It is frequently objected that [particular redemption] is inconsistent with the full and free offer of Christ in the gospel. This is a grave misunderstanding and misrepresentation. The truth really is that *it is only on the basis of [particular redemption] that we can have a free and full offer of Christ to lost men*. What is offered to men in the gospel? It is not the possibility of salvation, not simply the opportunity of salvation. What is offered is salvation. To be more specific, it is Christ himself in all the glory of his person, and in all the perfection of his finished work who is offered. And he is offered as the one who made expiation for sin and wrought redemption. But he could not be offered in this capacity or character if he had not secured salvation and accomplished redemption... *It is the very doctrine that Christ procured and secured redemption that invests the free offer of the gospel with richness and power... It is because Christ procured and secured redemption that he is an all-sufficient and suitable Saviour*. It is as such he is offered.²⁸⁴

As Murray said elsewhere: ‘The doctrines of particular election, differentiating love [and] limited atonement do not erect any fence around the offer in the gospel’. Murray referred to the time when Christ, speaking of God’s sovereignty in hiding the gospel from

The Objection Answered: General Principles

some and revealing it to others, immediately called the weary and heavy laden to come to him (Matt. 11:25-30). ‘The lesson is that it is not merely [the] conjunction of [the] differentiating and sovereign will with [the] free overture, but that *the free overture comes out from the differentiating sovereignty* of both Father and Son. It is on the crest of the wave of divine sovereignty that the unrestricted summons comes to the labouring and heavy laden’.²⁸⁵ And, reader, make no mistake, the invitation (or command) in the passage is unrestricted.²⁸⁶ Thus the freeness of the offer not only goes hand-in-hand with God’s sovereignty; it flows out of it. Christ confirmed it, speaking of both in the same breath.

John Calvin on the passage (Matt. 11:25-30):

That all do not obey the gospel arises from no want of power on the part of God, who could easily have brought all the creatures into subjection to his government... That some arrive at faith, while others remain hardened and obstinate, is accomplished by his free election; for, drawing some, and passing by others, he alone makes a distinction among men, whose condition by nature is alike.

How do many react to such teaching? As Calvin said, like this:

Many persons, as soon as they learn that none are heirs of eternal life but those whom God ‘chose before the foundation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4), begin to enquire anxiously how they may be assured of God’s secret purpose, and thus plunge into a labyrinth, from which they will find no escape.

And what does Christ say to such? ‘Christ enjoins them to come direct to himself, in order to obtain the certainty of salvation’. In short, the proper deduction from all this, said Calvin, ‘the meaning therefore is’:

That life is exhibited to us in Christ himself, and that no man will partake of it who does not enter by the gate of faith. We now see that [Christ] connects faith with the eternal predestination of God – two things which men foolishly and wickedly hold to be inconsistent with each other. Though our salvation was always hidden with God, yet Christ is the channel through which it flows to us, and we receive it by faith.²⁸⁷

And what of Gill? While not for a moment suggesting that he believed in the free offer(!), nevertheless it is clear that in Matthew

The Objection Answered: General Principles

11:25-30 Gill saw God's sovereignty and invitations to sinners running in tandem:²⁸⁸

[Christ speaks of] the sovereignty of his Father in the conversion of men... He... leaves [some] men to their own darkness and blindness; so that they cannot see, perceive and understand the beauty, glory, excellency and suitableness of the doctrines of [the gospel]. Now when Christ confesses this, or gives thanks to God for it, it is a declaration that God has done so, and denotes his acquiescence in it... To [others] God reveals... Christ, and all the blessings of grace in him, the mysteries of the gospel, and the unseen glories of another world. The veil of darkness and ignorance is removed from them; spiritual sight is given them... their desires are raised after them; their affections are set on them; their hearts are impressed with them; and they are helped to view their interest in them... Here the word designs [denotes] the sovereign counsel and purpose of God, to which, and to which only, our Lord refers the different dispensations of God towards the sons of men... All the elect of God are delivered to [Christ], to be kept and saved by him; all... to whom it was the Father's will to reveal the mysteries of grace, were his care and charge... and all the glory and happiness of his people, are put into his hands... all that he was to do and suffer for his people, all that he... should communicate to and bestow upon them... Christ having signified that the knowledge of God, and the mysteries of grace, are only to be come at through him, and that he has all things relating to the peace, comfort, happiness and salvation of men in his hands, kindly invites and encourages souls to come unto him for the same.²⁸⁹

This is it: 'Christ *having signified* that the knowledge of God, and the mysteries of grace, are only to be come at through him, and that he has all things relating to the peace, comfort, happiness and salvation of men in his hands, *kindly invites and encourages souls to come unto him* for the same'. That is, Christ, having frankly declared the sovereignty of God in grace, freely invites sinners to himself, showing that the sovereignty of God in election and particular redemption, far from contradicting the free offer, is its very life and power.

Edward Griffin captured the note. The sovereignty of God hinders the free offer? Far from it! Having spelled out the distinguishing grace of God which led to the glorious finished work of Christ, and the gift of the Spirit to bring... Reader, I pause; 'to

The Objection Answered: General Principles

bring'... 'to bring' *what*, do you think? Christ redeemed the elect only; he sent out the Holy Spirit. To do *what*? Griffin went on:

Christ... sent out the Holy Spirit to bring invitations to a universal world, and to subdue as many as the Father had given him... It was God and not man who undertook to provide that the gospel should be preached to every nation under heaven.

Pulling no punches over the sovereignty of God – 'God has taken into his own hands the salvation of every individual of his elect. It belongs to him to awaken the conscience... to convince of sin... to subdue the resistance which the heart is sure to make to the calls of the Spirit' – even so – no! – because of this! – Griffin freely called to sinners. Using the doctrines of grace, not as a barrier, but as a stimulus, he cried:

Here also is the only hope of unrenewed sinners. Come hither you mixed multitude of impenitent men, and contemplate the only chance [opportunity]²⁹⁰ which remains for your salvation. Unless that God whom you have made your enemy by wicked works, undertakes for you, all heaven and earth cannot save you. Unless that God whom you daily disobey... to whom you refuse to cry for relief – unless he in mercy to your poor perishing souls, begins and carries on and completes your salvation, you are undone for eternity. Will you any longer treat your only helper with so much neglect and abuse? Remember that you are in his hands. One frown from him and you are plunged into eternal woe; one smile from him and you live for ever. O realise your condition. Hasten to cast yourselves at his feet. 'Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon'. Amen.²⁹¹

* * *

These, then, are the general principles which make up the answer to the objection to the free offer based on the fact that Christ did not die for all men. As I have shown, it is no part of the free offer to tell men that Christ died for them in particular – nor do they have to believe it. No! In the free offer, sinners are to be told that if they repent and trust Christ – he who died for sinners – they will receive full salvation in him. They are to be invited and commanded to come, being warned that if they do not, but refuse the invitation and

The Objection Answered: General Principles

disobey the command, they will perish. What is more, it is sinners as sinners who are to be given the free offer, invitation and command; not as sinners elect or redeemed. In addition, the warrant for the free offer does not lie in God's decrees, but in the plain word of God; not in God's secret purposes, but in his revealed commands. True, the free offer appears to run counter to human logic in light of particular redemption, but this is nothing out of the ordinary; as always, human logic has to fall before Scripture. Finally, particular redemption – far from ruling out the free offer – is its backbone.

These are the general principles. Now to apply them to the three specific forms of the objection to the free offer.