

A Warning and a Challenge

As I draw to a close, I want to return to a very important point I made in my *Offer*, and to which I referred earlier. That is, many who in theory are persuaded of the rightness of the free offer – and therefore consider themselves staunchly opposed to hyper-Calvinism – are, nevertheless, hypers; albeit, unwitting, *de facto*, or incipient hyper-Calvinists. Hypers? Yes! And yet, although they are failing to preach as they know they ought to sinners, some convince themselves that they are. Others are afraid or too embarrassed to do what they know to be right. Whatever the reason, incipient hyper-Calvinism is the result.³⁵¹

Fuller's comment on Booth is apposite. As I have explained, although the two men disagreed about various aspects of redemption and the basis for the free offer, both were persuaded of the warrant for sinners as sinners to believe.³⁵² But Fuller had noticed something about Booth:

I have never been able to learn... from his writings, preaching or conversation, after all that has been said about sinners as sinners being warranted to believe, that he even exhorts them to it; or avows it to be the command of God that they should repent and believe, in such a manner as is connected with salvation.

Fuller attributed this to Booth's holding of:

The substitution of Christ in a way that does not admit of 'the command to repent and believe being promiscuously addressed to all'... Now what is it, but [other than] his ideas of imputation and substitution that can be the cause of this hesitation? I call it hesitation, because I never heard or saw anything in him that amounted to a denial of it. Yet he does not avow it, though he well knows it was avowed by Calvin, and all Calvinists for more than a century after the Reformation. They held the doctrines of imputation and substitution so as to feel at liberty to exhort sinners, without distinction, to repent and believe in Christ. Mr Booth does not.³⁵³

I record this episode, not only with some sadness, but with the positive purpose of trying to enforce my complaint that although we can – in theory – be persuaded of the freeness of the offer, we

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can – in practice – fail to preach it when we address sinners. Whether Fuller was right about the reasons for Booth’s ‘hesitancy’, I cannot say, but as I have tried to show, a belief in particular redemption, including the biblical doctrines of imputation, substitution and union with Christ, is no hindrance whatsoever to the free offer. The point I now want to press, however, is Fuller’s claim that Booth, for all his agreement with the free warrant for sinners to trust Christ, when it came to it, did not actually address sinners with those biblical commands and invitations as he ought – my very complaint about incipient hyper-Calvinism. And I have to record that, as far as I have read Booth, neither have I come across what I would call the free offer preached to sinners as sinners.³⁵⁴ And, if Fuller was right, this was because of Booth’s view of particular redemption – the very issue I am tackling.

But! ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ (Luke 4:23). What about Fuller himself? As far as I have discovered from Fuller’s sermons, I have not found *him* pleading with sinners as freely as he ought!³⁵⁵

All this is more than disappointing, because, although I consider Booth’s approach to the atonement and the basis of the offer to be more biblical than Fuller’s, both men had much which was excellent to say on the free offer. As I say, I record it as a warning to those of us who reject hyper-Calvinism but who – when it comes to it – are virtual hypes in practice.

But I must not leave it there. For all I have said by way of criticism of Fuller, how apt are his words in the spiritual climate in which we live today. And how necessary! I pay tribute to the man who preached and wrote them:

The gospel is a message in which... we ought to be firm, and fearless of consequences. Speak boldly... You must not calculate consequences as they respect this life. If you would preach the gospel as you ought to preach it, the approbation of *God* must be your main object. What if you were to lose your friends and diminish your income; indeed, what if you lose your liberty, or even your life – what would this all be, compared with the loss of the favour and friendship of *God*? Woe unto us, if we shun to declare any part of the counsel of *God*! He that is afraid or ashamed to preach the whole of the gospel, in all its implications and bearings, let him stand aside; he is utterly unworthy of being a soldier of Jesus Christ. Sometimes, if you would speak the whole truth, you may be reproached as unsound and heterodox. But

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you must not yield to popular clamour... Stand firm against all opposition... The gospel is a message full of importance, and therefore you must be in earnest. If your message respected the health of your hearers, or their temporal interest, or their reputation, it would be thought important. But what are these compared with the salvation of their souls! Salvation by Jesus Christ is God's last [and only] remedy – his ultimatum with a lost world (Mark 16:16; Acts 4:12). There remains no other sacrifice for sins. Then do not trifle on such subjects as these, lest you lose your own soul. What can be thought of you if you employ your time in making pretty speeches, and turning elegant sentences and phrases, instead of endeavouring to 'save yourself and them that hear you'! What if, instead of beseeching sinners to be reconciled to God, you should crack jokes before them, to excite a laugh!³⁵⁶

Reader, I do not know about you – but I feel the force of Fuller's words!