

Appendix 1

Ella's Criticisms of the Free Offer

Ella's book contains many sweeping generalisations and unsubstantiated assertions which are gratuitously offensive, and this does nothing to advance the debate on the free offer. This Appendix lists some examples.

Reader, I am conscious of the personal nature of much of what follows. Since, however, some of Ella's remarks were directed against what I have written, if I am to offer a reply, inevitably it is bound to be personal. And even where this is not the case, I cannot always speak for what every free-offer preacher does or says; I can only speak for myself. *But I do not want to personalise this discussion.* So much so, I have debated – struggled within myself – as to whether or not to include this Appendix. But I have decided to let it stand because some of Ella's comments – which could prove damaging to the biblical practice of preaching the free offer – should not go unchallenged.

* * *

Meney's opening remarks in his Introduction set the mistaken tone of Ella's book. It is not right to say that the free offer is used 'to explain an imagined lack of consistency between the biblical doctrine of sovereign grace and the church's obligation to preach the gospel to every creature'.¹

Meney again: 'The free offer is works mixed with grace'.² Oh?

Meney categorically, but wrongly, stated: 'All free-offer preachers... either... *must* preach a mongrel gospel of works and duty where the sinner is urged to commit to a Saviour who is ill-defined and a way of salvation that is *necessarily* vague – such preachers generally ignore anything to do with God's electing decrees, the divine source of repentance and faith, the purposely

¹ Ella: *The Free Offer* p5.

² Ella: *The Free Offer* p5.

Appendix 1: Ella's Criticisms of the Free Offer

limited extent of the atonement and the necessity of Holy Spirit regeneration. Or else, they *must* try to establish an alternative doctrinal basis, other than the shed blood of Jesus Christ, upon which to offer salvation to all'.³

Why is the following stated as a fact, when not only is it a part of the accusation which has to be proved, but in any case the definition of the free offer precludes it? I refer to: 'The "free offer" describes a method of preaching that undermines sovereign grace and denies that salvation is unconditionally the gift of God'.⁴ And since the definition says the opposite, how could Ella state, as a fact, that 'the free offer... has an insufficient view of the gospel which is not based on God's electing grace'?⁵

How could Ella say the free-offer preacher thinks of 'the atonement as merely a providing of salvation and not a procuring and securing of it'?⁶

Which free-offer preacher makes 'man... an agent in

³ Ella: *The Free Offer* p6, emphasis mine. And what did Meney mean by this last? Was he saying free-offer preachers do not hold to substitutionary atonement, or that the extent of the atonement governs the extent of the gospel call, or what? In the definition of the free offer as set out in the Introduction – as near as I can get it to his own – nothing is said about the shed blood of Christ being the basis of the offer. In fact, it is specifically removed from the definition as, indeed, the back cover of Ella's book makes clear: The free-offer preacher 'teaches that God genuinely offers forgiveness of sin and salvation to sinners, irrespective of the eternal decree of election, despite the particular, substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, and regardless of the distinguishing effectual call of the Holy Spirit'.

⁴ Ella: *The Free Offer* back cover.

⁵ Ella: *The Free Offer* p9.

⁶ On this, Ella was inconsistent. On the one hand, he rightly criticised talk of the mere 'provision' of salvation – as I do – yet he could also state: 'Preaching the gospel must take into consideration two major factors: the *provisions* of our holy God and the needs of sinful man. God's gospel *provisions* for sinful man are grounded in the atonement made by Jesus Christ... The big question is, however, what are the Father's exact *provisions* for salvation?' Even so, on the very same page he dismissed 'some preachers' – when they speak of 'Christ's saving work' – 'which they call God's *provisions*'. Yet he himself spoke of 'God's *providing* of salvation' (Ella: *The Free Offer* pp9,13,16,22,52,53, emphasis mine!)

Appendix 1: Ella's Criticisms of the Free Offer

salvation'?⁷

On what grounds did Ella say the free offer 'is based on law-duties and not faith', or that 'it teaches that law-duties beget faith'?⁸

On what basis did Ella have the right to assume the free offer 'is... *designed* to appeal to the natural man'?⁹ That the free-offer preacher may be misguided, I admit – to prove it was Ella's self-appointed task – but it was unjustified of Ella to attribute so perverse a motive to such a preacher. Or is it axiomatic that the free-offer preacher *sets out* to please the natural man, and has *designed* a system with this in mind?

Why is the free offer 'a man-centred and philosophical approach to the gospel rather than a Christ-centred and biblical approach'?¹⁰ Does this not beg the very question to be proved?

On what grounds did Ella assert the free offer credits 'the sinner with a natural ability to respond positively'?¹¹

How does the free offer undermine 'the eternal purpose of the Father in choosing, the atoning work of the Son in redeeming, and the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in calling, the elect'?¹²

To say the free offer 'is a gospel to believers only, [and] therefore it has no evangelistic purpose',¹³ is downright silly. As is this: 'It does not pay due attention to the saving application of the gospel'.¹⁴ And on what basis did Ella state: 'Nor does it pay attention to the fact that the gospel comes as a judge to some and a saviour to others'?¹⁵

⁷ Ella: *The Free Offer* p9. That is, if Ella was speaking of 'a person... that exerts power' (*Concise*), and meant *natural* power. If, however, Ella was saying the sinner plays no part in conversion – the sinner must, I presume, be a mere stone or robot – then I plead guilty. As I showed in chapter 3, the sinner repents and believes; God does not do it for him.

⁸ Ella: *The Free Offer* p9.

⁹ Ella: *The Free Offer* p9, emphasis mine.

¹⁰ Ella: *The Free Offer* p9.

¹¹ Ella: *The Free Offer* p9.

¹² Ella: *The Free Offer* p9.

¹³ Ella: *The Free Offer* p9.

¹⁴ Ella: *The Free Offer* p9.

¹⁵ Ella: *The Free Offer* p9. I have used Ella's words, even though the gospel is not a saviour.

Appendix 1: Ella's Criticisms of the Free Offer

If the section in Ella's book entitled 'Evangelical Arminianism'¹⁶ was meant to be a fair representation of preaching the free offer, it missed the mark by a long way; it is, in fact, an offensive caricature. But Ella certainly included the Reformed in his strictures.¹⁷ It is, therefore distasteful to see such preachers accused of believing that Christ has died 'to make salvation possible for all', and that they tell sinners, 'Christ desires and wants you so much that he has died for you'.¹⁸ Where is the proof of this practice? It is excluded by the definition of the free offer.

Must a free-offer preacher travel the philosophical route mapped out by Ella under 'Moderate Calvinism'?¹⁹

Which free-offer preacher has ever said, 'God the Father and God the Son *quarrel* over the salvation of sinners', that they '*contend* over the souls of sinners', that 'there is an eternal tension in the Godhead concerning who should be saved'?²⁰ Which free-offer preacher speaks of 'a God who is at logger-heads with himself'?²¹

As for my review of Iain Murray's book on Spurgeon and hyper-Calvinism, to which Ella referred, where did I say there are two gospels? Did I 'thrust forward... Spurgeon'? Here is my review:

In this little book, Iain Murray tackles the vital subject of hyper-Calvinism. He does it through the life of Spurgeon.

In a sense, it doesn't matter what Spurgeon thought – what does Scripture say? But, as Murray explains, Spurgeon argued from the Bible. A consistent Calvinist, he said that gospel invitations are sent to all sinners, that all sinners *may* trust Christ, that all sinners *must* trust Christ, and that God has a desire to see all sinners saved. Spurgeon did not try to reconcile the irreconcilable – he preached what the Bible teaches. He faced stern opposition. It has not gone away!

This book is easy to read, is well documented and copiously illustrated from the works of others. There is plenty to choose from. Spurgeon claimed he had almost all the Puritans with him – not all, as Murray

¹⁶ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp13-16.

¹⁷ Ella: *The Free Offer* p16.

¹⁸ Ella: *The Free Offer* p16.

¹⁹ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp16-19; see also same volume pp55-56.

²⁰ Ella: *The Free Offer* p20, emphasis mine.

²¹ Ella: *The Free Offer* p9.

Appendix 1: Ella's Criticisms of the Free Offer

said (p50). This didn't make Spurgeon right, but hypers ought to know it. See Owen: *Works* Vol. 10 p141.

One risk with Murray's approach is that some readers will think hyper-Calvinism is a matter of history. It isn't. I disagree with him (xiv); hyperism *is* gaining ground today. And virtual hyperism smothers our preaching. We must break free of it, otherwise we face extinction. Sinners need real preaching, now! I do!

Snap this bargain up. Its a good introduction to the subject. Read it. Pray for a return of proper gospel preaching. And do all you can to support and encourage it where you find it.²²

I object to Ella's foisting upon me the unwarranted and offensive statement: 'Gay... drops the scriptural passages which refer to Christ's particular atonement. This leaves him free to preach to persuade men according to their natural abilities to repent and believe'.²³ I do no such thing.

Where have I ever said anything which gives Ella the right to allege I 'would throw out of the Parliament of the Saints' – whatever that may mean – men such as Gill, Huntingdon, Hawker and Gadsby?²⁴

Why does the free offer imply 'a universal atonement'?²⁵

Matters does the free-offer preacher have to delve into extra-scriptural matters such as the benefits of the atonement for unbelievers?²⁶

Does the free offer mean 'Christ's work is not at least part of the contents of the gospel offered'?²⁷

Is it a part of the free offer to 'offer repentance'? Which free-offer preacher does it? The suggestion is silly. No free-offer preacher I know offers faith.²⁸ Who are these men of straw? The free-offer preacher demands faith and repentance, but offers salvation in Christ who gives repentance and faith (Acts 5:31; Eph. 2:8).

Why must the free-offer preacher preach a gospel 'that is void

²² Ella: *The Free Offer* p22. For more on Spurgeon, see chapter 10.

²³ Ella: *The Free Offer* p22.

²⁴ Ella: *The Free Offer* p23.

²⁵ Ella: *The Free Offer* p23.

²⁶ Ella: *The Free Offer* p24.

²⁷ Ella: *The Free Offer* p25.

²⁸ Ella: *The Free Offer* pp58,62.

Appendix 1: Ella's Criticisms of the Free Offer

of content and avoids controversial points'?²⁹ Indeed, if he makes the gospel 'void of content' how can he at the same time 'appear [merely] to *limit* its contents'?³⁰ Perhaps Ella would care to tell me what 'controversial points' I avoid in my preaching. The suggestion is offensive.

How does Ella know I think 'predestination and election is [*sic*] for believers only [to hear about] and thus not to be placed in the "free offer"'?³¹

Why did Ella assume I do not 'provide a solution to the problem of law, sin and the righteousness necessary to fulfil the law'?³² Of course *I* cannot provide the solution, but God in Christ has accomplished it (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 4:4-5; 1 John 1:7-9), and I preach it to sinners.

Where have I ever taken 'man's gaze from the atonement... and place[d] it on a moral or natural law'?³³

Is it true that I do 'not deal with sin as sin... and [do] not even begin to answer the question of how a man may get right with an angry God'?³⁴

Do I 'depict God as being narrowly but lovingly benevolent to the point of exhibiting blindness to justice and mercy'?³⁵

Do I 'deny that it was at Calvary that the ransom was paid once and for all time'?³⁶ I find Ella's assertion odious.

Is it fair to say Errol Hulse is 'so dogmatic in matters he finds unclear' and pays only 'lip-service to election'?³⁷

I agree with Ella, 'orthodox men' do believe Ephesians 2:8,³⁸ but I reject his innuendo that free-offer preachers do not. I do. All free-offer preachers (as I have defined them) do. But as to the question of 'orthodoxy' over the free offer – as defined by

²⁹ Ella: *The Free Offer* p28.

³⁰ Ella: *The Free Offer* p66, emphasis mine.

³¹ Ella: *The Free Offer* p66. But, of course, God's decrees have to be preached with care, especially in the presence of unbelievers.

³² Ella: *The Free Offer* p39.

³³ Ella: *The Free Offer* p39.

³⁴ Ella: *The Free Offer* p39.

³⁵ Ella: *The Free Offer* p39.

³⁶ Ella: *The Free Offer* p39.

³⁷ Ella: *The Free Offer* p53.

³⁸ Ella: *The Free Offer* p62.

Appendix 1: Ella's Criticisms of the Free Offer

Scripture – this is the question in hand!

‘Fuller believes that pardon comes when faith is exercised’.³⁹ So do I. Who does not? Does Ella not believe it? Or does he think unbelievers are pardoned?

Ella dismissed free-offer preachers out of hand: ‘In the opinion of this author [Ella]... such people do not perform the work of a gospel evangelist, and their opinions and definitions of the “free offer” are thus of little importance’.⁴⁰ Was this his premise or conclusion? If it was his conclusion, had he proved it or merely asserted it?

How does Ella know I am ‘embarrassed as to what [I] should include in the offer and to whom it should be free’?⁴¹ I am clear on both.

How could Ella say that the free-offer preacher ‘preaches to believers only’, and imply he does not ‘preach to win lost sinners for Christ’?⁴²

* * *

Reader, it is because of such unsupported – and often totally unjustified – accusations and innuendoes, to say nothing of unwarranted assumptions, that I think it is fair to say Ella’s book is not a serious effort at reaching a biblical position on the free offer. When Ella complained of a certain writer who, Ella claimed, ‘says quite untrue and unjust things about’ Gill,⁴³ a certain plank and eye spring to mind. Ella would have done better, in my opinion, if he had kept to the spirit of this good advice:

We have noticed in recent months a willingness by some Christians to lob allegations and employ intemperate language when it comes to theological differences with their brethren. This is unfortunate. Most reasonable Christians accept they are not perfect; even that they have a few things still to learn. Yet that does not restrict the bounds of some people’s rudeness when a brother has the temerity to raise a question that challenges their pet interpretation of a doctrine... Common

³⁹ Ella: *The Free Offer* p64.

⁴⁰ Ella: *The Free Offer* p66.

⁴¹ Ella: *The Free Offer* p70.

⁴² Ella: *The Free Offer* p62.

⁴³ Ella: *The Free Offer* p52.

Appendix 1: Ella's Criticisms of the Free Offer

courtesy requires that critics criticise *what is said, not what they think is said. It is easy to dress your opponent in black then damn him.* But this is the tactic of those who fear open examination and prefer to censor alternative interpretations of doctrine rather than hold them up to the light of honest investigation. Hurling epithets in public... is conduct unbecoming professors of the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴⁴

Excellent words.

But, no, reader, I didn't coin them. Nor did any free-offer preacher. It was Meney, Ella's publisher, and the writer of the Introduction to his book, who did.⁴⁵ A pity, therefore, Meney did not temper Ella's words before he published his work.

⁴⁴ Emphasis mine.

⁴⁵ At least it appeared under 'Comment' in *New Focus*, Go Publications, Eggleston, October/November 1999, Vol.4 number 3, p2.