

satisfaction; instead of regenerating the reprobate, He hardened them in their sins—and yet we are supposed to believe that, when God sends the gospel to (some of) the reprobate, He *wants* them to repent, to believe and to be saved.

The answer is simply this: when God commands, He does not express His desires but He simply expresses what is *the duty of man*. Because God is good, what He commands man to do is good. Because the Law is the expression of the holiness and righteousness of God, the Law is good (Rom. 7:12). Therefore, God commands man to keep His law because His law is the good standard according to which a man must live. The same thing applies to faith and repentance: faith and repentance are pleasing to God; therefore, a man should repent and believe. There really are only three possibilities: either (1) faith and repentance are *pleasing* to God or (2) faith and repentance are *displeasing* to God or (3) God is *indifferent* with respect to faith and repentance. Only the first option is the truth: God is pleased with faith and repentance. The holiness and justice of God demand that the reprobate sinner repent and believe the gospel when he is confronted with the message of Christ crucified. But the gospel simply tells man what his duty is: it does not tell him whether God is pleased to save him or not; it is not in itself an expression of grace to a man; and it does not express God's desire with respect to a man.

This is the teaching of the *Canons of Dordt*, which do not teach the free offer of the gospel, while at the same time they reject hyper-Calvinism:

... men are called to repentance and faith in Christ crucified (I:3).

The wrath of God abideth upon those who believe not this gospel (I:4).

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 ... (II:5).

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 (III/IV:8).

In appealing to the last quotation of Dordt, Waldron uses the Schaff translation: “God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word what will be acceptable to Him, namely, that all who are called *should comply with the invitation.*”² The Latin is *Serio enim et verissime ostendit Deus verbo suo, quid sibi gratum sit, nimirum, ut vocati ad se veniant.* One does not need to be a Latin scholar to see that “invitation” is not in the text. The Latin verbal form *veniant* comes from *venire*, which is the verb “to come.” (Readers who have studied French or Spanish will recognize that *venir* is the verb “to come” in those languages. Other readers may be familiar with Julius Caesar’s famous Latin dictum, “*Veni, vidi, vici,*” which translates as, “I came, I saw, I conquered”). Homer Hoeksema, commenting on the Schaff translation, writes,

There is the most glaring inaccuracy of the translation, “... should comply with the invitation.” It is difficult to understand how the translators could ever arrive at such a rendering, except upon the basis that they deliberately attempted to insert their own view into the Canons and had themselves already lost the spirit of Dordrecht. For certainly the article in the original breathes nothing of an “invitation.” Both the Dutch and the Christian Reformed revision of the English render the Latin literally and accurately by “... should come unto him.” On the other hand, it is rather ironic that the Christian Reformed Church, which in 1924 principally adopted the Arminian view in their infamous First Point of Common Grace, should make this revision, and thus eliminate from our creeds any mention of any “invitation.”³

The difference should be glaringly obvious. The Bible never uses the word “invitation.” The confessions never use the word “invitation.” The Authorized Version of the Bible uses the verb “invite” in only three Old Testament

² Philip Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, repr. 2007), pp. 565-566.

³ Homer C. Hoeksema, *The Voice of Our Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: RFPA, 1980), p. 485.

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passages (I Sam. 9:24; II Sam. 13:23; Esth. 5:12), but in each of those places the underlying verb is “call” and the person inviting is not God. While some modern Bible versions use the verb “invite,” the biblical and creedal term is “call.” Waldron understands the difference: “‘Offer’ contains in it the notion of a proposal presented to someone which the one presenting it desires for the person to accept” (10). “The obligation savingly to believe the gospel is to be construed not simply as an authoritative demand, but as a gracious offer or invitation” (52).

While in English an “offer” or an “invitation” implies graciousness on the part of the one making the offer or giving the invitation, the same is not true for the call of the gospel. That should be obvious, for an offer or invitation does not come with a *threat* to the one who does not come but the call of the gospel certainly does: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not *shall be damned*” (Mark 16:15-16).

An invitation is not a subpoena!

So what must a person conclude when he hears the gospel? He must conclude this: Jesus Christ is a wonderful Saviour and God commands me to believe in Him. What incentive does a person have? God promises eternal life to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ. What warning does a person receive? If I do not believe, I will be damned—and justly. What should an unbeliever conclude about God’s disposition toward him: does God love him, desire his salvation or want him to believe? An unbeliever can conclude nothing of the sort: he concludes only what his duty is, not what God has determined concerning him. An unbeliever can know this, however: faith and repentance are pleasing to God, while unbelief and impenitence, which are sins, are displeasing to God. Therefore, he should, nay, must, believe. And the preacher should unhesitatingly and unashamedly urge him to believe.

The Bible goes no further than that. The Bible need go no further than that. The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* explains this very succinctly: “The Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man” (A. 3). The Scriptures do not teach what desires God may or may not have, for the Bible does not use those terms.

The Bible simply states what God has decreed to do, some of which He has revealed and what God commands us to do.

Waldron's Appeal to John 5:34

Waldron devotes a whole chapter to one text, one to which, to my knowledge, no other advocate of the free offer has appealed, namely, John 5:34: "But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved." To understand this text, we first survey the context.

At the beginning of John 5, Jesus heals an impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, which led to accusations of Sabbath-breaking against Him. Jesus does not defend His actions by categorizing His miracle an act of mercy, which He did on other occasions, but He gives a detailed explanation of His relationship to the Father. Since the Father is always working, Jesus works too, even on the Sabbath (v. 17). In brief, Jesus is the Son of the Father, which is a relationship of intimate love and affection (v. 20); He shares life with the Father (v. 26); and He enjoys open and free communication with the Father (vv. 19-20). His relationship with the Father is a relationship of communion and fellowship, therefore. Jesus also performs the works of the Father, such as quickening the dead (v. 21) and judging all men (v. 22), and Jesus is equal in glory and honour with the Father (v. 23).

Although, as the Son of God, Jesus does not need witnesses, He provides four witnesses to leave the Jews without excuse. The first witness is the Father, who sent Jesus into the world (vv. 30-32, 37). The second witness is John the Baptist, who as a burning and shining light testified of Jesus (vv. 33-35). The third witness is the miracles that Jesus performed, which are the works that the Father sent Him to do (v. 36). The fourth, and final, witness is the Scriptures, which testify of Jesus and which the Jews must search, for in them they will find eternal life (vv. 39, 45-47). In connection with that fourfold testimony, Jesus says, "these things I say, that ye might be saved" (v. 34).

Waldron argues a number of points from verse 34. First, the audience is unbelieving, which we grant: most, if not all, of the people in the audience were unbelievers, at least with respect to Jesus as the Messiah. They were religious Jews, not atheists. Nevertheless, they were Jews hostile to Jesus' claims to be

the Messiah and they even wanted to kill Him (v. 18). Second, the audience included people who were finally lost, that is, reprobates. However, Waldron cannot prove that every hearer was reprobate, nor do we claim to be able to prove that any hearer was elect, nor is such proof necessary. We can agree that, with every public discourse in the gospel accounts, the audience was mixed. Third, Christ's purpose in preaching was the salvation of His audience: "that ye might be saved," where the word "that" expresses purpose and could be rendered "so that." We agree that the primary purpose of Christ's preaching and teaching ministry was salvation (Luke 9:56; 19:10; John 12:47). Nevertheless, that fact does not preclude a secondary purpose, which is the hardening of some. No preacher says to his audience, "I preach these things to you that you might be hardened," and neither did Christ, although Christ recognized God's sovereignty in His preaching, as do we. Ultimately, of course, God's purpose in preaching was the glory of His Father. Indeed, Christ can say, "These things I say, that ye might be saved," without implying that His purpose was the salvation of every hearer in the audience. Jesus does not say, "That every one of you might be saved," but simply makes a general statement concerning His purpose in preaching. Fourth, since Jesus is the Son of God, His purpose ("that ye might be saved") is God's purpose; therefore, God purposed the salvation of Jesus' audience, or Jesus' words in John 5:34 are the expression of the will of God. We do not object to Waldron's contention here, for certainly as the Son of God, Christ expresses God's purpose in the preaching, although we disagree that there is expressed here a desire for the salvation of all the hearers. Waldron concludes wrongly that, since Christ's purpose, which is God's purpose, in the preaching of the gospel is the salvation of the hearers, God must desire the salvation of the hearers—all the hearers—in John 5:34.

We disagree with Waldron on that last point. Christ does not speak of any desire or will—either His own desire or will, or God's desire or will—but only of His purpose. Therefore, we must not speak of the will of God's precept, and certainly not of His desire, but of God's will of *decree*, which is what He has purposed to do: God has purposed in Christ's preaching the salvation of Christ's hearers, although not all of Christ's hearers. If Waldron wants to make application to the will of God's precept, he must conclude that God commanded Christ's hearers to believe and thus to be saved, but Waldron cannot prove that Christ *desired* the salvation of all His hearers, or that God's desire was

unfulfilled or thwarted. In fact, God *did* save Christ's hearers—not all of them, of course—for many Jews who heard Christ's preaching were saved, either on that day or at a later day, such as on the day of Pentecost or during the days of the apostles after Christ's death and resurrection (e.g., Acts 2:41, 47; 4:4; 6:7).

Final Arguments: Different Kinds of Love

While Waldron argues for the free offer in other ways, many of his arguments have been answered elsewhere, including in the *British Reformed Journal*. We finish this critique by focusing on a cluster of arguments concerning the love of God. Waldron posits various kinds of love in God: the Almighty supposedly loves the elect in a certain sense but He also loves the reprobate in a different sense, although, at the same time, God hates the reprobate. To put it differently, God loves and hates the reprobate, although He does not love and hate the elect. Waldron concedes that God hates the reprobate, but he also contends that “both God's love for sinners and hatred for sinners must be carefully qualified” (40), adding that we should neither preach that God hates sinners “without careful qualification,” nor that we should preach that God loves sinners “without careful qualification” (40). For example, “God does not so love [sinners] as to cease demanding their repentance” (40). Moreover, writes Waldron, “you cannot preach a God who has nothing but hatred for the non-elect and not produce a people who tend to be like him” (40). Finally in this connection, Waldron contends that, if you teach that the preacher ought to desire the salvation of all his hearers, but you also teach that God does not desire the salvation of all, “the implication of this is that we are more loving and kind-hearted than God” (33).

We examine these arguments in turn. First, the two kinds of love in God that Waldron posits are His love of benevolence and His love of complacency. We could add God's love of beneficence. God's love of benevolence is His goodwill: He wills (Latin: *volentia*) well (*bene*) for the objects of His love. God's love of beneficence is His love according to which He does something good for the objects of His love: He does (Latin: *ficus*) well (*bene*) for His beloved. God's love of complacency is the delight that He has in the objects of His love: He is pleased (Latin: *placere*) with (Latin: *com*) His beloved. While theologians use these distinctions, they are theological, not biblical, distinctions. Waldron

argues that a father might have benevolence for the homeless people to whom he preaches in a mission—he wills their welfare and desires their salvation, although their sins and their filthy condition disgust him—but he has a love of complacency and delight in his own daughter (39). While we grant that with respect to man, Waldron does not prove any love for the reprobate *from Scripture*. The Bible does not teach that God loves the reprobate with the love of benevolence, while He withholds from them the love of beneficence or complacency. The Bible simply teaches that God does not love, but hates, the reprobate (e.g., Ps. 11:5; Prov. 17:15; Rom. 9:13). Besides that, we are not God: we do not measure God by ourselves (Ps. 50:21). Indeed, Herman Bavinck, although an advocate of common grace, writes,

Now it is indeed possible to speak of God's love to creatures or people in general (the love of benevolence), but for this the Scripture mostly uses the word "goodness," and as a rule speaks of God's love, like his grace, only in relation to his chosen people or church (the love of friendship).⁴

Therefore, God has good will (benevolence) for, does good (beneficence) for and delights in (complacency) His elect only. God has no desire for the salvation of the reprobate; God does nothing for the salvation of the reprobate or for the temporal welfare of the reprobate out of love, for even when He gives them good gifts He does not bless them. The Bible does not categorize gifts to the reprobate, such as food, shelter, good health, riches and long life, as blessings but as snares (Ps. 73:18). Finally, God does not delight in the reprobate but He loathes them (Isa. 41:24; Zech. 11:8).

Second, the idea that a preacher who desires the salvation of all his hearers is more loving and kind-hearted than God, if God does not also desire the salvation of all hearers, is absurd. God's love, mercy or grace is not measured by the number of its objects: when God loved Noah and his family (eight people), but hated and destroyed the rest of humanity, was God less loving and kind-hearted than Noah, who presumably desired the salvation of his neighbours? God's love is infinite. If God loved no one outside of Himself, His love would not be

⁴ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 215.

one whit less infinite: the Father loves the Son in the Holy Spirit within the Godhead with infinite love. If God loved only one man, and remember that He loves an innumerable throng of men, His love directed toward that one man would be infinitely greater than the love that that one man could show his wife, his three children, his siblings, his parents, his grandparents and all his neighbours. The infinity of God's love is seen in the greatness of the gift that God bestowed upon His people, the greatness of that salvation and the cost of that salvation. Our wishing something good for our neighbours—even if we earnestly desire their salvation and even if a preacher preaches with that desire (Acts 26:29; Rom. 9:1-3; 10:1)—is *nothing* in comparison to God's actually giving us salvation. While Paul desired the salvation of all of his Jewish brethren, he understood that God had not purposed it and, therefore, that God did not desire it. As Job explains, "what his soul desireth, even that [God] doeth" (Job 23:13). Paul was content to submit his desires to the sovereign will and good pleasure of God (Rom. 9; 11). Our desires are not the measure of God's desires.

Finally, does "hard shell" Calvinism produce hateful people, that is, people with a "hard, compassionless view of the lost" (40)? Undoubtedly, there are people who twist the truth in that manner. There are a few "Calvinists" who, shame on them, almost delight in the damnation of their fellow creatures. Nevertheless, Paul, who taught double predestination, was not such a "hard shell" Calvinist: he had great zeal for the salvation of lost sinners, which explains his life and ministry: he was willing to endure affliction for the salvation of souls and the love of Christ constrained him (II Cor. 5:14). Finally, the *Canons* of Dort, the gold standard of Calvinism, forbid such an attitude toward the lost and perishing:

And as to others, who have not yet been called, it is our duty to pray for them to God, who calls the things that are not as if they were. But we are in no wise to conduct ourselves towards them with haughtiness, as if we had made ourselves to differ (III/IV:15).

We do not need the free offer to motivate us to preach. We preach and pray with the earnest desire that people be saved. We know that it is not God's purpose to save everyone and, since we do not know God's purpose in individual cases, we preach and pray, trusting that God will perform His good pleasure.

E d i t o r i a l

Since God is God, all His purposes will be fulfilled. For the believer, the pillow of God's sovereignty should be the best place to rest his weary head. For the preacher, the truth that God has an elect people, who will be saved only through the preaching of the gospel, is a powerful and sufficient motivation to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth.