

A Letter to a Friend

God's Sovereign Choice

Dear Brother,

I wanted to respond personally, and at length, to your letter rather than appending one of my booklets or articles on the subject of God's sovereign and particular election of some to eternal life. It would be easy to simply pass on an objective study, but I want to address the matters you raise as one friend to another. You find my ideas of sovereign grace 'repugnant' and coin the phrase 'sovereign hatred' to describe the notion that God only loves some and hates others. You state that the doctrine of election makes God appear to be like a person who goes to a park and offers sweets to some children but not to others. Such a God is capricious and even callous.

It is because I respect your 'grey hairs' and esteem the many years of service and self sacrifice to the Lord that I feel I should explain my position carefully. I know you love the Lord and His word as much as I do, hence the foundation of my argument will be scripture. However, it should be noted that the position I take is that of historical, genuine Christianity. The great Fathers, the Reformers, the Puritans, the great doctrinal standards (like the Savoy Declaration, the Westminster Confession, the Articles of the Synod of Dort, the 39 Articles of the Church of England, the London Confession, the 1689 Baptist Confession, and so on), all agreed on the doctrine of discriminating, sovereign election. If God chooses some, then he must have ignored others so double predestination is at the least implied in the confessions even if not clearly articulated (though it is often spelled out very clearly¹). My view is not novel, modern, heretical, unorthodox, heterodox, overly dogmatic or excessively logical in areas of mystery. It is the clear Biblical, apostolic view, as history testifies. So, before I look at the Biblical data, you should know that the confessing Christian church has historically supported my position.

The essence of the argument

Theological systems

As you realise, the idea that God loves some and not others is part of the essence of what is called Calvinism or Reformed theology. We need not get hung up on names, Calvinism (as Spurgeon famously declared) is simply a nickname for Biblical teaching on the doctrines of grace as expounded by Paul and the other apostles. At root there are two logical foundations to explain Christian salvation:

- God is sovereignly gracious and gives repentance and faith to man who is dead in sins. This action is dependent upon his sovereign good pleasure, not any performance in man who is spiritually dead and incapable of good works. [This can be called monergism.]
- God gives grace to those whom God foresees will exercise faith. Man thus co-operates with God. [This is called synergism.]²

¹ E.g. *The Westminster Confession* Section 3:3,4,5,6; 5:6; 10:1,4.

² Another view is Pelagianism which even denies the need for grace, man is able to use his own

In history, the main synergistic champions were Jacob Arminius and his followers (Arminians, 16th century onwards), and the Semi-Pelagians of the 5th century, (though the Roman Catholic church teaches a variant of Semi-Pelagianism).

So the essence of the problem is: does man contribute to his salvation (synergism e.g. Arminianism) or not (monergism e.g. Calvinism). Each system is summarised in 5 points which hang together. One cannot be theologically consistent and try to adopt bits from one and bits of the other. One is either monergistic or synergistic.

Calvinism

Total depravity and inability.
Unconditional election.
Limited atonement.
Irresistible grace
Perseverance of the saints.

Arminianism

Man has innate ability to respond to the Gospel.
God chooses those who have faith themselves.
Christ dies for everyone who ever lived.
The call of the Gospel goes equally to all.
Saints can fall away and be damned.

The doctrines of grace

That God only loves some people is a natural outflow from the doctrine of Limited Atonement. Salvation is based on God's love, God saves those whom he loves (1 Jn 4:10). If Jesus only dies for his people, not all, then God only loves some and not all.

As I said, the doctrines of grace hang together, they are mutually consistent, each depends upon the others. Man is dead in sin and, therefore, cannot save himself (Eph 2:1). God the Father initiates salvation by choosing certain people out of his good pleasure, despite their sin. This choice has nothing to do with their abilities or character (Rm 8:28-33; Eph 1:4-5). Jesus, the second person of the Trinity and God's eternally begotten Son, covenanted to be the saviour of these chosen people before time began. Why would he die for people not chosen to eternal life? God cannot do anything unsuccessful, Jesus only dies for his sheep (Jn 5:21, 10:14ff). The Holy Spirit applies the benefits of the cross of Christ to these elect people by calling them effectually through the universal call of the Gospel. Some people who hear the Gospel respond to an inner motivation, others do not. Those responding are being drawn by the Father (Jn 6:44, 65; Rm 8:14). God's people who have responded to the call to repent are given faith and repentance as a result of an inward work of the Spirit (regeneration, new life) and express the reality of this changed life by manifesting good works prompted by the Holy Spirit. They do not finally fall away (though they may backslide for a time) because the life of God has a preserving power and God is now their Father and protector (Jn 10:27ff; Rm 8:1,29,35).

God's immutability

This shows the flow of God's grace in salvation as reflected in the doctrines of grace. Now, if Jesus does not die for all, and some go to hell and condemnation, how can God love these people? God is immutable, therefore, his will is unchangeable. God does not love people one day and hate them the next. The people in hell are not loved by God, they are suffering his anger. As sinners on earth they are said to be under wrath even before they go to hell: *He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ... He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the*

faith to initiate salvation. This is not included because it is not Christian in any sense, despite the fact that some eminent 'Christian' teachers (like Charles Finney) taught versions of it.

Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (Jn 3:18, 36).³

God's decree

Furthermore, we are told that salvation is based upon God's love and this is set in his eternal counsel:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as **He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world**, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, **having predestined us to adoption as sons** by Jesus Christ to Himself, **according to the good pleasure of His will**, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us **the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself.** (Eph 1:3-9)*

Those that are loved by God are the one's chosen in eternity and placed into Christ his Son. They are loved because Christ is loved; *The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand*, (Jn 3:35). The only persons God loves in this world are those who are in Christ. The rest of the world is doomed to judgment. God loves nothing outside Christ. God's love arises from election because it determines who are sons of God.

Those that are not chosen are condemned for their sins and, consequently, do not have the love of God resting on them, rather the wrath of God rests upon them. How can sinners have God's judicial anger and fatherly love resting upon them at the same time? Elect people, who are sinners before they respond to the Gospel, are seen by God as in Christ, and thus are legally treated as wayward sons even though they do not know it and outwardly appear as enemies. For this reason they are protected and guarded by angels until they are given faith (Heb 1:14).

So there is a sovereign division in the race.

The Elect - chosen in eternity to be in Christ, are saved in time and are predestined to salvation. They have the love of God resting on them.

The Reprobate (a Biblical word⁴) - are not chosen to be in Christ and are thus chosen to display God's wrath as a judgment on sin. These have the wrath of God resting on them.

Double predestination

What scriptures support this division of mankind?

*"I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." So then **it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.** For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." **Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.** You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?" But indeed, O man, who are*

³ Scriptures are from the NKJV.

⁴ As translated by the KJV, it is the Greek word: **avdo,kimoj** [adokimos]; translated as - reprobate 6x, castaway 1, rejected 1. It means: not standing the test, not approved, that which does not prove itself such as it ought, unfit, unproved, spurious, reprobate e.g: Rm 1:28; 2Tim 3:8; Tit 1:16.

*you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, "Why have you made me like this?" Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor? What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the **vessels of wrath prepared for destruction**, and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the **vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory.** (Rom 9:15-23)*

*For certain men have crept in unnoticed, **who long ago were marked out for this condemnation**, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 4; 'marked out' = 'ordained' KJV and means 'to write beforehand', 'to portray in advance')*

What could be clearer than this? Some are chosen to glory, some to condemnation.

*A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense." They stumble, **being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.** But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people. (1 Pet 2:8-9)*

The wicked are appointed to stumble over the Gospel, over Christ. Their disobedience is laid out in eternity. The elect (1 Pet 1:2) on the other hand are God's own special people, his family, on whom he has set his love in Christ.

This is not just a New Testament idea, the Old Testament writers were clear on this subject:

Psalm one encapsulates the themes which follow in the rest of the Psalms and this demonstrates a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked, half of the Psalm being given to each. The righteous man delights in God and his word and thus prospers; the ungodly face judgment and will perish. They are driven like chaff before a wind and their way is known to the Lord (v4,6) veiled poetic references to their ordained condition. This contrast between the righteous and the wicked is a feature of many Psalms.

The Lord has set apart for himself him who is godly. (Ps 4:3)

The righteous in the Old Testament are the people whom God sanctified, set apart. The distinction between the godly and the wicked is sovereignly ordained; the godly being for his own glory.

The LORD has made all for Himself, Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom. (Prov 16:4)

God created the wicked, however, to show his judgment on sin and testify to his holiness and justice.

References to the gift of salvation also prove this division. If it can be shown that God, not man, initiates conversion (faith and repentance), then only those selected by God can be saved. The people populating hell were never chosen for life. There are many scriptures showing that God controls the gifts of faith and repentance:

Gift of faith

*He (God) had **opened the door of faith** to the Gentiles. (Acts 14:27)*

*He (Apollos) greatly helped those who had **believed through grace**. (Acts 18:27)*

*For by grace you have been saved through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; it is **the gift of God**, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Eph 2:8-9)*

*For to you it has been **granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake**. (Phil 1:29)*

Gift of repentance

*Then **God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life**. (Acts 11:18)*

*Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to **give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins**. (Acts 5:31)*

*God perhaps will **grant them repentance**, so that they may know the truth. (2 Tim 2:25)*

*For you know that afterward, when he wanted to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for **repentance**, though he sought it diligently with tears. (Heb 12:17, repentance is not in man's ability even when he wants it.)*

God only gives faith and repentance to those elected to life. Conversion has nothing to do with man's initial choice or decision out of his own ability, faith and repentance come from God. If salvation is initiated by God, then those saved are those chosen (elected) by God; those condemned are not chosen to receive faith and repentance.

More could be added but this will do for our purposes. A portion of humanity is chosen to destruction because they are not elected to life. It dishonours the character of God to suggest that the reprobate are then blessed with the love of God, a love which is only reserved for his Son. Scripture suggests no other type of love in God. God's provision of food, rain, sun etc. to all mankind is the action of God's providence to all for the sake of the elect. The only reason why the world continues is that all the elect must come to repentance and some have not yet been born. This requires the continuance of seed and harvest until the last member of the elect community is saved.

I think that the scriptures quoted are very clear and the argument cannot be controverted; but there is more.

Relative scriptures

How do you deal with the many clear texts which state that God hates certain people? Under your scheme, all men know the love of God, at least until they are thrown into hell bereft of that love which did them no good. If this is true, who are the men God says he hates?

*The boastful shall not stand in Your sight; You **hate** all workers of iniquity. You shall destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. But as for me, I will come into Your house in the multitude of Your mercy. (Ps 5:5-7)*

Here we see that God hates some people now, yet your theology has Christ dying for these same people. God says he abhors them but yet deals with David in mercy, a man

who had also acted deceitfully and shed much blood. Why was he different? It can only be that he was chosen while the others were not.

*The LORD tests the righteous, But the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul **hates**.* (Ps 11:5)

*God is a just judge, And God is **angry with the wicked every day**.* (Ps 7:11)

But the wicked shall perish; And the enemies of the LORD, Like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. Into smoke they shall vanish away. (Ps 37:20)

God is angry with the wicked and says that he hates them. Their end is judgment. We know that those who are condemned are the reprobate, so it is the reprobate who are also hated.

*Your hand will find all Your enemies; Your right hand will find those who **hate** You. You shall make them as a fiery oven in the time of Your anger; The LORD shall swallow them up in His wrath, And the fire shall devour them. Their offspring You shall destroy from the earth, And their descendants from among the sons of men. For they intended evil against You; They devised a plot which they are not able to perform. Therefore You will make them turn their back; You will make ready Your arrows on Your string toward their faces.* (Ps 21:8-12)

Some men are enemies of God. They hate him as much as he hates them and their end is 'as a fiery oven'. The children of these people are also destroyed - God's judgment and condemnation even affects families and generations. There is no free will to salvation here.

*You love righteousness and **hate** wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.* (Ps 45:7)

This verse is ascribed to Jesus in Hebrews. Wickedness is hated, but we know [above] that wickedness is generic, the wicked were chosen for a display of judgment from eternity; those who continue in wickedness are hated and will always be hated.

*You who love the LORD, **hate** evil!* (Ps 97:10)

*I will set nothing wicked before my eyes; I **hate** the work of those who fall away.* (Ps 101:3)

*Do I not **hate** them, O LORD, who **hate** You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I **hate** them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies.*

(Ps 139:21-22)

We are commanded to hate evil in many places. The Psalmist is credited for hating those who fall away and who hate God. This is because there is a recognised hatred of God towards the wicked.

*" I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved; But **Esau I have hated**, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness." (Mal 1:2-3, quoted in Rm 9:13)*

God hates specific people and reserves them for judgment. Again this condemnation affects whole lineages. Yet even here there is sometimes mercy when people are rescued from evil families and picked like a brand from the fire. The Bible gives us examples like Rahab, the thief on the cross and Mary Magdalene; nevertheless God's judgment often stretches throughout generations. This passage was important enough for Paul to incorporate it into his argument that God sovereignly chooses some but hates others. We cannot avoid the clear implications of these two texts. God sovereignly chooses to hate

certain people. This cannot be avoided by sophistry.

It will not do to say that the word 'hate' used here means only, 'to love less'. It does not, it means what it says and is even used in connection with the sin of murder in Jn 15:25.

Enough has been said to make the point firmly. All of this has to be explained if God really loves everyone. One cannot say that God loves everyone and provides an equal opportunity for salvation in the light of verses like these. Some people are scheduled for condemnation before they were even born. [Though we should also add that when born they hate God and do evil; they are judged for what they do. It is the soul that sins which will die.]

The case for the opposition

Having got this far, it is now beholden to you to give support for the notion that God loves all people. I have supplied some evidence to show that he does not; the opposing view must supply texts which appear to state that he does, and then we can discuss relative values. Your problem is that there is not one scripture anywhere which categorically states that God loves all men. Not one. Neither is there a verse which states that God gives grace to all men. [There are some texts which, at first glance, seem to suggest that Christ died for all which we will look at shortly.]

The book of Acts which narrates the story of the initial spread of the Gospel gives us several sermons explaining what that Gospel is to Jews and Gentiles. Yet not once is the word love even mentioned in this book! Neither is the Gospel message predicated upon an apologetic that 'God loves you, therefore, give your life to him'. On the contrary, it states that all men are commanded to repent (Acts 17:30). It states that some came to faith because God opened their hearts (Acts 16:14). It states that only those ordained to eternal life believed the Gospel in Antioch (Acts 13:48). The overwhelming attitude of the apostles is based upon the sovereignty of God.

There are only two texts which come close to suggesting that God might love everyone. These are Ps145:8-9 and Jn 3:16. In actual fact, one mentions God's love, but not in the context of all men; while the other implies all men, but not in the context of God's love.

Ps 145:8-9

8 The LORD is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy.

9 The LORD is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works.

v8 gracious = channuwn
 compassion = rachuwmm (racham)
 mercy = chesed

v9 good = towb
 tender mercies = racham

Firstly, we must note that the word love does not appear in most translations of these verses anyway.

Here we see a distinction between the elect and everyone else. All God's works will give thanks, but it is the saints who bless him (v10). Verse 8 contains the covenant word *chesed* (steadfast love, mercy, loving kindness), but verse 9 only has the lesser word *racham* (compassion, pity, kindness) over all. *Chesed* is only used of the elect, regarding relations with God in the Old Testament, because it is conditional upon there being a

covenant between the parties. The Psalm works out the disparity between the elect and the wicked. The elect are the saints who bless God (v10), tell of his power (v11) and his kingdom (v12). The Lord lifts up the falling and bowed down saints (v14) and is near to those who call upon him in truth (v18). God fulfils the desire of those who fear him (v19) and hears their cry, preserving those that love him (v20). The wicked, however, will be destroyed (v20)

The Psalm extols the goodness of God. He is good to all, providing food, warmth, rain and so on through his providential acts in nature (v9,15,16); but the splendour and glory of his kingdom (v11-13) is only known to the elect. They tell of this glory to 'the sons of men'. There is no basis for positing a love of God to all men or a desire to save everyone in this Psalm. [It should also be noted that the NIV translation of v13b God is '*loving to all he has made*' appears in only one Masoretic manuscript and is ignored by all the best translations.]

Jn 3:16

14 "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up,

15 "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

18 "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

19 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

21 "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

As with several other texts used to support the notion that God loves everyone, if you make the word '*world*' here mean every human being, the result is universalism and hell would be empty, for it states in v17 that God wants the world to be saved not condemned. If *world* means 'everyone' in verse 16, then it also means 'everyone' in v17, but this is too bitter a pill to swallow. John cannot possibly have this in mind as he spends three verses (18-20) explaining the condemnation of those who do not believe.

'World'

The word '*world*' frequently means a rather small group of people, especially in John's writings. In Jn12:19 it says that '*the world has gone after him*' (Jesus); meaning a group of people in a small country. [So also Mk 11:32; Lk 3:15; Mk 1:37; Lk 2:1. How often does one hear that the whole town turned out to see the Queen, for example, when a relatively small percentage actually did.]

The word '*world*' can mean different things. We are told that God loves the world in Jn 3:16 but in Jn 17:3-9 John states that Jesus does not pray for the world and in 1 Jn 2:15-17 we are warned not to love the world. In Jn15:18-21 believers are said not to be of the world.

A similar problem arises in Jn 1:29, *'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'*. We know that John does not believe that the sin of everyone in the world is taken away. All these verses show that we must carefully interpret scripture, especially verses that can be misconstrued.

Without getting too technical, the word *kosmos* ('world') means 'an orderly arrangement', or an organic harmony, and from this Pythagoras used the word for the Universe (Cosmos). It seems clear that the word in Jn 3:16 is referring to the totality of the elect. To make it mean more reduces the section to teach universalism. Many more things could be said to strengthen this argument but I have said enough.

'All'

Perhaps I need to spend a little time on some similar texts based upon the word *'all'*. Examples would be Rm5:18b; Jn 12:32; 2 Cor 5:14-15; 1 Cor 15:22; 1 Tim 2:4-6; 2 Pt 3:9. All these texts would teach universalism if they meant every human being. They must be restricted in scope - to the elect. Often the context provides the restriction, e.g. in 2 Cor 5:14-15 the 'all' is the group who no longer live for themselves, for whom Jesus was crucified and raised; in 1 Cor 15:22 it is the 'all' which is in Christ as opposed to the 'all' which is in Adam. In 1 Tim 2:4-6 the restriction is all classes and types of people, which Paul lists; [we could not pray (v1) for the 'all' mentioned here if it meant everyone on earth, but we can pray for all types of people]. Often the 'all' or 'world' was used to shake Jews out of the ingrained elitist notion that only Jews could be saved. Look at Acts to see how the Lord had to shock Peter, about this matter, with a vision.

The word *pantas* ('all') does not have a single fixed meaning. Its range of meanings are determined by the context which can be: all without exception, all without distinction, any, total, whole, or every kind. Like texts using the word 'world', one has to be very careful in making an interpretation; the nearer and greater contexts must be carefully considered.

Final thoughts

The character of God

I know that whatever God does, It shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, And nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him. (Eccles 3:14)
His favour is life. (Ps 30:5)

God cannot have desires that are not fulfilled. Everything God does has a fulfilment and conclusion, there is never a gap. When it says that God desires 'all' to come to repentance, they all will. God's favour results in life not death. This is why the idea that God loves everyone, or desires everyone to be saved is close to blasphemy. It posits that God earnestly desires and wills something which is then unfulfilled and unsatisfied. If Jesus is a ransom for all, then all the 'all' will be ransomed because Jesus is God. The Jesus that dies for many and saves the few is not the God of the Bible. Can anyone seriously suggest that the most precious substance in the universe, the blood of Jesus, can actually be wasted? That God makes his Son suffer more than was necessary? What does that make God? Can God draw all men to himself and then fail to save some because their will was stronger than his and they refused to come?

The essence of Calvinism is that God is God. The essence of Arminianism is that man helps God. The essence of modern evangelicalism is that man is God. The essence of modern secular society is that man creates God. Where do you want to be in this?

The person of God is the root of Biblical Christianity. If we get this wrong, everything will be wrong. *'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'*. We cannot afford to make a mistake here. We must treat God as God. It belittles God to suppose that he must fit into our sensitivities, that he is 'nice' and 'cuddly', that he would never willingly send someone to hell. We should be amazed that anyone at all is saved. With the world and the church in the state it is in we should be gobsmacked that it continues another day.

The objects of God's love

John, the so called apostle of love, makes crystal clear that God's love is relational, covenantal. Only those who live in Christ know this love. God gives his love only to those whose sins the Son has propitiated (v10).

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 Jn 4:8-10)

God's love is towards those in Christ, part of his family. John states clearly that God's love is only manifested in those who live through Jesus. The love of God, when applied to a person, saves and sanctifies him. It does not result in his condemnation. To suggest that God loves the reprobate, the very people he has repeatedly stated that he hates, is close to blasphemy. In the light of the scriptures examined, there is no reason to assert this, other than modern sensitivities that God must be nice to all. We have thus lost our roots in the Biblical texts if we make this assertion.

Sin

As is so often the case, the idea that God loves everyone panders to a weakened view of the sin of man. Many almost feel that God owes them a favour. A perverted sense of fair play demands that God give everyone a fighting chance at eternal life. Few seem to realise these days what our rebellion did to God, what a stench our behaviour is in his nostrils, even Christian behaviour. God must have a declaration to the universe of his justice, wrath, condemnation and holiness as well as his mercy, love, faithfulness and compassion. Hell must exist for a testimony to God's eternal justice. That any of us escape is passing strange. We have no rights to any special treatment at God's hands. Who better to decide who inhabits hell and who shares in heaven?

The doctrines of grace

The idea that God loves everyone destroys the Biblical doctrines of grace:

Total depravity: if God loves everybody and if Jesus died for everyone, but not everyone is saved, then all the people who reject the Gospel have managed to resist God's best efforts to save them. The Bible states that God draws people to Christ, but in this view some stand their ground. Conversely, if God only provides a global salvation available to all if they choose it, then the initial act of salvation is determined by dead men and not God; but we know this is unscriptural. Both cases posit that man is stronger than God.

Unconditional election: if God loves everyone, why does the Bible state from cover to cover that he has chosen or selected only a portion of humanity? Many people, like yourself have decided that this doctrine cannot be true. One local 'evangelical' pastor called it a myth! If God decides when sparrows die and when our hair falls out, then it is no greater task to decide who goes to hell and who goes to heaven. Predestination of sparrows is wider than election of saints. Why one and not the other?

Limited atonement: if the 'all' passages refer to everyone, then God must love and give

grace to all men. God thus desires the salvation of everyone. Jesus therefore died for everyone. The result is a universalistic Gospel.

Irresistible grace: the items above mean that man can, therefore, resist God; thus the effectual call is destroyed. The texts which speak of God drawing men have to be cut out of the Bible. The alternative is that God draws everyone so all will be saved, if Jesus died as a ransom for everyone then God decrees the salvation of all people. There is no need for effectual calling, universalism again.

Perseverance of the saints: if salvation is left up to the choice of man, then it's continuance must also be in the gift of man. If a person does not keep the work going, then he will fall away. Several evangelical authors (like David Pawson) have recently written defending this view; but this is only the logical outcome of a loose Gospel and an Arminian theology.

I am tempted to continue, but this letter has already become a lengthy article. I do sincerely hope that you will give consideration to what I have said. The implications of adopting what appears to be a merciful stance, actually has devastating repercussions on the person of God and clear scriptures. I could go on to mention the appalling effect on the Gospel presentation which this idea has had in the last fifty years, with many people joining the church who are not actually saved. This is, I believe, a critical problem in these days. I could mention also the way that people have gone after preaching this view for decades. Billy Graham now actually teaches universalism after holding the view that God loves everyone for some time. Graham suggests that all one has to be is sincere in whatever religion you hold and God will accept you. However, I won't pursue these thoughts, I have said enough.

This letter is lengthy because I feel that the issue is crucial. Forgive my intensity but I believe that the idea that God loves everyone is pernicious and debilitating. We hold it at our peril and we hold it in contradistinction to our more wise forefathers in the faith.

It may be that you have never considered a carefully laid out exposition of the doctrines of grace and that these imperfect thoughts of mine are new and challenging. If so, I feel certain that an honest examination of the scriptures referred to will convince one of the truth of the historic Augustinian/Calvinistic/Reformed position. Any text which seems to contradict this stance (and there are a few I have not discussed) can be explained when interpreted carefully in context. But before new texts are introduced, it behoves you to overthrow my thesis, controvert the arguments and give a different explanation of the scriptures already quoted.

I pray that you will know God's blessing in your studies.

Your friend,

Paul

Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version
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