

The Free Offer Debate

Contra Malcolm Watts

Sad to say, but this question must be raised again. Despite many articles being written to overwhelmingly prove that there is no sincere offer in the Gospel to reprobates - that God does not love all or offer salvation to all, but only the elect - we must enter the ring again. Certain teachers keep raising the same old arguments, that have been destroyed a thousand times since the Reformation, often using disingenuous methods. The recent article by Malcolm Watts in *Sword and the Trowel* magazine (2009:1) is one such case. It must be answered.

For the sake of clarity I will first explain, simply, what I mean by the free offer. This is the claim that the Gospel message (“offer”) contains these constituents:

1. God gives grace to all men.
2. God desires (wills) the salvation of all men.
3. The Gospel is predicated upon the love of God for all men.

The basic difficulty

What is the essential problem with this notion? The problem is that it leads people to sin against God and man. How is this so? They sin because:

1. *They lie against God’s clear and specific word*, and also the analogy of Scripture, in their proclamation of the Gospel to sinners. This can never bear fruit and it deceives men who are thus lied to.
2. *They misrepresent God and paint a false picture of his attributes*. This is a very serious error which will have to be accounted for in the Day of Judgment. People should be afraid to make such a mistake.

This is a very important matter for Christians to consider. We dare not offend God in our ministry; if we are wrong about the foundation of the Gospel, how much damage will we do to the church?

The basic doctrinal error

What is the real problem with Arminianism? It is that it misrepresents God and denies many of His attributes. Arminians have a very different view of God than Calvinists. Arminianism denies all of the five points of the doctrines of grace and in doing so denies God’s sovereignty and His decree, and also contradicts His revealed word. Worse than this it paints a picture of God that is contrary to the truth of His being. It denies God’s immutability; it twists His providence into an unbiblical common grace; it lies about His love, making it universal instead of particular; it makes God lie, and thus destroys His truth; it questions His eternity, His faithfulness, His freedom, His goodness, His grace. His holiness and infinity are compromised; He becomes passible (able to suffer); His justice and righteousness are controverted and His perfection is ruined. We could write at length on this (and have elsewhere), but the simple point is that the Arminians’ God is not the God revealed in Scripture. The repercussions of this to Arminian converts is easy to see.

Those who promote the free offer do something very similar – they paint a picture of God in their Gospel proclamation that distorts or contradicts the Biblical revelation about God. Thus they commit a very serious and fundamental error; to say nothing of the deceit placed upon their hearers. To lead people astray in their view of God is very dangerous, to encourage people to believe a false Gospel is grave, but to misrepresent the God you are supposed to be honouring is ominous and should create fear.

This is no small issue; it is of fundamental importance to get this matter right. We will now examine some of the detail in Mr Watts' argument.

The crucial mistake is to affirm that God is willing to give salvation on the condition of any man believing it. Now since we know that Watts is a professing Calvinist and believes in election, then he holds the self-contradictory position of the Amyraldians who affirmed election but also taught that God loves all men and freely offers salvation to all men. What Amyraldians did was to make the Gospel message more presentable by offering salvation to all on the condition of faith, while knowing in their hearts that only the elect would actually believe since the reprobate were not chosen to salvation.

Look at the simple analogy of faith:

1. *God is sovereign in salvation, man can do nothing* (Psa. 3:8; Jonah 2:9). Therefore there is no conditionality in becoming a Christian. Man cannot have faith naturally because all men are depraved and no one does good (Rom. 3:10-18). If the Gospel is conditional on man's faith (the basis of the modern word "offer") then God is not sovereign in salvation.
2. *God is consistent and does everything perfectly* (Eccles. 3:14). Therefore if God loves someone, He loved them in eternity past and will love them into eternity future. His love is perfect; it never stops and never begins, it was always set upon those he chooses (Eph. 1:4-5). Proclaiming a universal offer of sincere salvation is always predicated on a universal love in God, which includes a love for the reprobate. This denies God's immutability since this love changes to hate or there are two types of love – a better and weaker version. It denies God's perfection since those He loves go to hell and cease to be loved, God loved the wrong thing.
3. *God categorically states in many places that He hates the reprobate* (e.g. Psa. 5:5; 11:5). Thus proclaiming the free offer denies God's clear word and makes Him a hypocrite.
4. *Calvinists affirm that Jesus did not die for all men but only the elect*. Therefore, on what basis can God be said to love reprobates? On what basis is there a promise of salvation for reprobates? Where does the grace come from that is offered to reprobates? [Grace only comes from the cross and is only directed to the elect.] Proclaiming the free offer denies the value of Christ's atonement.
5. *God has chosen only the elect, and foreknows all men in a predestinating way*. Thus telling men, whom God has predestined to condemnation in eternity, that they can be saved because God loves them means telling lies on God's behalf. Telling a room full of people that God loves them all, that Christ died for them all and that God offers salvation freely to them all is a lie, since this promise is only to the elect.

We could continue in this vein, but enough has been said to show that the free offer is contrary to basic Biblical doctrine.

What does "offer" mean in Scripture and the Reformed standards?

Watts claims that "offer" means the tender of a benefit that can be accepted or rejected.

The word 'offer' is derived from the Latin *offere* which literally means 'to bring to', for acceptance or rejection. ... The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'offer' as 'a holding forth or presenting for acceptance; an expression of intention or willingness to give or do something conditionally on the assent of the person addressed. (p.27).

There is no dispute that "offer" means this today, but did it always mean this in history?

Offer in Scripture

The word "offer" occurs 217 times in the Bible with a variety of meanings to be determined by the context. The Hebrew word '*alah*' basically mean "to go up" and is used of offering up

animals to be sacrificed. To demonstrate the variety in the word, the AV translates it as: come up, offer, come, bring, ascend, go, chew, offering, light, increase, burn, depart, put, spring, raised, arose, break, & exalted. Several Hebrew words are translated by “offer” even though their real meaning is something else, such as “slaughter”, “fashion”, “pour out” or “do”.

In the Greek text we see words such as: *prosphero*, meaning “to bring”; *didomi*, meaning “to give or supply”; *parecho*, meaning “to reach forth” or “exhibit”; *anaphero*, meaning “to carry up or lift up”.

There is no warrant to take Hebrew and Greek words translated by the English word “offer” and then ascribe to them the modern meaning. This is simply false reasoning. I can find no example of the word “offer” used in Scripture to mean “tender of a conditional benefit”, which is the way Watts explains it.

Watts’ list of Scripture verses to undergird his point does no such thing; they are generally speaking of the external call, not a will of God to save all men. It is noteworthy that he does not exegete these passages, but leaves them standing alone.

“Offer” in Calvin, the Canons of Dort and the Westminster Standards

There is no doubt that many theological works use the word “offer” occasionally. However, it did not have the modern meaning but essentially was used to mean “presentation”.

Calvin uses the word many times in connection with the Gospel and rightly so, but he never implies by it the sense of a conditional promise tendered to the reprobate. In Rom. 1:16, quoted by Watts, Calvin uses it in the Old Testament sense of Christ being raised up as a sacrificial offering. This does not help Watts’ case in any way. The atonement of the Lord Jesus is like the serpent on Moses’ pole (Num. 2:8-9); on the cross the Lord was raised up and all who look to him in faith will be saved (John 3:14-15); but only the elect will look savingly (John 1:12-13). We who object to the free offer have no problems with a universal call for repentance, a command to preach the Gospel universally, nor even that the Gospel promise is free (that is, of sovereign grace); we just do not include in the universal preaching of the Gospel a promise of life to the reprobate on the basis of God’s love for all. Only true Hyper-Calvinists object to the universal preaching of the Gospel message.

Calvin’s view of the call of the Gospel is that it is absolutely connected to the decree of election; his *Institutes* make this very clear. Calvin teaches that God elects some to eternal life and some to condemnation (e.g. *Inst.* 3:22) but this harmonises with God’s command to preach the Gospel to all. The Gospel is that God “*directs the promises of salvation specifically to the elect: for he proclaims that they alone, not the whole human race without distinction, are to become his disciples ... Hence it is clear that the doctrine of salvation, which is said to be reserved solely and individually for the sons of the church, is falsely debased when presented as effectually profitable to all ... although the voice of the Gospel addresses all in general*” (*Inst.* 3:22.10). This single quote alone shows that Watts misrepresents Calvin since Calvin does not support the modern concept of the free offer. The title of *Inst.* 3:22.10 is, “*The universality of God’s invitation and the particularity of election;*” this entirely sums up our position. The Gospel call is universal but the message of the call itself must present the truth of God’s choosing a particular people, not all, “*Scripture reconciles the two notions that all are called to repentance and faith by outward preaching, yet that the spirit of repentance and faith is not given to all.*”

The Canons of the Synod of Dort also affirm this, contrary to Watts. While asserting that the external call of the Gospel is universal, they state that the internal call is only to those predestined by God, the elect (Heads 3 & 4, Art. 10). The promise is only “*to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him*” (Heads 3 & 4, Art. 8). Like Calvin, Dort also taught this double calling, externally as a message to all but internally and effectually by the Spirit in the preaching to the elect. Furthermore, Dort strongly asserted the doctrine of reprobation, for example in First Head, Art.6 and 15.

The Calvinistic doctrine of a double call (a general call to all and an effectual call to the elect alone) precludes the idea of the free offer, which teaches a desire of God to save the reprobate out of love for all. If God loved all, all would be saved. If God wills the salvation of all, all would be saved. [Creating the concept of two contradictory wills in God to get round this only deepens the errors about God’s attributes.] God only does things perfectly, fully, unchangeably, eternally and infinitely; if he loves, then he loves forever and this love never changes or fails. Dort affirmed this against the Remonstrants (Arminians) by explaining election and reprobation. God does not try to save those he damned in eternity.

In none of the authoritative Reformed standards (e.g. the Three Forms of Unity or Westminster) do we find the notion of Watts and others that there is saving grace available to all, that God loves all men and desires to save them, or that the Gospel message includes a sincere offer that all men can be saved. God wills the salvation of the elect alone. Dort denies the claim that God promises every man salvation in the Gospel, which is offered as a tender of saving promise on the condition of faith.

However, the canons do use the word “offer”, as Watts points out, in Heads 3 & 4, Art. 9. However, the Latin word *offero*, as used by the theologians at Dort, essentially means “set forth” or “present”, and there is no problem with the idea that Jesus is set forth in the Gospel. There is no conception that “offer” here has a meaning of divine love for everyone or a divine will to save everyone; the whole thrust of Dort’s teaching is set against this. It is a misrepresentation to say otherwise.

The Westminster Confession, coming after Dort, fully agrees with the conclusion of the canons; the gracious call of God is to the elect alone, not to the reprobate (see chapters 3, 5 and 10). The mention of “offer” in 7:3 has to be understood in the context of the whole document, which is set against the modern free offer doctrine; here it is addressing the external call of the Gospel. It is odd that modern Calvinists assume the arguments of the Arminians and misrepresent Reformed standards. There is no support for Watts in these standards, or in Calvin.

Since Watts later appeals to Turretin, I will give a relevant quote from the great theologian: Now although we do not deny that the reprobate (who live in external communion with the church) are called by God through the Gospel [this is the external call as he has previously explained]; still we do deny that they are called with the intention that they should be made actual partakers of salvation (which God knew would never be the case because in his decree he had ordained otherwise concerning them). The external call is extended to the reprobate as well as the elect; but in a different manner ... the call cannot be addressed to men indiscriminately without the reprobate as well as the elect sharing in it. ... [The call to the reprobate] springs from the justice of a judge who wishes to convict the stubborn and rebellious and to render them without excuse. [Francis Turretin; *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, P. & R. Pub, (1994) Vol. 2, p.504, emphasis P.F.]

One of his sub-headings is entitled:

Proof that God acts seriously in the calling of reprobates, although he does not intend their salvation. [Francis Turretin; *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, P. & R. Pub, (1994) Vol. 2, p.505]

Under this heading he says,

God cannot in calling intend the salvation of those whom he reprobated from eternity and from whom he decreed to withhold faith and other means leading to salvation. ... God does not intend faith in the reprobate; therefore neither does he intend salvation. ... It is ... absurd to say that he [God] calls the reprobate with the intention that they should be saved. [Francis Turretin; *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, P. & R. Pub, (1994) Vol. 2, pp.505-506]

Turretin agrees with me that to teach this, as Watts does in the free offer, is to be

Repugnant to the wisdom, goodness and power of God. [Francis Turretin; *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, P. & R. Pub, (1994) Vol 2, p.505]

What could be clearer? Turretin spends page after page trouncing all the claims of the free offer. We could quote from many sources in this vein, from the Reformers, to the Puritans or great Reformed theologians; they would see the modern free offer as Amyraldism. Watts speaks contrary to those he endorses and contrary to historic Calvinism.

The message of the Gospel

It seems that, amazingly, modern Calvinists do not understand what the Gospel message actually does, they do not understand God's purpose in it.

Firstly, there is the twofold call that we have alluded to already. This needs no discussion since I am addressing Calvinists in this paper that purport to believe this truth. The external call is universal and general; all men are commanded to believe the Gospel, to repent, to turn to God. But Calvinists know that this is impossible for sinners and that God must first regenerate a man and give him faith and repentance as a free gift. Only the elect are given these gifts and so only the elect believe in Christ and turn to God. The internal call, the work of the Spirit within the external call, is the means whereby God empowers his chosen people to respond to the call. All this is standard Calvinism and should not be objectionable.

However, we must emphasise what God is doing in this external call. As Jesus promised to bring a sword and divide humanity, so the Gospel call divides all men. The Gospel brings judgment on all who hear it. To those who are God's elect it brings life, promise, hope and power to believe; the result is eternal life. But to the reprobate the Gospel comes to harden them in their rejection of God and determination to sin, and to render them without excuse. There is no promise, no life, no hope, but only condemnation. Thus people are objectively divided by the Gospel preaching into two classes: the elect who receive life, and the reprobate who are confirmed in condemnation.

There is no warrant for Christians to tell men that God loves them, that God wants to save them, that Jesus died for them or that grace is given to them, in order to hide the sword in the Gospel message. To do this is to deny the clear teaching of God and to speak lies. There is no peace for the wicked because God has not chosen them. There is no divine love for the reprobate since they are destined to destruction. It is misrepresenting God to say otherwise. Our job is to present Jesus as the salvation of God for sinners and tell men that it is God's command that they repent (Acts 17:30). The water of eternal life is freely available (Rev. 22:17) and we should explain that this life is in Christ and that those who believe in him will receive it; but we cannot say that God loves anyone specifically, or that Jesus died for them specifically, or that God desires their salvation specifically – because

we do not know if they are elect or not. We must limit ourselves to the truth God has given us and not add to His word. Men must repent; those that do are elect.

If we fail to preach the Gospel Biblically, we do not serve God's purpose in dividing men and thus give reprobates false hope by telling them deceitful notions, such as that God loves them. The free offer works against God's purposes in Gospel preaching.

What is the Gospel?

Watts claims that it is *"not the whole revelation of the Word of God, but is that part of the Word which concentrates upon the good news of Jesus Christ"* (p.29). I am rather amazed by this. The good news of God is Jesus Christ! God is not only the author of salvation but is Himself our salvation (Psa. 38:22; Isa. 12:2; Jer. 3:23); and that salvation is centred in the God/Man Christ Jesus. To this end, beginning with the proto-evangelium of Gen. 3:15, all of God's Word is focused upon Christ from beginning to end. All the OT revelation leads up to Him, the cross is the centre of time and everything after this is the last time. The NT revelation is the explanation of what the shadows represented of Christ and the final words of Christ from heaven given through His apostles. All of Scripture revelation pertains to the Gospel since this is God's purpose in history – to bring out the elect from all nations and form a people for himself, given to Christ as a bride, who will begin a new life in harmony with God in a new restored world.

The Gospel is thus the whole counsel of God; all of it is contained in the good news. When people get converted they only understand a little of this Gospel. Concentrating upon redemption, atonement, faith, repentance, regeneration, justification and so on, is necessary at the start, but new believers grow in understanding what this good news fully means. The good news is not just "believe in Christ and be saved", but the good news continues as it explains that I am declared righteous in heaven (justification) that I am part of God's family (adoption) that I am a new creature (sanctification), that I am a serving member of Christ's body (the church) and that Jesus is coming again to finalise this work of salvation (eschatology); we could add to this list

When Peter mentions the Gospel, it is set within the confines of: hope, obedience, the holiness of God, Christian ethics, the fear of God, sanctification, brotherly love in the body, the eternality of the word of God, predestination, Christ's incarnation, resurrection, glory, faith, hope, regeneration and human frailty (1 Pet. 1:12-25). In different places Paul mentions that the Gospel involves:

- The eternal purpose of God, election, calling, grace, the incarnation, death and eternal life (2 Tim. 1:8-10).
- Election, sanctification, the work of the Spirit, faith, truth, calling and glory (2 Thess. 2:13-14).
- The work of apostolic delegates to establish believers in the churches is the labour of the Gospel and this involves affliction (1 Thess. 3:1-3).

We could continue if there was time. The point is that the Gospel is the whole counsel of God as revealed in Scripture.

Watts then claims that the Gospel can't be good news to all people (Luke 2:10) if that good news is restricted to the elect alone (p.29). But I have just proved that the Gospel is God's whole counsel revealed in Scripture, which contains all doctrines. Are all these good news to all people? Is God anger and wrath against sin good news to all people? Is God's hate of sin and sinners good news to all people? Is hell good news to all people? Is God's justice any comfort to the reprobate? The Gospel is good news to the elect but a severe warning and condemnation to the reprobate.

The good news is only good news to the elect, how can it be otherwise since God has already condemned the reprobate and judgment is hanging over them (John 3:36); there is no good news for the wicked. The elect come from all nations and this is the angel's point in Luke 2:10; indeed *laos* ("people") also means "nations". The angel was declaring that God will henceforth not only dwell with the elect in Israel but with all peoples. This appears to me to be a basic error of exegesis, unless someone is ignoring the meaning of the text solely in order to prove a prior agenda.

Wrong use of the "universalistic" texts.

Again Watts uses Arminian arguments to bolster up his weak case. It is a sad day when superficial Calvinists have to use Arminian arguments to attack consistent Calvinists. Watts refers to John 4:42 and 1 John 4:14 stating that this is good news to all. He had earlier implied this by referring to texts such as John 3:16. In a moment of utter madness Watts even states that "*Christ may be said to be everybody's saviour*" (p.30) whereas Scripture tells us that Christ came to ransom many, but not all (Matt. 20:28). He also refers here to Thomas Boston using a quote that shows his being influenced by the universalism of the Marrow Controversy. I can hear Calvin turning in his grave.

We cannot enter into a full exegesis of these texts here [anyone wanting such an examination can have my paper on them by request] but a few words must be said.

1. The foolishness of using the universalistic texts to support the free offer is that if one claims that the words "world" or "all" mean everyone, then the whole of God's revelation of the Gospel is ruined. In John 3:16 if "world" means everyone, then it must also mean everyone in verse 17, and this would result in no hell.
2. John 4:42 & 1 John 4:14 – if "world" means everyone then either the result is universalism (the whole world is saved) or a denial of the divinity of Christ (he is the saviour of the world but fails to save the world) or an assertion that man can overrule God's sovereignty (the world is potentially saved but the casting decision is man's not God's).
3. John 6:31-33 – "gives" can be variously translated including as: extend, present, reach out, to cause to come forth, though "give" is the primary meaning. There is no problem here. If the word is translated as "present" then Christ is presented as the true bread from heaven. If someone insists that the word must mean "give", we know that there were those in this company who were disciples and those who later became disciples; the plural "you" is necessary to include these believers but not the reprobate in that crowd. Watts is really clutching at straws.
4. Titus 2:11 – means all kinds of men; including the slaves mentioned in the immediate context and qualified by "us" (i.e. believers) in the next verse and verse 14 (those whom Christ redeemed). Is Watts really saying that Christ redeemed all men? This is, at least, implied if "all men" means everyone. In fact, the Greek word *pas* ("all") is frequently restricted, as is the word "world" (e.g. John 12:19).
5. Claiming that these texts apply to all men results in proving too much since universalism is the result. Surely no Calvinist can stoop to this tactic?

Watts adds to his madness by saying that, "*Christ has been given to people without restriction and without reservation ... the gift [of salvation] is general*" (p.30). Please explain to me how Christ can be given without reservation in eternity to those same people that God chose for damnation in eternity? How can Christ have spilled his blood, the most precious thing in the universe, for those whom God hates and has ordained to judgment? Do we have to prove reprobation to Calvinists? If so please note:

- The LORD hath made all *things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. (Prov. 16:4)
- That the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? they shall be brought forth to the day of wrath. (Job 21:30)

- *What if* God, willing to shew *his* wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction. (Rom. 9:22)
- *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. (1 Pet. 2:8)

Conversely the elect are chosen for glory in eternity:

- *Even every one* that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him. ... This people have I formed for myself; they shall shew forth my praise. (Isa. 43:7, 21)
- And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory. (Rom. 9:23)

Again, we could add many more such verses.

In passing I should add that some of Watts' Scripture quotes appear to have no purpose and are not qualified or commented on (e.g. Isa. 40:9, 45:24). It seems to be a tactic to throw lots of Bible verses into the argument to give the appearance of being biblical, when his arguments are actually unscriptural.

Some of his minor arguments also appear to me to be pointless, such as the discussion about those who are called are not named in Scripture. Of course not or the Bible would be millions of pages long. What's the purpose of such an argument? We all agree that, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom. 10:13); the argument is about whether the reprobate ever will, whether God ever intended their salvation.

Regarding his arguments about preaching to all, I have already explained that this is Biblical and Reformed. The Gospel call goes out to all people. Only true Hyper-Calvinists deny this. I also have no problem with his denial of preparationism, often seen in the Puritans. The Gospel call is not to a restricted group of people who are already half-saved. Neither do I object to his warnings about a reliance on inward impressions. All these are fine but have little to do with a defence of the free offer.

A sincere offer?

Notwithstanding points of agreement (would that there were more) Watts continues to aver the error of, not only a free offer, but a sincere offer, "*He is offered sincerely! In the Gospel God says what he means and he means what he says*" (p.37). He follows this with Matt. 23:37.

Now just consider this carefully; what Watts is saying is that in the Gospel God tells reprobate people, those He has predestined to hell, that they can choose Christ; they can be saved and God wants them to be saved; that God loves them and eternal life can be theirs if they believe. Watts says that God is sincere in tendering this promise. Please think this through carefully. This is what Scripture says of such people:

- The foolish shall not stand in thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity. (Psa. 5:5)
- Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. (Psa. 1:5)
- As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then *it is* not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. (Rom. 9:13-16)
- For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. Raging

waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. (Jude 1:4-5, 13)

- These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. (2 Pet. 2:17)

Since God predetermined the condemnation of the reprobate before they were born, how can God be sincere in telling these same people that they can be saved and that He loves them? It is standard Reformed theology, affirmed by Calvin, Dort and Westminster that God reprobates (rejects) certain people, just as He elects others. Indeed, the very election of some, of itself, automatically means that God passes others by.

To claim that the Gospel offer is a sincere tender of a promise of eternal life based on God's love and grace to all is not sincere, it is a lie.

Why Watts appeals to Matt. 23:37 is a mystery since it does not support his thesis at all. What it says is that God wants to gather the children of Jerusalem (i.e. the elect in Jerusalem, since God only gathers chosen people to himself) but Jerusalem tried to prevent this. Jerusalem is then identified as reprobate - "*thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee.*" How does Jesus' condemnation of reprobate Jews support an argument that God wills the salvation of all? God's compassion is here expressed towards elect Jews, not reprobates.

Regarding God grieving for reprobates (p.38) what can we say? This is beyond belief. A sovereign God who predetermines the days of all men according to his purposes does not grieve when men fulfil those purposes. John 5:40 is not indicative of grief but a statement of the truth of the matter; reprobates won't come! Jesus explains in the very next chapter that they won't come because God does not draw them. What nonsense is it to claim that God grieves because of the results of his own choice?

Conclusion

The nub of the argument is the contradiction of God's decree and revelation by the free offer. His word shows us that God chooses the elect in eternity and that Jesus died for them alone. Watts affirms this but then, astonishingly, contradicts these truths by claiming that God loves all, wills to save all and offers grace to all – which the reprobate then refuse. This paints a picture of God that:

- God rejects the reprobate in eternity – but wants to save them in time.
- God hates the wicked reprobate – but loves them at the same time.
- God passed the reprobate by in eternity – but now offers them grace.

Only a fool can fail to see that such claims ruin the Biblical revelation of the attributes of God.

Believers are commanded not to add or subtract from the word of God, and also to properly witness to the truth of God's character in the testimony of their lives. The preaching of the Gospel is a crucial aspect of this testimony, indeed it is often the only testimony that many sinners ever get of God. To reduce this preaching to a set of lies about God's plans, decrees, character and purpose is a most serious sin. To comfort sinners that God loves them, wants to save them and gives them grace, does nothing but set them on slippery slopes. Why bother repenting if God already loves you? Why bother counting the cost and committing your life to God's service if you already have grace and God is for you?

There is no benefit in such Gospel preaching, and this is why the church in this country has fallen to pieces in the decades since the free offer has been most popular. Evangelism has never been so unsuccessful in England, during the whole period subsequent to the

Reformation, as it is at the present time; and this is why foolish method after foolish methods are adopted – only to fail.

Some of Watts' warnings about the failings of true Hyper-Calvinist preaching of the Gospel, such as a reliance on subjective impressions, are valuable; but this does not detract from the weight of erroneous statements in his chief presentation on the offer.

Watts' arguments begin with positing a modern meaning of "offer" into the historical use of the term by theologians to mean "presentation", claiming that it means the "tender of a sincere, beneficial promise that can be accepted or rejected". This misrepresents all those who used the word in a Biblical way, including Calvin, the Synod of Dort and the Westminster Assembly. He contradicts the Biblical meaning of the word as expressed both in Hebrew and Greek. He misunderstands the purpose of the Gospel, that it brings light and life to the elect but confirms the reprobate in their sin and hardens them to God's word. Watts even misunderstands what the good news actually is and limits its meaning from the Biblical panorama of truth it should convey. To support his false arguments Watts misuses Scripture and even stoops to affirm Arminian exegesis, failing to see that this always results in universalism. Some of his arguments and texts quoted appear to have no point at all. He utterly fails to do justice to the scriptural doctrine of reprobation, even though he refers to Calvin, Dort and Westminster, whose works openly explain reprobation. Finally, Watts' claim that the Gospel is a sincere offer to reprobates denies most of the attributes of God and dishonours God's self-revelation in Scripture. This article is a terrible piece of work that will only do damage to the Lord's people who read it. People should be warned.

My comments here may seem harsh to some but, like Calvin, though I seek to be gracious in dealing with brothers that teach errors (as far as possible), when it comes to a serious denial and mockery of the doctrine of God I must needs be bold in denunciation. Brethren, we cannot hold God up to contempt and must honour his name or we disobey his first commandments. Denying God's attributes is the same as dishonouring his name. If our pet doctrines result in a denial of God's character, decree and purpose, then we are close to blasphemy, and this must be criticised strongly. I trust that Mr Watts may learn from this and come to his senses, that is my prayer.

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