

4/10/11

Commentary
on George Zeller's "For Whom Did Christ Die?"
(his defense of the refutable proposition of unlimited atonement)

Taking issue, again (after a 30 yr. hiatus from correspondence), with brother Zeller's propagation of the Arminian belief of unlimited, or general atonement, and free will salvation availability, I would first state objection to his position on what he calls "universal" terms that the Bible uses in connection with the doctrine of the atonement.

Two particular errors, or omissions are to be noted:

(1) Defining the meaning of certain qualifying words, without recognition, or comment on the fact that, especially with the word "world", there are numerous variant uses of the word—of which he must be aware. Scripture often contains different senses of the word, or related phrases. How can one not be critical of such glaring oversights, or omissions? Especially when specious conclusions are offered as true interpretations of scripture! Specious: "plausible, but not genuine", per Webster's Dict.

(2) Ignoring, or omitting context, (especially in John 3, Rom. 11, et al), or the unique significance of the Jewish custom of referring to other nations than Israel, as "the world"—even in a derogatory, and judgmental sense.

A partial excerpt from John Gill's commentary, which I had included in a 1980 reply to George's 12-point study on the subject of the application of Christ's death, is presented below.

"Nothing is more common in the Jewish writings than to call the Gentiles, the world, and the whole world, and the nations of the world; the apostle Paul calls them the world, in Rom. 11:12, 15." ".....when our Lord was discoursing with Nicodemus, one of their rabbins, he lets him know that God so loved the world, the Gentiles, contrary to their rabbinical notions, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever of them that believeth on Him, should not perish, as they had concluded every one of them should, but have everlasting life,"

".....the word "world" admits of a variety of senses, and therefore, the sense of it in one place cannot be the rule for the interpretation of it in another, which can only be prefixed as the text or context determine.....". See John 1:10, 29, 6:33, 51, 15:19, 16:28, 17:19, etc for examples.

No conscientious, objective study can be conducted without following those two fundamental rules. The Arminian infidelity to gospel truth permeates the few pages of the study I read, which is no surprise, because its free will premise is wrong, and so must be its conclusions. Yet, they go on in willful disobedience, spreading their propaganda, as if they are blissfully innocent of error, instead of being pathetically ignorant of the truth.

A brief comment should explain the alleged problem of "universal" terms related to the atonement, compared to restrictive terms for election.

First of all, they are the same persons, no matter what the associated grammar may suggest. The interpretation of the passage is determined by logical study of the underlying principles

involved. Or, as Martin Luther said, “Are we not to be logicians, more than grammarians?”

Also, the words in question support the literal (Calvinistic) doctrinal interpretation—if studied contextually, and not arbitrarily assuming that one of many senses of the word “world” applies, and thereby claiming that such words establish, or verify universal application of the atonement.

Many Christians treat some Biblical doctrine, as if it is not the exact science that it is, or that we are not under compulsion to come to a position of unified belief of it. “One heart, one mind, and one accord” was the testimony of the original church at Jerusalem. It certainly is not the state of the contemporary church, no matter what excuses or reasons may be given. Conversely, to its shame, it is almost completely indoctrinated with the radical, liberal vs. literal gospel theology of Arminianism. What they consider to be unity, is merely the false security of majority consensus—in a corrupted gospel. Which, as Spurgeon said, “in no way resembles the truth.”

It should be mutually agreed that **the decree of election establishes who will be saved. What, then, is the logic, or value of an unlimited, or general atonement**—that the Arminian proponents persist in maintaining? It contradicts, and denies the efficacy of Christ’s blood sacrifice, which propitiates the sins of, and reconciles those to God for whom he died, unconditionally ensuring their ultimate spiritual conversion, and eternal life.

The John 3 scene is that of Jesus informing the Jewish rabbi, Nicodemus, that salvation wasn’t only for the Jews, but for the Gentiles, as well. This extension of God’s grace to include other nations, was as difficult for the Jews to accept, as the dispensational transition from law to grace; which had to be continually repeated, and reinforced. This is the context that determines the sense of the phrase “the world” in John 3, and other places, as well as “all men”, “every man”, etc.

It was more a question of who, or what nationalities, besides the Jews, not that every individual Gentile was included, any more than “All Israel shall be saved” (Rom. 11:26), means every Jew.

As for election verses using what he calls restrictive terms, the same qualification applies to the atonement passages, as well, because they are the same people. What he has missed in both cases is the contextual meaning of the words in question. Which is Gentiles. For example, in the third paragraph where he inserted the “universal” terms—as he calls them, they would be equivalent to—(1) “*The Gentiles* have not chosen me, but I have chosen *the Gentiles*”, and (2) “According as He has chosen *Gentiles* in Him, etc.”, and (3) “Who has saved *Gentiles* and called *Gentiles* with a holy calling...according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to *Gentiles* in Christ Jesus before the world began”. Again, the “world”, etc references are made to inform the elect world, and emphasize to the Jews, that God’s plan of salvation includes some of every nationality. Therefore, the conflict that Arminian believers maintain exists is really only perceived, or even worse, presumptuous. It is, as in Shakespeare, “Much ado about nothing.”

To change the subject, the root, misleading problem in the Arminian concept is misinterpreting the “believe”, and “saved” passages, by automatically equating salvation with conversion, or

regeneration. Which, is all because of failing to understand that salvation is the end result of being a believer. Even though our future salvation is assured in our new birth, we cannot rightly ignore the fact that the word salvation, and other forms of it, have a literal meaning, which must be considered contextually, and doctrinally, and in their proper place, chronologically.

The most frustrating, and disturbing thing for Arminians to encounter must be the doctrine of election, which is evidenced by the lack of prominence it is given in their ministries. Brother Zeller's avoidance of the subject, is typically conspicuous. So, even though their sense of certain grammatical terms convinces them of their gospel beliefs-- the fact of election makes the theory of universal atonement, or general redemption, illogical, and incompatible with that truth.

Voluntary salvation is a product of man's imagination, or wishful thinking--that contradicts the literal truth of several gospel principles. The essence of the misinterpretation, being the prevailing assumption that one must believe the gospel to become a Christian, which is doctrinally, "putting the cart before the horse."

For that to be true, one has to think that some part of natural, fallen man's will can knowingly cooperate with God in a spiritual matter--contrary to the explicitly clear teaching of I Cor. 2:11-14, which says, vs. 14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned".

Why would a Christian believe, preach, or teach a "form" of the gospel which violates that absolute, definitive principle? Assuming that he is faithful to God, when he has, in fact, given Satan access to his mind, to further manipulate and delude him. We are either doctrinally right, or wrong--there is no allowance for two different interpretations of the same scriptural revelation. If one is the truth, the other is error, even heresy--especially if persistently maintained.

The sad commentary on the Arminian salvation concept is (1) disobedience, in not learning the truth of the Gospel, and (2) infecting the universal church with the "leaven" of false doctrine.

Do they ever consider who the Rev. 3 (Laodicean church) prophecy applies to, and why the church is characterized as "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked"? What else but false gospel doctrine has done such widespread damage to the contemporary church? And that is not to exclude all the other reasons for individual, and church unfaithfulness.

An implicit fact in that final church prophecy is that no significant repentance, or revival is to occur. Yet, there is the warning at the end of the message, that "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches". So, some personal or church reformation could happen.

The supposed conflict cited by George, and others, as to certain words used for the atonement vs. election, doesn't really exist when the use of the words is correctly understood.. That is, when they are not doctrinally misinterpreted.--which unfortunately follows the pattern of the other misguided assumptions of the Arminian scheme, which has hijacked, and dominated the church for centuries. Strong charges, yes, but to vindicate the true gospel, they are warranted.

The Arminian gospel concept is only a theory, contrived by those who will not learn, or accept the literal Gospel truth that God has declared in His word. Whenever a Christian departs from the truth (intentionally, or through ignorance or neglect) he has given place to the devil--which the Bible warns us against--unless and until he repents of his unfaithfulness to God, and His word. For, the extent to which we obey His word, is the criterion that measures how much we truly love and honor Him!

How can we claim allegiance to God, if we hold unsound, even false beliefs? There can be only one true interpretation of any Biblical doctrine, and God commands us, and will enable us to come to that unequivocal, unified knowledge. But He will not excuse any deviation from his intended doctrinal meaning, not even if nearly the whole universal church is complicit in it, which it is.

It was disappointing to read various over-simplified opinions, and interpretations relating to the issue, which are too superficial to be credible answers to the age-old controversy. Claiming them to be “plain” and “simple”, they are often “simplistically” untrue presumptions..

In my experience with Arminian Christians, I have found most of them to be closed-minded, and unwilling to even consider the contrasting literal interpretation of gospel doctrine. Don't they ever think that refusing to listen to one who may be a messenger of God, is the same as not listening to God? But, then, they are not following His scriptural teaching of the gospel in the first place, so that they remain guilty of that disobedience.

Hence, they cannot really be open to the true answers and solution to the controversy involved. They seem to refuse to submit themselves to the scrutiny of scriptural proof, by “rightly dividing (interpreting) the word of truth”.

God is not the author of confusion, or erroneous thinking. Man is, both he, and whoever wrongly influences him. And, of course, Satan, who is the father of lies, and who unceasingly works to draw Christians away from the truth, and faithfulness to God. Just like he did with Adam and Eve, and Job.

Can we think a little bit about our church history? The testimony recorded in Acts 2:41-47, and 4:32-37 of the believers in the first church is one of complete unity in every aspect of their responsibility to God, and His word. They were of unanimous convictions, that is, one heart, one mind, and one accord. Ironically, today's church could be described with the same words, but not spiritually, because their gospel interpretation is not the literal truth, to which the early church was faithful.

The first church received the gospel directly from the apostles, who received it from the Lord--so there should be no doubt of their literal belief and understanding of it. “.....and they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine”.

But unfortunately, error would eventually creep in. The most notable source of it being

Pelagius, a British monk and theologian, in the third and fourth centuries. He was a strong (but wrong) proponent of human free will, being required, with divine grace, for salvation.

I don't know how much development there was in the philosophy in the next thousand years, but near the end of the sixteenth century, Jacobus Arminius became the driving force behind the movement that bears his name today--and that has proliferated into the constitutional gospel theology of nearly the entire universal church-- to his, and their ignominious credit.

While I had included the following quoted comments in my reply and rebuttal of George's study, "Did Christ Die For All Men", some thirty years ago (apparently to no avail), I would hope that he might reconsider its bearing on the presumed validity of the Arminian gospel doctrine.

"The following quotation is from "The Church in History", a Christian school textbook, on the subject of the free will concept, known as Arminianism:

From Page 39, an earlier root of the subject theology, 'In 529 the synod of Orange refuted the teachings of the Semi-Pelagians--that it is up to the individual to accept or refuse God's "offer" of grace',

And from Pages 266-268: 'Arminianism, while maintaining the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, stresses man's will at the expense of God's sovereignty'.

'In his (Arminius's) lectures his departure from historic Calvinism (independent, sovereign grace) became more and more noticeable, although he retained his belief in the Trinity, the deity of Christ, and salvation by faith in Christ's atoning work on the cross.'

'Arminius held some ideas which remind us of Pelagius. He denied the total inability and depravity of man.'

'Arminius did not deny the doctrine of election outright. But he taught that God had elected those who he had foreseen would believe. His teaching was a somewhat subtle and indirect denial of election. He made God's election depend on the action of man. In that way, while seemingly holding to the doctrine of election, he actually denied and destroyed it (and this is what anyone but a complete 5-point Calvinist does to the true doctrine.'

'He also taught that Christ died for all men, and that is possible to fall from grace. He denied that the work of the Spirit is irresistible.'

'.....Arminianism acquired a far greater influence in England (than the Netherlands Reformed Church). It invaded the Anglican Church and nearly all the dissenting denominations. John Wesley adopted Arminianism, and it became the creed of the Wesleyan Methodists. Today, it has become the accepted doctrine in most of the churches in America. (fundamentalist, so-called, as well).' Parenthetical portions, and underlines, mine.

In a brief comparison of the two sides of the controversy:

1. Calvinism is the literal, orthodox interpretation of the Gospel—or the Gospel according to God.
2. Arminianism is the liberal, unorthodox interpretation of the Gospel—or the Gospel according to man.

The first is a product of the new, spiritual mind of man.

The second is a product of the old, natural mind of man.

It is noteworthy that in the quotations from Richard Baxter, and Robert Anderson, there is no thought given to the fact that the word “world” has many variant uses, nor to the context, especially in John 3, of the traditional custom of the Jews referring to the Gentiles as “the world”, and “nations of the world”, etc. Which distinction applies wherever such words are used in conjunction with salvation doctrine.

It is scripturally right to say that any salvation references employing the words “the world”, the whole world”, “all”, “all men”, “every man”, “whosoever”, etc., as the objects of God’s saving grace—including the application of the atonement—refer only to the elect. That decree is self-explanatory, and the only logical conclusion possible.

Simply saying that what Arminians choose to believe is the “plain” sense of the variant words in question, doesn’t make it so. In fact, it is highly presumptuous, and poor scholarship at best. It is also a common characteristic of human nature for people to believe what they want to believe, even if they have to create the “facts” to substantiate it. Not unlike evolutionists’ theories, which being also illogical, are little more than fantasy compared to the truth of creation, which they automatically label as religious superstition, or brainwashing. Both evolutionists, and Arminians are usually so deeply entrenched in their false beliefs that they are incorrigible.

The Arminian interpretation of salvation doctrine is filled with sophistry (per Webster’s Dict., College Edition: “unsound, or misleading, but clever, plausible, and subtle arguments, or reasoning”). Another description is specious reasoning, but the worst thing about it is that whether it is just erroneous interpretation, or purposely contrived, it is doctrinally illogical

It not only misrepresents scriptural truth, but mischaracterizes God, as condescending to sin-cursed man, by appealing to his carnal mind to make an eternally vital spiritual decision of accepting “proffered” salvation—when he does not have the cognitive ability to comprehend it; except intellectually, which is a natural man’s only capacity, and does not equate to required spiritual understanding, or assent!

While Arminians would acknowledge the fact that man was created in the image of God, they have, relative to the gospel, “created” God in the image of man. Ascribing to Him, in effect, a fleshly, human concept of His plan and works of salvation. They see God the way they want to see Him—not the way He really is, at least regarding His gospel principles.

There are two opposite meaning words that identify the Calvinist, and Arminian gospel theologies. The Calvinist believes in monergism. That is, that “God works to effectually bring about the salvation of individuals through spiritual regeneration without cooperation from the individual.” Or, that God is the sole active agency in every aspect of human salvation; man being entirely passive. Whereas, Arminianism is based on synergism, which “argues that human will cooperates with God’s grace in order to be regenerated.” Quotations are from the online Wikipedia Dictionary. It is doubtful if many Christians could frame the debate as well as that secular publication has.

Noting from 2 Cor. 10:5, part of the vindication of Paul’s apostleship, are the words: “Casting down imaginations (overthrowing wrong reasonings)” and, “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”. That degree of submission to the Lord, coupled with the practice of 2 Tim. 2:15, “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”, if diligently maintained will fulfill its promises.

What , then, except failure to faithfully follow those principles, could result in the church being indoctrinated with a false interpretation of gospel truths? How can a church immersed in doctrinal error, be blessed or commended by God, when they continue in such serious unfaithfulness?

“He that hath an hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches”, both in His basic related scriptures, and the applicable end-time church prophecy of Rev. 3. And, “.....lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” Acts 5:39. Would that not be the effect of promoting doctrinal error?

Objective consideration of the arguments set forth in this commentary, would be appreciated. .

In brotherly love, for the cause of God, and His truth!

Everett Falvey

Email: efal@comcast.net

Url: www.theliteraltruth.net

