

# **THE O.P.C. AND THE FREE OFFER**

**A Critique of the Murray-Stonehouse  
Pamphlet:  
*The Free Offer of the Gospel***

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*A series of fourteen editorials that first appeared in the  
Standard Bearer magazine  
between the years 1973 and 1974.*



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## **Part One**

### **Introduction**

In connection with our discussion of the proposed merger of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, we have begun to discuss the matter of Arminianism. And in connection with this discussion of Arminianism, we earlier mentioned both the OPC's treatment of the "Clark Case," beginning in 1944, and the booklet by Dr. Murray and Dr. Stonehouse, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*. Both, we said, were evidences of Arminianism in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. And these evidences we propose to discuss now.

Parenthetically, we may remark that there seems to be a revival of interest in the subject of the so-called "free offer." Just recently I read two references to it in religious magazines originating in the United Kingdom; and one of these references promises to be an extensive discussion which will eventually appear in booklet form. This furnishes additional reason, therefore, for our discussion.

It will not be necessary in this connection to review the Clark Case and its treatment in detail. For any who may be interested in some research on this subject, there was an extensive discussion of that case in Volumes 21 and 22 of the *Standard Bearer*, in a series of articles entitled, "The Text of a Complaint." It will not be necessary for us to review this case, however, because the issue of the so-called "free offer" as it was part of that case is precisely the same as the issue of the booklet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*. In fact, the latter had its origin historically in the Clark Case. According to the introduction of the booklet itself, "This study was prepared by the Rev. Professors John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse of Westminster Theological Seminary, and presented as the report of a committee to the Fifteenth General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church" in 1948. But all this began with the Clark Case in 1944.

What was the Clark Case?

It began in 1944, when a special meeting of the Presbytery (classis) of Philadelphia was held for the purpose of examining Dr. Gordon H. Clark with a view to his licensure and ordination to the ministry. Against the fact that this meeting was called, as well as against its proceedings and decisions, a complaint was directed. Among the dozen signatures to this *Complaint* are such familiar names as R. B. Kuiper, N. B. Stonehouse, and C. Van Til. The second part of the *Complaint* (a lengthy, printed protest) dealt at length with four alleged errors in the theological views of Dr. Clark, errors which became manifest, according to the complainants in the course of Dr. Clark's examination by the Presbytery and in spite of which the Presbytery decided to license him and proceed to his ordination.

What were the four alleged errors?

The first charge of the *Complaint* alleged erroneous views on the part of Dr. Clark concerning the incomprehensibility and knowability of God (*The Text of a Complaint*, pp. 2-6). This, at first glance, does not seem to be related to the issue of the free offer. But it appears that there

nevertheless was a relation in so far as the issue of the “logic of revelation” is concerned. Perhaps we shall have occasion to refer to this later.

The second charge concerns Dr. Clark’s “view of the relation of the faculty of knowledge, the intellectual faculty, to other faculties of the soul” (pp. 6-10).

The third part of this section of the *Complaint* alleges that Dr. Clark is guilty of maintaining “that the relationship of divine sovereignty and human responsibility to each other presents no difficulty for his thinking and that the two are easily reconcilable before the bar of human reason” (pp. 10-13). In this connection, the charge against Dr. Clark was really that of *rationalism*, a charge all too familiar in our Protestant Reformed history, but as false in Dr. Clark’s case as in ours. But again, this third allegation was closely connected with both the first one (concerning God’s knowledge and ours) and the fourth one.

The fourth charge was that “in the course of Dr. Clark’s examination it became abundantly clear that his rationalism keeps him from doing justice to the precious teaching of Scripture that in the gospel God sincerely offers salvation in Christ to all who hear, reprobate as well as elect, and that he has no pleasure in any one’s rejecting this offer but, contrariwise, would have all who hear accept it and be saved” (pp. 13-15).

Those familiar with our Protestant Reformed history will recognize at once the similarity between the position of the *Complaint* and that of the First Point of 1924 and its general, well-meant offer of salvation. This was, of course, not mere coincidence: there was a definite Christian Reformed influence in the *Complaint*, an influence which came about through the presence of men among the complainants who had their origin in the Christian Reformed Church.

I will not weary the reader with a detailed account of the proceedings in the Clark Case. Eventually the case went to the General Assembly (roughly equivalent to our synod), a committee was appointed by the Twelfth General Assembly to examine the doctrinal aspects of the *Complaint*, and this committee reported (with a majority and minority report) to the Thirteenth General Assembly. Although Dr. Clark’s licensure was upheld, neither the majority nor the minority of the committee entertained Dr. Clark’s views on the matter of “apparent contradictions” in Scripture on the matter of the offer of the gospel. Another committee was appointed which was to report to the Fourteenth General Assembly and which was to clarify these doctrinal matters. And, to make a long story short, eventually the booklet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel* came out of this history at the time of the Fifteenth General Assembly in 1948.

The strange thing was that while Dr. Clark’s licensure by the Presbytery of Philadelphia was upheld by the Thirteenth General Assembly, it was the views of the *Complaint*, especially with respect to the so-called “free offer” of the gospel, which prevailed in the OPC as the final result of this history.

This appears very clearly from a comparison of the booklet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel* with the following description of the differences between Dr. Clark and the complainants by Rev. H. Hoeksema in the *Standard Bearer* (Vol. 21, pp. 384ff.):

Let us try to define the difference between the complainants and Dr. Clark as sharply as we can.

The difference is not that the complainants insist that the gospel must be preached to all men promiscuously, while Dr. Clark claims that it must be preached only to the elect. This would be quite impossible, seeing that no preacher is able to single out the elect and separate them from the reprobate in this world. They are agreed that the gospel must be preached to all men.

Nor is the difference that the complainants openly deny the doctrine of reprobation, while Dr. Clark professes to believe this truth. We read in the *Complaint*: “He believes—as do we all—the doctrine of reprobation” (p. 13).

Again, the difference does not consist in this that the complainants characterize the gospel as an “offer” of Christ or of salvation, while Dr. Clark objects to that term. If the term “offer” is understood in the sense in which it occurs in the confessions, and in which also Calvin uses it (*offere*, from *obfero*, meaning *to present*), there can be no objection to that term, though, to prevent misunderstanding, it would be better to employ the words *to present*, and *presentation*.

Again, even though Dr. Clark objects to the word “sincere” in the sense in which the complainants use that term, afraid to leave the impression that he preaches Arminianism, even this does not touch the real point of difference between them. That God is sincere in the preaching of the gospel no one would dare to deny. As the complainants rightly ask: Would it not be blasphemy to deny this? (p. 13).

But the difference between them does concern *the contents* of the gospel that must be preached promiscuously to all men.

It is really not a question *to whom* one must preach, or *how* he must preach, but *what* he must preach.

According to the complainants the preacher is called to proclaim to all his hearers *that God sincerely seeks the salvation of them all*. If this is not their meaning when they write: “in the gospel God sincerely offers salvation in Christ to all who hear, reprobate as well as elect,” their words have no meaning at all.

According to Dr. Clark, however, the preacher proclaims to all his hearers promiscuously *that God sincerely seeks the salvation of all*

*the elect*. The elect may be variously named in the preaching: those who repent, they that believe in Christ, that hunger for the bread of life, that thirst for the water of life, that seek, knock, ask, that come to Christ, etc. But they are always the elect.

We may define the issue still more sharply, and limit it to God's intention and attitude in the preaching of the gospel *with regard to the reprobate*.

For it is more especially about the reprobate and their salvation that the complainants are concerned. Strange though it may seem, paradoxical though it may sound, they want to leave room in the preaching for *the salvation of the reprobate*. For the sake of clarity, therefore, we can safely leave the elect out of our discussion. That God sincerely seeks their salvation is not a matter of controversy. To drag them into the discussion of this question simply confuses things. The question very really concerns the attitude of God with respect to the reprobate. We may limit the controversy to this question: *what must the preacher of the gospel say of God's intention with respect to the reprobate?* And these, too, may be called by different names, such as: the impenitent, the wicked, the unbelievers, etc.

The answer to this question defines the difference between Dr. Clark and the complainants sharply and precisely.

The complainants answer: the preacher must say that God sincerely seeks the salvation of the reprobate through the preaching of the gospel.

Dr. Clark answers: that is not true, the preacher may never say that in the name of God.

And, in the light of Scripture, he should say: God seeks His own glory and justification in preparing the reprobate for their just damnation even through the preaching of the gospel.

It is plain from the above description that the views of the complainants prevailed in the booklet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, and in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

## *Part Two*

### **Contrary to Logic**

We are now ready, after furnishing in our previous editorial on this subject the historical background, to discuss the current Orthodox Presbyterian position on the so-called “free offer” as this is embodied and expounded in the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*.

The basic issue, you will recall, developed (in the course of the Clark Case) into one that involved the preaching of the gospel. The complainants against Dr. Gordon Clark took the position *that the preacher must say that God sincerely seeks the salvation of the reprobate through the preaching of the gospel*.

This, we must remember, is the heart and core of the whole controversy concerning the “free offer.” The issue is *not* whether the preaching of the gospel is promiscuous; every Reformed man believes this. The issue is not correctly stated in the following question: *May and must the preacher say that God sincerely seeks the salvation of all men through the preaching of the gospel?* The “free offer” doctrine has often been formulated thus. And in a general way this is a correct formulation. But it does not “zero in” on the fundamental issue. After all, among “all men” are also God’s elect. And there is no debate about the question whether God sincerely seeks the salvation of *the elect* in the preaching of the gospel. But the problem—not a problem for me or for any truly Reformed man, but for the supporters of the “free offer” doctrine—is that among “all men” there are the *reprobate* as well as the elect. And to state the fundamental issue correctly and accurately, in such a way that the specific issue stands out clearly, therefore, we must phrase it as follows: *May and must the preaching of the gospel say that God sincerely seeks the salvation of the reprobate through the preaching of the gospel?*

The position which Dr. Clark took—and which we took in 1924 and still take today—is: NO!

The position of the OPC in *The Free Offer of the Gospel* is: YES!

The latter position we propose to examine in the light of Scripture and the confessions. In doing this, we shall quote at length from the pamphlet itself, so that we cannot be accused of misrepresentation or misinterpretation. And although the pamphlet itself fails to appeal to the confessions or even to attempt to justify its position in the light of the confessions, we expect to conduct our examination in the light of the confessions (both the *Westminster Confession* and our Reformed confessions, especially the *Canons*): to us it is inconceivable that the confessions should be totally ignored in a discussion of this kind. It is both Presbyterian and Reformed to apply the test of the confessions to any doctrinal position.

The Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet is divided into three parts. First is a brief, but important, introduction. In it the authors set forth their position in brief, a position which is supposed to be a Reformed theology of the “free offer.” The second, and by far the largest, part of the pamphlet is entitled “Scriptural Basis.” In this section the authors produce their alleged scriptural evidence

for the doctrine of the “free offer.” The third part is very brief; in it the authors present five conclusions.

We will begin with the statement of position furnished in the *Introduction*.

In the first two paragraphs we read the following:

It would appear that the real point in dispute in connection with the free offer of the gospel is whether it can properly be said that God desires the salvation of all men. The Committee elected by the Twelfth General Assembly in its report to the Thirteenth General Assembly said, “God not only delights in the penitent but is also moved by the riches of his goodness and mercy to desire the repentance and salvation of the impenitent and reprobate.” (*Minutes*, p. 67). It should have been apparent that the aforesaid Committee, in predicating such “desire” of God, was not dealing with the decretive will of God; it was dealing with the free offer of the gospel to all without distinction and that surely respects, not the decretive or secret will of God, but the revealed will. There is no ground for supposition that the expression was intended to refer to God’s decretive will.

It must be admitted that if the expression were intended to apply to the decretive will of God then there would be, at least, implicit contradiction. For to say that God desires the salvation of the reprobate and also that God wills the damnation of the reprobate and apply the former to the same thing as the latter, namely, the decretive will, would be contradiction; it would amount to averring of the same thing, viewed from the same aspect, God wills and God does not will.

This is about as clear a statement of position as one could desire. We may summarize it in the following statements:

1. According to the will of His decree, God wills the damnation of the reprobate. According to that same will of His decree, God does not will the repentance and salvation of the reprobate. To assert that He does would involve one in a plain contradiction.
2. When one speaks of the free offer of the gospel, he is not dealing with the decretive or secret will of God, but with the revealed will.
3. According to the revealed will of God, He wills the very opposite of what He wills according to His decretive will, namely, the salvation of the reprobate.

Now the conclusion from the above position is obvious. It is this, that there are in God two wills, each willing the very opposite of the other. We shall enter into this matter in detail a bit later in our discussion: for here we have the most basic issue in the entire debate about the “free offer.”

This is indeed a doctrine which involves one's *theology*, one's doctrine of God. Is there contradiction in God? Is there conflict in God? Or even, is there contradiction and conflict between God's Being and God's revelation? Can it be said—dare it be said—that God is *one kind of God* according to His eternal Being and His eternal thoughts (His decree), but that He is *another kind of God* according to His revelation (His revealed will), that is, according to His Word, the Scriptures?

In turn, this is, you will understand, an important question also with respect to a question that is currently much discussed, namely, revelation and Holy Scripture. Are the Scriptures trustworthy? Do they truly and correctly and accurately make God known to us? Or are God and His will and His purpose and His attitude really not the same as they are revealed to be in God's Word, the Scriptures? You see, these are important questions. It simply will not do to give formal assent to the authority and infallibility of the Scriptures, but then in actual fact to deny the *trustworthiness* of those same Scriptures. If you do so, you lose revelation and you lose all possibility of the knowledge of God. Either God is as He has revealed Himself to be in the Scriptures, or we cannot and do not know Him at all. In fact, either God has revealed His so-called decretive will in the Scriptures (and then it is *revealed!*), or we cannot even say that God has a decretive will, much less say that the contents of that decretive will is the damnation of the reprobate.

Now it is perfectly obvious that the authors felt the force of the contradiction in which they were involving God in the above quoted paragraphs. In fact, they mention it. They state the problem plainly in the last sentence. But what do they attempt to do? They attempt to escape the contradiction by proposing that there are two wills in God: the will of God's decree and His revealed will.

Do not say that this is not true. Do not say that they are only talking about *two aspects of one will*. For two aspects of one and the same will cannot possibly be contradictory. When you consider the one will of God from two aspects, or points of view, it cannot possibly be said that God 'wills' the damnation of the reprobate *and* that God does 'not will' the damnation of the reprobate. There is no rational being who can possibly convince himself or be convinced of this.

Hence, the authors of this pamphlet involve themselves in something that is in a way worse. It is bad theology! It strikes at the very attributes of God's Being, namely, His *unity* and His *simplicity*. For the doctrine of two wills in God is a denial of these attributes.

But even so, the authors of *The Free Offer of the Gospel* do not escape the contradiction; they only move it back a step by their doctrine of 'two wills in God.' This is very easily tested. For do not forget that when they write about these 'two wills' in God, they are nevertheless writing about *God*, the willing God. You may reduce the expression "the decretive will of God" to: "God wills, according to His eternal decree." And you may reduce the expression "the revealed will of God" to: "God wills, according to His own revelation." Put thus, the contradiction is as glaring as ever:

1. God wills the *damnation* of the reprobate.

2. God wills the *salvation* of the reprobate. And no amount of mental gymnastics can persuade one to accept both propositions.

What is the practical result for the preaching? The preacher who holds to the doctrine of the “free offer” necessarily must let go of proposition No. 1. And he does so, too! He will not preach it. Nor, by the way, will he preach sovereign election at all consistently. And if he does occasionally mention reprobation, he will either give it mere lip-service or he will present the Arminian doctrine of conditional reprobation. It never fails!

But there is a second, very serious contradiction involved in the position of the “free offer.” To make this plain it is necessary to quote two more paragraphs of the *Introduction*:

The question then is: what is implicit in, or lies back of, the full and free offer of the gospel to all without distinction? The word “desire” has come to be used in the debate, not because it is *necessarily* the most accurate or felicitous word, but because it serves to set forth quite sharply a certain implication of the full and free offer, of the gospel to all. This implication is that in the free offer there is expressed not simply the bare preceptive will of God (another words, the will of God’s command, HCH) but the disposition of lovingkindness on the part of God pointing to the salvation to be gained through compliance with the overtures of gospel grace. In other words, the gospel is not simply an offer or invitation but also implies that God delights that those to whom the offer comes would enjoy what is offered in all its fullness. And the word “desire” has been used in order to express the thought epitomized in Ezekiel 33:11 which is to the effect that God has pleasure that the wicked turn from his evil way and live. It might as well have been said, “It pleases God that the wicked repent and be saved.”

Again, the expression “God desires,” in the formula that crystallizes the crux of the question, is intended to notify not at all the “seeming” attitude of God but a real attitude, a real disposition of lovingkindness inherent in the free offer to all, in other words, a pleasure or delight in God, contemplating the blessed result to be achieved by compliance with the overture proffered and the invitation given.

The above language leaves much to be desired as far as clarity is concerned. And there is more to be criticized than the single point which we now make. The only item we now wish to point out is that here is a second contradiction with respect to God. For here it is emphasized that the “free offer to all” bespeaks an attitude of “lovingkindness” on the part of God. This is said to be “inherent” in the “free offer to all.” And it is even emphasized that this is not a “seeming’ attitude” of God, but a “real attitude, a real disposition of lovingkindness.”

But do not forget that reprobation is not a mere formal decree to damn some. Reprobation means *divine hatred!* It means that God from eternity hates some.

Hence, here is the second contradiction in God which is posited by *The Free Offer of the Gospel*:

1. God from eternity *hates* the reprobate, and reveals Himself as such.
2. God is filled with *a real disposition of lovingkindness* toward the reprobate, and reveals Himself as such.

Again, of course, the only “escape” from this contradiction is to keep silence about proposition No. 1 or to pervert sovereign reprobation into the Arminian heresy of conditional reprobation.

But let no one imagine that these are abstract theological problems. They involve *God!* They involve God’s revelation and its trustworthiness! They involve the truthfulness of the preaching!

What must the preacher, as an ambassador of Jesus Christ, preach?

He dare not, in the name of Christ, preach both!

## Part Three

### **Contrary to the Reformed Exegetical Method (I)**

In our previous editorial on this subject we pointed out the fact that from the outset the position of *The Free Offer of the Gospel* involves its proponents in flagrant contradictions concerning God's will and concerning His attitude toward the reprobate.

Ultimately, of course, this whole question becomes a question of what Scripture itself teaches. I say "ultimately" because it is not—for a Reformed man—merely a question of Scripture, but also, and first of all, a question of the creeds. This, by the way, is something that is singularly ignored by the authors of *The Free Offer of the Gospel*. Nevertheless ultimately it becomes a question of what Scripture teaches on this score. This is plain also from the attempted appeal to Scripture in the booklet under discussion.

And this question is basically a question of *exegetical method*. Does Scripture contradict itself? Does Scripture present mutually exclusive truths? Does Scripture posit doctrines which stand diametrically opposed to one another? There is one method which holds this position: the method of appealing to isolated proof-texts. There is the Reformed method, however, which denies this: it is the method of presenting the current teaching of Scripture, or, the method of allowing Scripture to interpret Scripture.

Recently, in connection with this matter of the "free offer" and also in connection with the questions currently being treated in *Question Box*; I have been impressed anew with this matter of exegetical method.

And rather by coincidence, in connection with our Dutch Reading Class at seminary, I came across a thorough treatment of the question of exegetical method in the series of articles which the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema wrote in answer to the late Rev. Daniel Zwier's writings on "God's General Goodness." Fortunately, these articles were also translated into the English language and published in a brochure entitled, *God's Goodness Always Particular*. And because this chapter on exegetical method is very appropriate with a view to our current discussion, we are presenting it in this and the next issue of the *Standard Bearer*.

Here follows the first installment of the chapter referred to.

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In the fifteenth editorial of the series in *De Wachter* entitled "God's General Goodness," the Rev. Zwier writes concerning our explanation of Psalm 145:9: "Yes, esteemed reader, this proof is so utterly weak, that for years it was a riddle to me, that one with even a quarter of an ounce of exegetical brains could be convinced of it."

He writes this in the erroneous imagination that we explained the text to mean that the Lord gives good gifts to all or that the Lord is good to all His elect and His tender mercies are over all things

in the realm of redemption. But he fails to mention where he found these interpretations of Psalm 145:9 in any of our writings.

Before I enter into these details and criticize Zwier's exegesis of various texts, I must refer to another, deeper, and more fundamental difference between him and myself, a difference that determines our differing exegetical results. We have a fundamental difference regarding the method of exegesis. This difference explains why my interpretation of certain scriptural passages impresses Zwier as utterly incompetent, so that after years of study he cannot understand how "one with even a quarter of an ounce of exegetical brains" could accept such exegesis. Although I am not acquainted with the standard weight of a normal exegetical brain, I understand that by this somewhat haughty and contemptuous figure of speech Zwier intends to convey to his readers the opinion that my exegetical work is far below normal. I have attempted to explain how Zwier could arrive at such a contemptuous judgment about my interpretation of the word of God. I came to the conclusion that there is a deep and fundamental difference between his concept and my concept of the proper exegetical method. What I consider exegesis according to the proper method he brands as a distortion of the text to suit my own notions, and what he offers as exegesis of Scripture is in my opinion not worthy of the name.

It is imperative, therefore, to give an account of this fundamental difference. As Zwier seems to think, the difference is not that he lets Holy Writ speak for itself, while I impose preconceived dogmatic notions on it. Rather, the difference is that Zwier assumes that interpretation of a text apart from its connection with the current teaching of the Bible is interpretation of *Scripture*, while I am convinced that the word of God is one organic whole that presents the same teaching throughout. Because of this, one can explain a certain text in the Bible without interpreting *Scripture*. The whole of Scripture must be considered when one interprets any particular passage, so that every text must be explained according to the rule of Scripture (*regula scripturae*), the current teaching of the Bible.

The entire scriptural foundation on which Zwier attempts to build the superstructure of his doctrine of "God's general goodness" consists of a few individual scriptural passages that superficially appear to support his view. However, his interpretation of them directly opposes not only several other clear texts of the Bible, but also the current teaching of Holy Writ. He is well aware of this conflict and admits it, but he refuses to explain Scripture in its own light.

In this chapter I will first demonstrate by a quotation from his articles that Zwier labours according to this method of exegesis. Next I will prove that this method is un-Reformed. Then I will point out the great danger of using this method.

Zwier writes,

Let us attend now to the second argument the deviating brethren usually adduce in explaining this passage of Scripture.

Does not Scripture clearly teach us, so they ask, for instance in Psalm 73 and Psalm 92, that all the good gifts the non-elect receive are means whereby the Lord realizes His eternal counsel of reprobation?

In Psalm 73 Asaph first stares himself blind on the fact that the ungodly prosper and the righteous suffer in this world. He cannot understand why the ungodly have peace and increase their substance in the world, while he is plagued every morning and chastened the whole day. But when he enters into God's sanctuary, he beholds the same things in a different light, in the light of God's counsel and purpose with all things. He notes that the peace and prosperity of the wicked are only slippery places on the which God sets them so that they fall into eternal destruction.

In Psalm 92 the same thought is more strongly expressed. All the wicked grow as the grass and all the workers of iniquity flourish, *that* they may be destroyed forever. And note the word *that*, which denotes the purpose of the Lord.

Hence they conclude that the Lord bestows all the good gifts on the non-elect in His wrath and great anger. Psalm 145:9 and Acts 14:16-17 must be interpreted in harmony with this. How, then, can one interpret these texts to speak of a favourable disposition of God toward the ungodly?

Our answer to this question is very simple: *Because Scripture teaches this.*

We do not attempt a rationalistic interpretation of these scriptural passages in harmony with each other. (God's General Goodness, 16).

According to Zwier, we are dealing with series of scriptural passages that are in direct opposition to each other: the one text teaches the exact opposite of the other, and they are mutually exclusive. The one series teaches that in bestowing the things of this life on the ungodly God is merciful to them. The other series teaches that even in the bestowal of these things, God hates the ungodly, is filled with wrath, and purposes to cast them into destruction. We might expect that in reverence to Holy Writ Zwier would reason that "both cannot be true. Scripture cannot teach both, for if it did it would flatly contradict itself. Therefore, one of these series of passages I misunderstand; let me examine my interpretation of both again to come to a correct understanding of the true teaching of the Bible." But this Zwier emphatically refuses to do. He does not even want to put forth the least effort to explain the Bible in its own light. His avowed opinion is that such an attempt would be rationalistic. The result is that he concludes that both teachings are true. God's yea is also nay.

Zwier might have sufficient reason to review his exegesis of the one passage of Scripture in the light of the other. Psalm 73 teaches plainly that when Asaph did not view things in their proper light he laboured under the illusion that in the things of this present life God is good and gracious to the ungodly. He discovered his mistake when he viewed the same things in the light of God's counsel. How natural it would have been for Zwier to conclude that he laboured under the same illusion as the psalmist of old, that he misinterpreted the scriptural passage because he did not

view it in the proper light, and that he would have to change his exegesis the moment he studied the passage in the light Asaph received from the sanctuary of God. But in spite of all this, Zwier refuses to interpret Scripture in its own light.

When he meets with texts that plainly teach that God's grace is always particular, and His wrath abides on the ungodly in this life, and also finds passages that superficially appear to teach that God's grace is common and general, Zwier puts the texts side by side, in glaring contradiction with each other, and says that both are true.

This method of interpreting the Bible I do not accept. I am deeply convinced that it does not lead to the true word of God, but must lead to a distorted meaning of Holy Writ. Word interpretation is not *scriptural* interpretation, even though it superficially may appear to be such. Interpretation of individual texts is not interpretation of the *word of God*, although both for the writer and the reader it may be an easier method to follow. The same is true of many sermons that are praised as clear and convincing. Such sermons explain every word of the texts, but fail to explain the texts in the light of the whole of Scripture. Because of this, such sermons are unworthy of the name "ministry of the word of God."

I wholeheartedly condemn this method.

How thoroughly un-Reformed the doctrine of common grace is can be gathered from the fact that it can be maintained only on the basis of an exegesis of the Bible that proceeds from this erroneous method of interpretation. When I write *only* on this basis, I assume that Zwier offered us his very best to prove the theory of common grace.

Those who believe and defend the truth of God's absolute predestination have never accepted this method of interpreting the Bible, but have always condemned it as conflicting with the unity of the word of God. The Pelagians, Semi-Pelagians, and Arminians have always used this method.

Julian, the arch opponent of the doctrine of sovereign grace, urged against the doctrine of Augustine the objection that such scriptural passages as I Timothy 2:4—which Zwier adduces, following the example of the Synod of 1924, to sustain the doctrine of common grace—teach that God wills the salvation of all men and is merciful to all men. But how did the great church father answer the heretic? He spoke of three possible explanations of I Timothy 2:4: First, "all" in the text means *all of whom God wills to save*, for it is certain that no one can be saved contrary to His will (Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 103). Second, "all" refers to all *classes* of people not to all individual men. Third, "all" refers to *all who will be saved* by virtue of the new will infused by God (Augustine, *Contra Julianum*, 22:2).

How did Augustine arrive at those interpretations? Simply by explaining them in the light of the expression in Scripture to which he referred frequently, and which Calvin also quoted in a similar connection: God is in the heavens, and he does all His good pleasure. And if God performs everything He willed, He certainly cannot have willed what He does not perform. For that same reason Augustine explained the goodness of God that leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4) as referring only to the elect (A. D. R. Polman, *De Predestinatieleer van Augustinus, Thomas van Aquino en Calvijn* [The Doctrine of Predestination of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Calvin], 98).

If Zwier had lived in the days of Augustine, he would no doubt have taken sides with the heretic Julian, and would have remarked that “one with even a quarter of an ounce of exegetical brains” would not permit himself to be led astray by such exegesis.

We by far prefer Augustine’s method.

John Calvin followed the same method as Augustine. More than once Calvin’s opponents confronted him with I Timothy 2:4. How did he reply to their objections? He wrote,

I answer, first, That the mode in which God thus wills is plain from the context; for, Paul connects two things, a *will to be saved*, and *to come to the knowledge of the truth*. If by this they will have it to be fixed by the eternal counsel of God that they are to receive the doctrine of salvation, what is meant by Moses in these words, “What nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them?” (Deut. 4:7). How comes it that many nations are deprived of that light of the Gospel which others enjoy? How comes it that the pure knowledge of the doctrine of godliness has never reached some, and others have scarcely tasted some obscure rudiments of it? It will now be easy to extract the purport of Paul’s statement. He had commanded Timothy that prayers should be regularly offered up in the church for kings and princes; but as it seemed somewhat absurd that prayer should be offered up for a class of men who were almost hopeless (all of them being not only aliens from the body of Christ, but doing their utmost to overthrow his kingdom), he adds, that it was acceptable to God, who will have men to be saved. By this he assuredly means nothing more than that the way of salvation was not shut against any *order* of men; that, on the contrary, He had manifested His mercy in such a way, that He would have none debarred from it. Other passages do not declare what God has, in His secret judgment, determined with regard to all, but declare that pardon is prepared for all sinners who only turn to seek after it. For if they persist in urging the words, “God hath concluded all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all” (Rom. 11:32), I will, on the contrary, urge what is elsewhere written, “Our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased” (Ps. 115:3). We must, therefore, expound *the passage so as to reconcile it with another*, I “will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy (Ex. 33:19). (John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, 3.14.16; emphasis added)

The above is a clear illustration of the method of interpretation Calvin applied to the word of God. First he referred to Deuteronomy 4:7 to show that God sovereignly determines who will come to the knowledge of the truth and who will not receive that knowledge, in order then in the light of that truth to interpret I Timothy 2:4. If the opponents still objected that Scripture clearly teaches

that God will show mercy to all, Calvin replied that such expressions must be explained in the light of others, such as Psalm 115:3 (often appealed to by Augustine) and Exodus 33:19.

Zwier wants nothing of that method of explaining Scripture. He considers it rationalistic. He differs in principle from Calvin. I say *in principle*, for one who applies a wrong method of interpretation to Scripture distorts the foundation of the truth and exposes himself to every wind of error. He refuses to compare Scripture with Scripture and especially to interpret texts that superficially appear to teach common grace in the light of many others that plainly teach the opposite. He insists that he will maintain both. Presently, if he does not relinquish this fatal method, he will be forced by the power of “wretched human logic” (as he terms it) to discard one of the two contradictory propositions and have nothing left but common grace. But even if he can remain sufficiently inconsistent to avoid this danger, his readers surely will conclude, nevertheless, that God’s grace is always common.

Allow me to refer to one more illustration from the same paragraph of Calvin’s *Institutes*.

A stronger objection seems to be founded on the passage in Peter; the Lord is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (II Peter 3:9). But the solution of the difficulty is to be found in the second branch of the sentence, for his will that they should come to repentance cannot be used in any other sense than that which is uniformly employed [everywhere in Scripture]. Conversion is undoubtedly in the hand of God, whether He designs to convert all can be learned from Himself, when He promises that He will give some a heart of flesh, and leave to others a heart of stone (Ezek. 36:26). It is true, that if He were not disposed to receive those who implore His mercy, it could not have been said, “Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts” (Zech. 1:3); but I hold that no man approaches God *unless previously influenced from above*. And if repentance were placed at the will of man, Paul would not say, “If God peradventure will give them repentance” (I Tim. 2:25). [Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.14.16; emphasis added]

Calvin consistently followed the same method of interpretation. He explained the Scriptures in their own light and did not hesitate to explain apparently general texts in the light of those that clearly teach God’s particular grace.

Do not object that Calvin in the above quotations dealt with saving grace, while Zwier writes about the non-saving goodness of God. This has nothing to do with the point in question. I am not yet criticizing the content of Zwier’s teaching, but only his method of interpreting the Bible. And his method is un-Reformed.

Let Zwier apply the same method to those passages of Scripture that refer to saving grace, and his interpretation will certainly be Arminian.

## *Part Four*

### **Contrary to the Reformed Exegetical Method (II)**

I will refer to a few quotations from Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck.

Bavinck wrote,

Scripture is the principle of theology. But Scripture is no statute book; it is an organic unity. The subject-matter for theology, more especially for dogmatics, is scattered through the whole of Scripture. Even as gold out of a mine, so the truth of faith must be delved out of the Scriptures with the exertion of all spiritual power.

*With a few proof texts one can do nothing* [emphasis added]. Not on the basis of a few separate texts, but on the Bible in its entirety a dogma must be built; it must evolve organically out of the principles that are present everywhere in Scripture. For the doctrine of God, of man, of sin, of Christ, and the like is not to be found merely in a few expressions, but is spread throughout the entire Bible—not only in a few proof texts but also in sundry figures of speech, parables, ceremonies, and historical narratives. No part of Scripture may be neglected. The whole of Scripture must prove the whole of the system. Also in theology separatism must be avoided. *A distinguishing mark of many sects is that they proceed from a small part of Scripture and leave the rest of it severely alone.* (Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* [Reformed Dogmatics], 1:644–66; emphasis added. All translation from *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* are mine.)

This is exactly what Zwier does with the proof texts for the so-called “general goodness of God.” He cannot find a place for this theory in the Reformed system. He quotes a few aphoristic proof texts that conflict with numerous passages of Holy Writ and that he cannot harmonize with such fundamental doctrines as God’s righteousness, holiness, wrath against sin, predestination, particular grace, and the cross of Christ. Nowhere do these passages that Zwier interprets as teaching God’s lovingkindness toward the reprobate ungodly fit into the current teaching of Scripture.

According to Bavinck, Reformed theology refuses to acknowledge a few individual texts as a basis for dogma, but with the exertion of all its spiritual powers elicits from Scripture the truth of faith. Reformed theology has always considered the doctrine of particular grace as being the current doctrine of Scripture, and Reformed theologians never hesitated to interpret other texts that apparently teach general grace in the light of that current doctrine.

But Zwier finds his strength exactly in these separate texts, understanding full well that his entire theory of common grace must fall when they are compared with the rest of Scripture. Zwier emphatically refuses to do this. He condemns this method of interpretation as rationalistic. Thereby his method is branded as un-Reformed.

I quote one more passage from Bavinck.

The theologian must bestow some mental labour on the material he thus obtained. The dogmas are not literally in Scripture, but in principle and according to their idea they are conclusions of faith. The doctrines of the Trinity, of the two natures of Christ, of the atonement, of the sacraments, and the like are not based on a single declaration in Scripture, but are construed from data scattered throughout Scripture. Dogmas are a brief compendium in our language of everything the Scriptures teach about the subjects concerned.

Romish and Protestant theologians have always maintained over against various tendencies that insisted on literal expressions of Scripture, the right of dogmatic theology. According to those theologians, complete justice was done to Scripture not by literally quoting a single text, but by reflecting the entire truth comprised in many texts. (Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, 1:665–66; emphasis added)

Anyone acquainted with Kuyper's *Encyclopaedie* his *Dictaten Dogmatiek* knows that could easily quote similar passages from his pen. But I would rather show how he applied these principles of scriptural interpretation. For this purpose I refer to the well-known *Dat De Genade Particulier Is* (Particular Grace), the fourth volume of his series *Uit het Woord* (*From the Word*). Kuyper reasoned from some fundamental truths of Scripture to prove that the Arminian doctrine of common grace cannot be true and that all scriptural passages that seem to teach common grace must be interpreted in the light of these fundamental truths of Scripture. The doctrine of general grace conflicts with Scripture's teaching about the deep corruption of man and his total incapability to accept the proffered redemption. It is also contrary to what Holy Writ teaches concerning the unity and veracity of our God. General grace cannot be harmonized with the doctrine of the person of our Redeemer, who was ordained from eternity as the head of His people, nor with His redemption, which was payment for the guilt of sin and the basis of liberation from the power of sin. Therefore redemption must be particular, for if it is not particular it cannot be an atonement for sin (39–67).

Since it is a matter of complete indifference to us whether our confession of the truth is in harmony with what some people please to think of God; and since it is our sole purpose to see to it that our confession completely harmonizes with the living God as He really is and exists we can and may do nothing except busy ourselves with

Holy Writ, which alone knows and says and shows who God is and how He actually is.

On the contrary, if there is in Holy Writ a revelation of positive truth, as we confess with humble gratitude, it is not only my privilege, but also my solemn obligation to attack your presentation concerning the scope of grace so consistently and perseveringly, that it no longer encroaches on all that is revealed to us in those holy records concerning the *essence* of the Supreme Being. (Abraham Kuyper, *Dat De Genade Particulier Is*, 54; emphasis added; all translations from *Dat De Genade Particulier Is* are mine.)

According to Kuyper, the scope of grace must be determined by what the Scriptures teach concerning the *essence* of God. He compared Scripture with Scripture.

According to Zwier that is rationalism.

In opposition to those who wanted to prove the doctrine of general grace from the words “he died for all” in II Corinthians 5:15, Kuyper wrote,

But even this more limited allegation (that the expression in II Cor. 5:15 refers to all baptized people, H.H.) cannot be maintained. For though it be true that every one who belongs to the church of Christ, be it only externally, shall be judged by the death of the Lord and by the holiness of His atoning blood; and though the blood of the Son of God concerns such a one, if he does not repent, so truly that he can only perish an apostate and hypocrite; yet may we never draw the conclusion from this that the apostle of Christ presented the death of Jesus as being intended to be beneficial for such a one personally. The very fact that the apostle addresses the entire church as *elect* proves without a doubt that his epistle is directed to the congregation *in its ideal character*, that is, the letter is addressed *exclusively to all and every one who essentially and as living members belong to the church*, without figuring in the least with the counterfeit, false, and unsanctified elements, that adhere to her, wear her uniform, and present themselves as belonging to her. (Kuyper, *Dat De Genade Particulier Is*, 210–11)

Kuyper explained the apparently general expression “he died for all” in the light of the particular expression in II Corinthians 1:1: “Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia.”

A clear illustration of the application of this method of interpreting Scripture is found in Kuyper’s explanation of Romans 5:18, “By the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto

justification of life,” in the light of verse 21: “That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

For most people the weightiest objection against the doctrine of particular grace appears to be what Paul wrote in Romans 5:18. There we read clearly in words that seem to allow only one interpretation: “As by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men unto condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.” We do not deny that the expression “upon all men” is sufficiently emphatic and striking to mislead the best men and even to cause confusion for those of strong convictions who quote it according to the mere sound of words.

Yet by a careful study of the context of this passage, there can be no doubt that this confusion and hesitancy must gradually be replaced by the most positive conviction that sound exegesis does not permit the application of “upon all men” to all men who have been born.

To make this clear to our readers we first call their attention to the closing verse of Romans 5, where sin and grace are again contrasted from the viewpoint of their fruit. There it says that sin results in death and that grace is the mother of life. But how is the operation of both represented? Do we read that sin *attempts* to bring death and that grace *tries* to work life? Not in the least.

On the contrary, if the verse says that sin irresistibly accomplishes its fatal work, that nothing can oppose it, and that with authority it calls death to appear. To express this emphatically and in all its horror the apostle uses the word “reign”—to be queen. Sin therefore is mistress, ruler, or queen. She had *dominion*. Her will could not be resisted. Man was subject unto her. She intended to bring death and no one could oppose that intention. Therefore, it was not that she merely *threatened* death and that after the operation of man’s will interposed she either succeeded or failed to bring death. No, with power she caused death to come. As the ruling lady she brought death, and no one could resist her will. Hence all men *died*.

After the apostle clearly explains this, he declares that the situation is exactly the same regarding *grace*. Just as sin has dominion, grace appears as ruler and irresistibly executes her will. For thus we read in verse 21: “As sin hath *reigned* unto death, even so might grace *reign* ... unto eternal life.”

Now this cannot be true if grace, as death, is extended to all men who have been born. If this were the case, we would have to conclude that sin includes all men who have been born and results in the death of

them all, and that grace also extends to all men who have been born. However, in reality not all of them, but only a small part of men, inherit life. In that case sin reaches its purpose, but grace fails to reach its purpose. This means that sin succeeded in reigning but grace failed. Instead of ruling over man, grace remained dependent on man's will. This is absurd, for the apostle directly and explicitly establishes the very opposite when he writes, "even so might grace reign." (Kuyper, *Dat De Genade Particulier Is*, 214–15)

From this interpretation of verse 21, Kuyper concluded that the expression "upon all men" in Romans 5:18 cannot refer to all men who have been born.

According to Zwier this method is rationalistic. But it has always been followed by Reformed theologians.

These illustrations can easily be multiplied, but I have abundantly proved that Zwier's exegetical method is not now and never was the method of Reformed people. I am convinced that I am touching on the essence of Zwier's argument. If only he would follow the method of scriptural interpretation always applied by Reformed theologians and relinquish his corrupt method, he would have to acknowledge that his entire argumentation concerning "God's general goodness" has no basis in Scripture.

Allow me to offer an illustration in proof of this last statement. Zwier blindly follows the Synod of Kalamazoo in 1924 and offers the following interpretation of Psalm 145:9: "the Lord is good to *all men*."

If we interpret Psalm 145:9 according to the right method, we obtain the following explanation.

First, Scripture teaches that God hates the reprobate ungodly, that He is angry with them, that His wrath abides on them, that He causes the things of this present time to work to their destruction, that He sets them on slippery places by means of prosperity and peace, and that He casts the ungodly into eternal desolation. This is not deduced from only a single text, but is the current teaching of Scripture. Therefore when we understand Psalm 145:9 in the light of the whole of Scripture, the meaning cannot be that God is merciful and good to *every person*.

Second, bearing this current teaching of Scripture in mind, we notice at once that the entire psalm speaks of God's grace, goodness, mercy, longsuffering, and great lovingkindness toward *His people*. Generation upon generation (not of all men, but of *His people*) shall praise His works and declare His mighty acts. They shall abundantly utter the memory of His great goodness (toward *His people*) and shall sing of His righteousness. For the Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and of great mercy (vv. 4-8). The Lord upholds all who fall and raises those who are bowed down. He is nigh to those who call on Him and will fulfil the desire of those who fear Him. He also will hear their cries and save them (vv. 14, 18–19). And if there is any doubt that by this grace, lovingkindness, mercy, and longsuffering of God the psalmist refers to God's people only and not the reprobate ungodly, note the contrast in verse 20: "The Lord preserveth all them that love Him, but all the wicked will He destroy." In all seriousness, would it not be extremely

strange if in the midst of all this praise of God's grace toward His people we would suddenly find a sentence teaching that God is gracious also toward the ungodly, as Zwier would have it? The answer of all sound interpretation is, that cannot be the right explanation of verse 9 when it is viewed in the light of the whole of Scripture and of its context.

Third, with all this in mind, we notice two things in verse 9. First, we do not read "all men" in the text but merely "all." To what does "all" refer? What is its content? May we, as Zwier does, insert here *individual men*, righteous and ungodly? This would conflict with the whole of Scripture, the whole psalm, and the text. Second, according to the rule of Hebrew parallelism, the second part of the text explains the first part. The Lord is good to *all*, and His tender mercies are over *all His works*. We explain that the Lord is good to all His works, even as His tender mercies are over all His works. "All" therefore means all creatures in the organic sense, all the works of God, without reference to all the individuals of a certain kind of creatures, as, for instance, men. If we interpret the text thus, it does not conflict with the last part of verse 20: "but all the wicked he destroy." All kinds of creatures are included in the word "all" in verse 9, but the ungodly are excluded.

This wise, sound, exegetical method will interpret the text. Only thus do we understand the word of God.

Last I point out that Zwier's exegetical method, which Reformed theologians of every period have always condemned, is also dangerous, first, because it means death for all systematic theology. According to Zwier's method, in which he employs several individual texts to support a certain theory and refuses to explain the texts in the light of the whole of Scripture, all true dogmatics becomes impossible. From this perspective one cannot even speak of a current teaching of Scripture. "Wretched human logic" (so-called) cannot build a system of truth, so we must be satisfied with a concoction prepared by biblical theology that does not care to proceed beyond a literal quotation of Scripture. This is the death of the entire Reformed faith and confession. Then there is nothing positive. All unity of view and conception is condemned as rationalistic, as we have nothing left but a few separate and mutually contradictory texts.

Second, Zwier's method is dangerous because the result must be that the doctrine of sovereign grace cannot be maintained. It was not without good reason that our Reformed fathers always emphatically demanded that certain passages of Scripture be interpreted in the light of the whole of the Bible. They did not hesitate to tell the opponents of the doctrine of predestination that individual texts mean nothing to them. The doctrine of sovereign grace stands or falls with the method one applies in the interpretation of Scripture. If one follows the method recommended by Zwier, the doctrine of sovereign grace certainly must fall.

In proof of this statement, take these words from I Timothy 2:4: "[God our Saviour] who will have all men to be saved." Apply Zwier's method to interpret this text, and what do you obtain?

The text clearly speaks of "all men," and with that term you cannot tamper. I know that Scripture also teaches that God is merciful to whom He will be merciful and whom He wills He hardens [Rom. 9:18]. I also wholeheartedly accept this. But I also believe just as wholeheartedly the word of Scripture that God wills "all men" to be

saved. And “all men” certainly means everybody. You may not attempt to harmonize these two passages with each other, for this would be rationalism. I admit that these two passages directly conflict with each other, and I do not understand how they can be harmonized. But I accept both. God wills only the elect to be saved; He also wills all men to be saved.

The above is the pure application of Zwier’s method of scriptural interpretation to a certain series of texts. The reader will admit that I do no injustice to him.

The inevitable result of such an interpretation of Scripture will be that one element of the so-called mystery is abandoned and that nothing will remain except the doctrine of general grace and general atonement.

Therefore I pray, Zwier, that you will relinquish this un-Reformed and unscriptural method! For the sake of the seriousness of the truth, confess that you departed from the true way and that you may not so arbitrarily treat the holy word of God! The issue at stake is not dogmatism or maintaining one’s church. The issue is the truth, the maintenance and development of the Reformed truth, of which it certainly cannot be said in our day and in our country (and in your churches, Zwier, as you and many others know well) that it flourishes. In that truth I am sincerely interested and earnestly hope and pray that also the Christian Reformed Church, though she cruelly cast us out, may again love and understand and maintain the Reformed truth.

Let Zwier openly return from his dangerous ways on which many of his readers will follow him and depart from the truth. Then possibly there will be hope for the maintenance of the Reformed truth in our country.

## Part Five

### **Contrary to the Confessions (I)**

In our second installment on this subject (prior to the section in which we made the point concerning basic exegetical method) we pointed out the twin contradictions in the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*. We pointed out that the pamphlet does not only separate between the so-called will of God's decree and will of God's command (decretive and preceptive wills, or, secret and revealed wills), but it teaches a flat and impossible contradiction between the two. This position is basic to the whole offer-doctrine of the pamphlet. And, having made this contradiction, the pamphlet then proceeds to forget all about the will of the decree and to busy itself exclusively with the contradictory revealed will.

We have already pointed out that this involves Murray and Stonehouse in a denial of the simplicity of God. At this time we shall not belabour this point further, lest we complicate the entire discussion. There are so many facets to this offer-theology that one runs the risk of being side-tracked from the main issue and of complicating the discussion. Nevertheless, many of these facets are significant, too, and well worth discussing. And perhaps at a later date we can discuss some of them. There is, for example, the fact that the Murray-Stonehouse denial of God's simple will is in flagrant contradiction of Calvin (who is often incorrectly appealed to and quoted in support of the offer-theology). And there is the subject of the unity of God's will and of the distinctions between secret and revealed, decretive and preceptive will—a subject well worth studying. There is also the subject of so-called “hyper-Calvinism,” a subject on which the Rev. Engelsma hopes to write in the future under “Taking Heed to the Doctrine” ([\*Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel\*](#)). But for the present we must by-pass some of these subjects or touch on them only incidentally.

The twin contradictions which we found in the introductory section of *The Free Offer of the Gospel* were these:

1. God wills the *damnation* of the reprobate; God wills the *salvation* of the reprobate.
2. God from eternity *hates* the reprobate, and reveals Himself as such; and God is filled with a *real disposition of lovingkindness* toward the reprobate, and reveals Himself as such.

Of the two above statements, our Reformed creeds maintain exclusively the first half of each. The Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet *claims* to maintain both halves, but *in effect* teaches only the second half of each.

And the position of the pamphlet flatly contradicts the confessions. This I will demonstrate in the present article. And I will quote especially (for the benefit of Presbyterians), though not exclusively, from the *Westminster Confession*. My quotations are all taken from the edition published in 1970 by The Publications Committee of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. To avoid confusion I will designate the chapters by Roman numerals and the paragraphs by Arabic numerals.

In chapter III (*Of God's Eternal Decree*), paragraph 2 we read:

Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions (*I Sam. 23:11-12; Acts 15:18; Matt. 11:21, 23*) yet hath He not decreed any thing because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions (*Rom. 9:11, 13, 16, 18*).

Murray and Stonehouse are shut up to the position that God is filled with an earnest desire to save all men, except upon the supposed and foreseen condition that they refuse to accept the gospel invitation.

In chapter III, paragraphs 3 and 4, we read:

By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels (*Matt. 25:41; I Tim. 5:21*) are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death (*Prov. 16:4; Rom. 9:22-23; Eph. 1:5-6*).

These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished (*John 13:18; II Tim. 2:18*).

Did God have a sincere desire, and was He disposed in His lovingkindness, to save those whom He ordained to death? If the decree of reprobation was not motivated by such a desire to save the reprobate, could there be such a desire in God in time and in the proclamation of the gospel? Moreover, the number of the elect and the reprobate is determined by what God decreed from eternity. The acceptance or rejection of the gospel invitation has no effect on this—in fact, has nothing to do with this determination. There are no conditions attached to this determination. How, then, as Presbyterians, can Murray and Stonehouse in their pamphlet maintain a conditional desire on God's part to save the reprobate?

I must interrupt the discussion at this point, and continue the next time, D.V. But let me conclude by calling your attention to the fact that what is quoted above is indeed the will of God's decree, but is, according to the *Westminster Confession* itself, the *revealed* will of God. Did you notice the Scripture references? These are the official proof-texts which belong with this confession. I furnished only the references, to save space. A full edition of the *Westminster Confession* quotes all these proofs verbatim. And this means that according to the *Confession* itself, this is *revealed truth!*

As a footnote to the above, I want to acknowledge receipt of two important booklets on this subject. They are opposite in content, and they came to me from opposite parts of the world. One booklet, *The Free Offer* is by Pastor Erroll Hulse, of England. It was sent to me by one of our readers for critique. It is sub-titled, *An Exposition of Common Grace and the Free Invitation of*

*the Gospel*. This booklet not only defends the offer-theology, but endorses the position of the “Marrow” men of Scotland. The other booklet is an excellent and thorough-going critique of offer-theology published by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Tasmania, Australia. The title is: [\*Universalism and the Reformed Churches: A Defence of Calvin’s Calvinism\*](#). The position taken in this booklet is very close to ours. To both of these booklets I hope to give detailed attention in the future. I will also try to furnish more information about the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, as soon as I receive some promised information. These brethren are much in agreement with us, and this contact is a promising one.

## Part Six

### **Contrary to the Confessions (II)**

We now continue to demonstrate from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* that the offer-theology set forth in the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, is inconsistent with our Reformed confessions.

In the *Westminster Confession*, chapter III, paragraph 5, we read (and again, I insert the references to the scriptural proofs, which the *Confession* quotes in full):

Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, hath chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory (*Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:4, 9, 11; I Thess. 5:9; II Tim. 1:9*) out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto (*Rom. 9:11, 13, 16; Eph. 1:4, 9*) and all to the praise of His glorious grace (*Eph. 1:6, 12*).

This article teaches that God's grace and love were toward His elect in Christ from eternity. And, in the light of what this same confession teaches concerning reprobation, it teaches that God's grace and love are for the elect *exclusively*. The Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet teaches that God is filled with lovingkindness toward the reprobate. It teaches a grace for all that is revealed in the gospel. And no amount of mental gymnastics can harmonize the two or even persuade a man that both positions are possible.

For note that in chapter III, paragraph 7, the same *Westminster Confession* states the following:

The rest of mankind God was pleased, according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will, whereby He extendeth or withholdeth mercy, as He pleaseth, for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by; and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice (*Matt. 11:25-26; Rom. 9:17-18, 21-22; II Tim. 2:19-20; I Pet. 2:8; Jude 1:4*).

Now let us notice, for the purposes of this discussion, that this article speaks infralapsarian language: for it speaks of the *passing by* of the reprobate. This only strengthens our argument, and it prevents anyone from claiming that the controversy about the offer is one of *supra* against *infra*. This has been claimed upon occasion in the past, as though basically *infra* is more sympathetic to the Arminian position than is *supra*. Anyone who claims this either does not understand infralapsarianism as over against Arminianism—and at the same time betrays little knowledge of the history of doctrine (it is the infralapsarian *Canons of Dordrecht*, after all, which controvert the Arminian heresy!)—or he is deliberately twisting the truth. No sound and

consistent infralapsarian could possibly agree with the offer-theology of the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet.

Notice, secondly, that for all its *infra* language, this article emphasizes very clearly that reprobation is sovereign and unconditional:

- 1) It speaks of God's good pleasure: God "was pleased ..."
- 2) It speaks of the fact that God extendeth or withholdeth mercy "according to the unsearchable counsel of His own will."
- 3) It speaks of the fact that He reprobates "for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures."
- 4) And note very carefully that it speaks of the fact that God was pleased "to ordain them to dishonour and wrath for their sin." Notice, please, that the phrase "for their sin" does not belong with the words "to ordain." That would be *conditional* reprobation: reprobation *on the basis of foreseen sin*. That is the Arminian position. And that is the only consistent position which the offer-theology can take with respect to reprobation. But the words "for their sin" belong with "dishonour and wrath." This also explains how the *Confession* can add at this point: "to the praise of His glorious justice."

Now the position of offer-theology is in direct contradiction of the above article of faith. The protagonists of this position may expostulate again and again that when they speak of the "offer of the gospel," they are not referring to the decretive will of God, while at the same time they claim that they are not referring simply to "the bare preceptive will of God." This is a ruse by which no one—least of all, they themselves—can be convinced. The fact remains that they attribute to the will of God two totally contradictory desires:

1. God *wills the damnation* of the reprobate: He has ordained them to dishonour and wrath.
2. God has a real disposition of lovingkindness toward the reprobate, according to which He *wills their salvation*.

And it is impossible for any rational mind to hold both positions.

Next we call your attention to chapter III, paragraph 6:

As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath He by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. (*Eph. 1:4-5; 2:10; II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:2*). Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ (*I Thess. 5:9-10; Tit. 2:14*) are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified (*Rom. 8:30; Eph. 1:5; II Thess. 2:13*) and kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation (*I Pet. 1:5*). Neither are any other redeemed by

Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only (*John 6:64-65; 8:45; 10:26; 17:9; Rom. 8:28-39; I John 2:19*).

This article connects the whole of our salvation, both objective and subjective, with the decree of election. The foreordination of the elect includes not only their appointment unto glory but also “all the means thereunto.” And these means include the work of Christ *for* us, that is, His redemption, and the work of Christ *in* us: calling, faith, justification, adoption, sanctification, and preservation. Notice, too, that there is a strict limitation in this article, in the form of an *exclusion*: “Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.” (emphasis added) This is worthy of special note. Sometimes it has been claimed that this element of *exclusiveness* is not found in the *Westminster Confession*. But this is obviously not correct.

But an article such as this presents insurmountable difficulties for the offer-theology. In the first place, if the redemption of Christ through the cross is for the elect only, it is evident that there was in God no desire to save all men and no disposition of lovingkindness toward all men when He gave His only begotten Son: for then He would certainly have redeemed them all, something which He did not do. In the second place, if Christ died and paid the price of redemption for the elect only, and for none other, then God has no salvation to offer the reprobate. The benefits of the cross were purchased only for the elect. How, then, can it be truthfully said—not only by the human preacher, but by God Himself—that He offers salvation to all and that He desires the salvation of all? Such an offer cannot possibly be *bonafide*! In the third place, what kind of God does the offer-theology presuppose? A God who desires the salvation of all, but who does not provide for their salvation? A God who is able certainly to save whomsoever He desires to save, and who claims that He desires the salvation of all and is filled with lovingkindness toward all, but who nevertheless neither redeems, nor calls effectually, nor justifies, nor adopts, nor sanctifies, nor preserves? Among men anyone who would thus conduct himself would be called a cruel fraud and deceiver! And how much more is this true of such a God! Yet this is the God of the offer-theology!

This concludes our quotations from chapter III of the *Westminster Confession*.

## **Part Seven**

### **Contrary to the Confessions (III)**

Since our discussion of this subject is rather protracted and has been frequently interrupted, it may be well to remind ourselves of the question under discussion. In general, it is this: is the doctrine of the “free offer” of the gospel, as set forth in the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, and as maintained by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (among others!), consistent with our Reformed confessions?

More specifically, we are investigating the confessional correctness or incorrectness of the proposition that there is in God “a real attitude, a real disposition of lovingkindness inherent in the free offer to all.” This, we must remember, is the fundamental thesis implicit in the theory of the “free offer.” In one form or another, all who hold to this theory make it plain that they hold to some kind of “common grace.” This is very plain already in the introductory section of the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet. In it we read:

The word ‘desire’ has come to be used in the debate, not because it is necessarily the most accurate or felicitous word but because it serves to set forth quite sharply a certain implication of the full and free offer of the gospel to all. This implication is that in the free offer there is expressed not simply the bare perceptive will of God but the disposition of lovingkindness on the part of God pointing to the salvation to be gained through compliance with the overtures of gospel grace. In other words, the gospel is not simply an offer or invitation but also implies that God delights that those to whom the offer comes would enjoy what is offered in all its fullness (4).

Here the matter is very plain, at least if one is not fooled by some of the jargon and sleight-of-hand switch in terminology. For notice, in the first place, that the main proposition here is very simple: “God delights that those to whom the offer comes (reprobate as well as elect, HCH) would enjoy what is offered in all its fullness.” It is rather tragic, however, that educated and learned men, especially when they wish to cling so tenaciously to a certain doctrine, cannot express themselves more clearly and precisely. If they would, of course, their Arminianism and their contradiction of the Reformed position would stand out in sharp relief! But now the waters must be muddied.

Notice:

1) That the authors have already made it plain that they do not mean by this theory the *decretive* will of God. That, of course, would be too plain a contradiction of the Reformed doctrine of double predestination.

2) But neither do they mean “the bare perceptive will of God.” Well, of course not! An offer, after all, is by no means the same as a precept, a command, or a demand. True, there belongs to the

gospel the *command* to repent and believe; and although this is not all of the gospel, at least the error would not have been so serious if the authors had only meant to stress the *demand* of faith and repentance. But mark you well, the authors themselves do not intend this; they say so in plain words. And it's well that we pay attention to this difference. For it is certainly Reformed to say—and we as Protestant Reformed do indeed teach—that in the promiscuous proclamation of the gospel the demand of faith and repentance comes to all who hear the preaching. Let there be no mistake on that score! But neither let anyone confuse this with a general offer! The adherents of the offer-theory mean something different.

3) But now begins the sleight-of-hand. First it is: "... in the offer there is expressed not simply the bare preceptive will of God ..." (emphasis added) But now notice the substitution of ideas: "In other words, the gospel is not simply an offer or invitation ..." (emphasis added). As though "the bare preceptive will of God" is equivalent to "simply an offer or invitation"! This is playing with words.

4) But even this is not enough. It must be made plain, too, that the offer means that God actually delights that those to whom the offer comes would enjoy what is offered in all its fullness.

At this point, however, it would seem that the authors feel they have gone a little too far in stressing what in the next paragraph they again call "a real disposition of lovingkindness inherent in the offer to all." For in the conclusion of the paragraph they throw some sand in the eyes of the reader:

And the word 'desire' has been used in order to express the thought epitomized in Ezekiel 33:11, which is to the effect that God has pleasure that the wicked turn from his evil way and live. It might as well have been said, 'It pleases God that the wicked repent and be saved' (4).

Now here is a stellar example of the kind of language which confuses the simple and unwary and which is (deliberately?) calculated to try to drive any denier of the offer-theory between a rock and a hard place. If anyone denies the well-meant offer, he is now going to be suspect of denying Ezekiel 33:11. And that, of course, is much worse than being against apple pie or motherhood. But let me make it crystal clear:

1) That I do not deny Ezekiel 33:11. When the proper time comes in the later discussion of this pamphlet and this offer-view, we will explain the passage.

2) That I can even defend the proposition, "It pleases God that the wicked repent and be saved,"—though not in the context in which the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet paraphrases Ezekiel 33:11.

3) That it is by no means the same to say, "It pleases God that the wicked repent and be saved," as to say, "God delights that those to whom the offer comes would enjoy what is offered in all its fullness." The former statement can be understood to mean that it is right in God's sight that the wicked repent, and that He is pleased to save those who do repent. The latter statement can only mean that God is so filled with lovingkindness toward those to whom the "offer" comes (reprobate

as well as elect!) that He *wants* them all to enjoy salvation. And the latter, of course, is nothing but universalism!

Would that the proponents of the offer-theory would use in their explanations of their theory language that is as precise and unequivocal as is the language of our confessions in setting forth the truth of sovereign, particular grace! Then all would know where they stand, and then the people would not be confused.

We shall have to return to this matter of linguistic hocus-pocus later: for the pamphlet is replete with such confusing language.

But now let us return to the business at hand.

We have been demonstrating that the offer-theory is contrary to our Reformed creeds. And thus far we have limited our proofs to chapter III of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. From this chapter we have seen that this confession not only does not allow room for a disposition of lovingkindness of God toward the reprobate, but positively excludes it. Mind you, this means that the major premise of the offer-theory is shut out by the *Westminster Confession*.

However, we need not appeal only to chapter III. The simple fact is that this entire theory is contrary to the *current teaching* of the *Westminster Confession*; it is foreign to it. If only people would get back to the confessions and their language, they would begin to have deep problems with the offer-theory. For the language of the confessions is sharp and distinctive.

Turn, for example, to the chapter on "Providence," chapter V, paragraph 6:

As for those wicked and ungodly men whom God, as a righteous Judge, for former sins, doth blind and harden (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; 11:7-8), from them He not only withholdeth His grace whereby they might have been enlightened in their understandings, and wrought upon in their hearts (*Deut. 29:4*); but sometimes also withdraweth the gifts which they had (*Matt. 13:12; 25:29*) and exposeth them to such objects as their corruption makes occasion of sin (*Deut. 2:30; II Kings 8:12-13*) and, withal, gives them over to their own lusts, the temptations of the world, and the power of Satan (*Ps. 81:11-12; II Thess. 2:10-12*) whereby it comes to pass that they harden themselves, even under those means which God useth for the softening of others (*Ex. 7:3; 8:15, 32; Isa. 6:9-10; 8:14; Acts 28:26-27; II Cor. 2:15-16; I Pet 2:7-8*).

Once more we call your attention to the fact that in the full edition of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* the scriptural proofs are printed in full. We have given only the references, for reasons of space. We strongly advise the reader who is interested in this subject to look up these passages of Scripture. They clearly confirm what the *Confession* states, and they make it abundantly clear that the whole notion of a will of God to save all and a divine disposition of lovingkindness toward the reprobate-ungodly is utterly foreign to the Scriptures—foreign not merely to some isolated

proof-texts, but foreign to the current thought of Scripture! It will be well worth the time to look up the texts referred to.

*(To be continued).*

## Part Eight

### **Contrary to the Confessions (IV)**

We have been busy, in our recent articles on the above subject, evaluating the theory of the “free offer” in the light of our Reformed confessions. Murray and Stonehouse in their pamphlet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, do not appeal to the confessions at all. In the “Clark Case,” which gave rise to the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, it was at least attempted (though it was a dismal failure) to criticize Dr. Clark on the basis of the creeds. We, however, refuse to be bound by the failure of the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet to appeal to the confessions. It is Reformed methodology always to look to the confessions *first*, and not to turn directly to Scripture when testing any doctrine. Why? Not because the confessions are on a par with Scripture, but because the confessions contain the systematic exposition of what Reformed (or Presbyterian) churches believe to be the truth set forth by Scripture. Hence, if we want to know what Presbyterians hold to be the truth of the Word of God, we look to the Presbyterian creeds; if we want to know what the Reformed hold to be the truth of the Word of God, we look to the *Three Forms of Unity*. And if we want to *test* any doctrine in Presbyterian or Reformed churches, we apply the test of the confessions *first*.

We maintain that if this test is applied to the theory of the “free offer,” it will be discovered that the theory is entirely foreign to the spirit and the letter of the confessions. The confessions are particularistic throughout. They breathe an entirely different spirit than that which is breathed by the doctrine of the “free offer.” The theory of the “free offer” sets aside (though giving lip-service) the doctrine of sovereign election and reprobation, and sets up a general will of God unto salvation. The theory of the “free offer” sets aside the doctrine of definite, or particular, atonement; and while in most cases the “Reformed” proponents of the offer-theory do not dare accept the logical consequence of universal atonement which follows from their theory, yet even in this regard they find it necessary to weasel with words. And in some instances (as in the infamous Dekker Case, which grew directly out of the offer-theory of 1924) the atonement is openly generalized. Why? Because even a child can understand that if Christ died only for the elect, there simply is no salvation to offer the reprobate. The same is true of the doctrine of the calling. The confessions teach plainly the doctrine of irresistible grace and effectual calling. But the whole spirit of the offer-theory militates against the doctrine of effectual calling. Yes, I know, the offer-theoreticians will loudly claim that they hold to the doctrine of effectual calling: as Reformed men, they *must* do so. But in the preaching, effectual calling is silenced; and the “offer” is given the prominence. You see, it makes no sense to anyone to say that God wills the salvation of all and lovingly offers salvation to all, and at the same time to say that He effectually calls only some and brings them to salvation. But there is more involved in adhering to the doctrine of effectual calling, you see, than that it is a doctrine explaining the fact that only some heed the preaching and believe. It is *Reformed* not merely to *adhere* to this doctrine as an *explanation* of men’s reaction to the preaching of the Word, but to *proclaim* this truth as *an integral part of the good news of salvation!* And if you hold to the offer-theory, you simply cannot do this. Still more, implicitly if not explicitly the offer-theory must lead to a denial of the Reformed doctrine of total depravity. Why? When you make an offer, this implicitly assumes ability to accept the offer on the part of those to whom it is made. It makes as much sense to offer salvation to a man *dead* in

trespasses and sins as to offer life to corpses in the cemetery if only they will accept! And again, remember, please, that this affects the *preaching*. Total depravity is not merely a neat theory to explain the *necessity of sovereign grace*. No, it is *Reformed* to say that total depravity, the doctrine that man is *dead* in trespasses and sins, is *an integral part of the good news!* Does not our *Heidelberg Catechism* beautifully stress this when it teaches that to enjoy the only comfort in life and death the first thing I must know is: how great my sins and miseries are?

All of the above deserves to be emphasized. In the first place, it renders suspect the entire approach of the proponents of the offer-theory that they do not appeal (and *cannot* appeal!) to the confessions for their theory. In the second place, it reminds us of the importance of knowing our confessions. Not only must ministers and elders know the confessions, but also all of God's people should be thoroughly immersed in the confessions. The confessions should be of the very fibre of our being. We should understand the *line* and the whole *method of thinking* of our confessions, not just some individual articles to use as ammunition against this or that theory. And we must learn more and more to *think* confessionally. Then such theories as that of the "offer" could never gain entrance among Reformed people. For the entire theory is out-of-kilter with the line of thought presented in our Reformed creeds.

Now we turn again to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. The first article which we quote is of special interest because the term *offereth* occurs in it. We refer to chapter VII, paragraph 3:

Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second (*Gen. 3:15; Isa. 42:6; Rom. 3:20-21; 8:3; Gal 3:21*), commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein He freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in Him, that they may be saved (*Mark 16:15-16; John 3:16; Rom. 10:6, 9; Gal 3:11*), and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life His Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe (*Ezek. 36:26-27; John 6:44-45*).

Now those who hold to the offer-theory in Presbyterian circles will be quick to grasp at an article like this. But they are grasping at straws. Let alone the fact that the article indeed employs the term "offereth," (though not in the current sense), and let alone the fact that the article itself by no means speaks of a *general offer*, but is particularistic, are you going to rest an entire theory, and that, too, a theory which militates against the thought of the entire *Confession* upon a single use of the word "offereth" in an article which by no stretch of the imagination can be said to set forth a *doctrine* of an "offer?" To say the least, this is poor theologizing!

But let us examine the article. In the old Clark Case the complainants said that they found it strange that Dr. Clark was reluctant to admit that the gospel is an offer and an invitation; and they appealed to this article of the *Westminster Confession* to condemn this reluctance of Dr. Clark. In commenting on this, Rev. H. Hoeksema wrote as follows in Volume 21, page 408:

But how superficial is the reasoning of the complainants here! Dr. Clark is reluctant to speak of the gospel as an offer and "invitation"

in the sense in which the Arminians, and also the complainants use these terms. They understand these terms as meaning that in the gospel God sincerely seeks the salvation of the reprobate. But the *Westminster Confession* in the passage quoted knows nothing of this modern connotation of the terms. This should be evident from the fact that the word *offered* is used in the sense of the Latin *offere* from *obfero*, and may be translated just as well by “present.” (Or, *set forth*. In the Dutch: *voorstellen*, HCH) But that it was far from the minds of the authors of the *Westminster Confession* to teach that in the gospel God is sincerely seeking the salvation of the reprobate is especially evident from the rest of the same passage: “and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.” This, then, is the promise of the covenant, the promise that must be preached: *God will give to all the elect His Spirit*. But the complainants are not satisfied with this. They insist that Dr. Clark must preach and teach “that in the gospel God sincerely offers salvation in Christ to all who hear, reprobate as well as elect.”

The Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet and all who hold to the offer-theory teach and believe that God is filled with an earnest desire to save all men, elect and reprobate alike.

To anyone who can read, it is plain that this theory is in irreconcilable conflict with the *Westminster Confession*, which consistently teaches that God wills to save and does save, and that, too, by sovereign grace, only His beloved elect.

The former position Reformed believers must reject and abandon.

To the latter position they must cling if they wish to be Reformed. For what the confessions teach is Reformed, and that only.

## **Part Nine**

### **Contrary to the Confessions (V)**

In this concluding article of the fourth section of our critique of the offer-theory we call attention, first of all, to one more article of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* with which the offer-theory is in conflict. We refer to chapter VIII, paragraph 5:

The Lord Jesus, by His perfect obedience, and sacrifice of Himself, which He through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father (*Rom. 3:25-26; 5:19; Eph. 5:2; Heb. 9:14, 16; 10:14*); and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the father hath given unto Him (*Dan. 9:24, 26; John 17:2; Eph. 1:11, 14; Col. 1:19-20; Heb. 9:12, 15*).

In this article on the atonement the *Westminster Confession* plainly teaches, first of all, that Christ by His sacrifice objectively accomplished something in behalf of others. He fully satisfied the justice of His Father, and He purchased reconciliation and an everlasting inheritance. And, in the second place, the article plainly stipulates who are the beneficiaries of that objective work of Christ, namely, “all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.” Now it is true that in this article there is no negative and no limiting phrase such as “and those only” or “and for no others.” But, in the first place, this does not justify any assumption that Christ might also have purchased these benefits for others, perhaps for all men. This, of course, would make the above statement of VIII:5 useless and nonsensical. Besides, this would make the *Westminster Confession* Arminian and contradictory. What we have in this article is what is popularly known as the doctrine of “limited atonement” but more correctly known as particular, or definite atonement. But, in the second place, if there should be any doubt as to whether the *Confession* here means the elect, *and them only*, I refer the reader to chapter III, paragraph 6, which we quoted earlier. There you find a definite limiting clause: “Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.” And I submit that if there is any doubt about the meaning of the article now under consideration, that doubt is dispelled when we read VIII:5 in the light of III:6. The *Westminster Confession* definitely holds to limited, or particular, atonement.

But then the remarks which we made in connection with III:6 also hold true here. This article makes a general, gracious offer impossible. He who would attempt to hold on to both particular atonement and the free offer becomes guilty of making God out to be a dreadful, mocking monster. God invites all men to be saved, genuinely wills and desires their salvation, but does not have salvation for all? What is more, He does not even make salvation possible for all? He does not provide payment for all? What kind of God is it who thus teases men, who thus toys with men’s souls? No one has ever made it clear how the offer-theory can be harmonized with the veracity of God, nor with the truthfulness of Him who is the way, and the truth, and the life. And that preacher who proclaims a free offer in the name of God takes upon himself a heavy

responsibility, and will have to give account some day of his tampering with the gospel of the Scriptures!

But there is harmony among Reformed confessions with respect to this subject. The *Westminster Confession* is by no means alone in this position which excludes any possibility of the offer-theory. As might be expected, this is also true of the *Canons of Dordrecht*. And do not forget: the *Canons* were in a sense a Reformed ecumenical creed, due to the fact that almost every Reformed church of that day in lands other than the Netherlands had representatives who took an active part in the Great Synod and who subscribed to the *Canons*. In this light, it is worthwhile to note how the *Canons* rule out the offer-theory. We shall not go into great detail, but merely call attention to some outstanding features. Meanwhile, we recommend that those who are interested in this subject read and study the *Canons* as a whole, and pay particular attention to chapter III/IV, which has much to say, both positively and negatively, on the whole subject of the call of the gospel and the conversion of the elect sinner to God. In fact, it will do none of our readers any harm to give himself a refresher course in the *Canons*. They are as up-to-date today as they were at the time of the Arminian controversy.

With respect to the subject under discussion, I would call attention, first of all, to *Canons* I:6:

That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree, "For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world," Acts 15:18. "Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will," Ephesians 1:11. According to which decree, he graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while he leaves the non-elect in his just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy. And herein is especially displayed the profound, and merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men, equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God, which though men of perverse, impure and unstable minds wrest to their own destruction, yet to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable consolation.

The Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet on *The Free Offer of the Gospel* proposes that "God delights that those to whom the offer comes would enjoy what is offered in all its fullness." It posits a "real attitude, a real disposition of lovingkindness" towards all. Still more, it even recognizes that faith is the necessary means unto salvation. For in the last paragraph of the introductory section of this pamphlet we read:

Still further, it is necessary to point out that such "desire" on the part of God for the salvation of all must never be conceived of as a desire to such an end apart from the means to that end. It is not a desire of their salvation irrespective of repentance and faith. Such would be inconceivable (4-5).

Now I realize that Murray and Stonehouse here do not intend to emphasize that faith is one of the gifts of salvation and that it is absolutely a gift of grace, the God-given means and instrument whereby He saves His people. The contrary is true. It is just exactly their purpose to teach that faith is a *condition* of salvation, that it is the condition attached to the offer. In fact, they say this in so many words: “This is the same as saying that he desires them to comply with the indispensable conditions of salvation.” And thereby they land themselves squarely in the Arminian camp, of course. The offer of salvation is *conditional*; and unless man complies with the condition of faith and repentance, God cannot and will not make good on His offer.

But this is precisely the point of my citing *Canons* I:6. The *Canons* want nothing of this view. They teach that faith is a gift of God for the elect only. And they teach that the reception of the gift of faith on the part of some, but also the non-reception of the gift of faith on the part of others proceeds from God’s eternal decree of election and reprobation. And this means—apart from anything else that may be said of the offer-theory—that God just exactly does not desire the salvation of the reprobate ungodly. What a strange and contradictory theory this is, then, which teaches that God desires the salvation of the reprobate, but nevertheless wills not to bestow upon them the gift of faith, without which they cannot possibly be saved!

I need not quote in this connection what the *Canons* say about election, about reprobation (I:7 and I:15), nor what they say about particular atonement (II:8). On all these matters the *Canons* and the *Westminster Confession* are in complete agreement, and we have commented on them in connection with our discussion of the *Westminster*.

There is one article in *Canons* III/IV to which we may pay attention for a moment. It was used in 1924 by the Synod of Kalamazoo. It was employed by the opponents of Dr. Clark in the case which preceded and gave rise to the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet. It is not quoted in the latter; in fact, all references to the confessions are conspicuously absent from this pamphlet—not a high recommendation for a pamphlet on such an important subject. But more recently it was quoted by Dr. John R. de Witt in the British magazine, *Banner of Truth* (January, 1973), in an article entitled “Distinctives of the Reformed Faith.” Dr. de Witt evidently counts the free offer of the gospel as belonging to the distinctives of the Reformed faith. He writes:

It (the Reformed faith) does not tamper with human responsibility, nor cancel out the free offer of the gospel. ‘As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called; for 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. He, moreover, seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to him and believe on him.’ III/IV, 8.

Now it has been pointed out many times in the past in the pages of this magazine and elsewhere that this is a corrupted translation of *Canons* III/IV:8. But let it be pointed out again. The correct translation, which cannot be confused with the offer-theory, is as follows:

As many, however, as are called by the Gospel are seriously called. For God has seriously and most truly shown in his Word what is

pleasing to him, namely, that the called should come unto him. He even promises seriously to all those coming to him and believing, rest of soul and eternal life.

Those who hold the offer-theory must hold that this article teaches something like the following: “As many as are invited by the preaching of the gospel are unfeignedly invited by God. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in His Word that He is desirous, yea, longs and yearns that every one that hears the gospel invitation should comply with it and accept it. Moreover, He seriously promises to all who accept the invitation, and thus come to him and believe, rest and eternal life.”

But this is by no means what the article teaches. It does not speak of an invitation with so much as a word, nor of complying with an invitation. It speaks of the *calling*. And in the light of the article itself and also of the context, the *Canons* here mean the external call of the gospel. Now what does this external call of the gospel say? Or rather, what does God Himself say in that outward call of the gospel? He says that men must believe and repent. He says that they must come to Him. And the article states that God is serious about this. He calls unfeignedly. He means what He says! And the article states further that it is “pleasing” to God that those who are called should come. This simply means that it is right in God’s sight that men should heed the call to faith and repentance. Not to heed it is terribly disobedient, and it is displeasing to God; it incurs His fierce wrath and displeasure.

Notice, further, that there is no suggestion whatsoever that any man is by nature *able* or *willing* to heed that call of the gospel. None is! But that has nothing to do with the fact that it is nevertheless right to come to Christ, and terribly sinful and displeasing in God’s sight not to heed the demand of faith and repentance. Our *Heidelberg Catechism* maintains this same position with respect to the law of God when it asks: “Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in his law that which he cannot perform?” Answer: “Not at all; for God made man capable of performing it; but man, by the instigation of the devil, and his own wilful disobedience, deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts.” We must always be on our guard against the insidious notion that somehow responsibility implies *ability* on the part of the natural man, whether with respect to the law or the gospel. That simply is not the case.

But my point is: there is no offer mentioned or suggested in this article of the *Canons*. Nor is there so much as a hint of a favourable disposition, an attitude of lovingkindness, or a desire for the salvation of all on the part of God.

Nor is this taught in the final statement of the article. That statement plainly teaches a particular promise: a promise of rest and eternal life *to all those coming and believing*. And they are, without any doubt, the elect, who come and believe through sovereign grace and through the effectual calling.

But of an offer there is not so much as a breath in this article, nor anywhere in our *Canons*.

## Part Ten

### **Analysis of Scripture Proofs (I)**

As we have already noted, the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, makes absolutely no appeal to the Reformed confessions for support. This in itself is a bad sign. There are indeed extra-confessional matters, that is, matters to which the confessions do not address themselves. And on such matters it is to be expected that appeal is made directly to Scripture. This is surely permissible, provided that whatever view is developed directly on the basis of Scripture does not conflict with the confessions even by implication. However, the matter of salvation, God's will with respect to the heirs of salvation, the way of salvation, the gospel, the proclamation of the gospel—all these are by no stretch of the imagination such extra-confessional matters. The confessions, both of Presbyterian and of Reformed origin, speak plainly on these subjects. And for this reason, it is a bad sign, a negative recommendation, when the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet simply by-passes the confessions without so much as mentioning them. This is not Reformed methodology. And this may well be stressed in a day when the creeds are largely ignored and belittled. For Reformed churches the creeds are decisive; they are the criterion according to which any view is to be judged. They are the standard of what is orthodox and what is not orthodox. For this reason, too, it is of the utmost importance that Reformed people thoroughly know and understand their confessions; and therefore it is of the utmost importance that they be instructed in and according to the confessions from their youth up. No communion of churches can long remain strong and faithful where such instruction is neglected. Let us never forget this!

This criticism is all the more appropriate with respect to the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet when we bear in mind that it was originally the report of a committee appointed by the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and that therefore the General Assembly also was guilty of a breach of Reformed methodology in by-passing the confessions. This should never be allowed! In Reformed churches a man is guilty of heresy when he is convicted on the basis of the *confessions*; there is no need to proceed any further. Why? Because all agree to abide by the teaching of the confessions *as the doctrine set forth by the Scriptures*; and all agree not to militate against the teaching of the confessions. Hence, it is not necessary to judge a doctrine except on the basis of the confessions. It is not necessary to prove over and over again that the doctrine of the confessions is that of Scripture—unless objections to the confessions themselves should arise by way of filing a *gravamen*, a charge of error, against them. And it is wrong to by-pass the confessions either to support or to contradict some view that is contrary to them.

On this basis it would be perfectly legitimate to end our discussion of the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet right now. We have abundantly proved it to be contrary to the confessions. And if I were involved in an ecclesiastical process of protest and appeal against the views set forth in this pamphlet, I would insist that the only proper standard of judgment is the confessions.

However, we are not engaged in such an ecclesiastical process. And besides, the fact that this pamphlet attempts to appeal to Scripture necessitates a review of the Scripture passages treated,

in order to show that even this attempted appeal to Scripture is an utter failure. There is not an iota of proof to be found in Scripture for the “free offer” theology.

This also holds true for the recent booklet by Erroll Hulse, *The Free Offer: An Exposition of Common Grace and the Free Invitation of the Gospel*. Pastor Hulse is an English Baptist minister. It was rather surprising to find that he at least makes reference to the *Westminster Confession* (VII:3) and to the *Canons of Dordrecht* (II:5). Both references are faulty. That from the *Westminster* is only partial and taken out of context. That from the *Canons* does not so much as mention the word “offer,” but speaks of the “promise of the gospel” and the fact that this promise “ought promiscuously, and without distinction, to be declared and published to all men.” Even this article is not correctly quoted; significantly, Mr. Hulse omits the limitation, “to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel”—a clause which already contradicts the offer-theory by implication. But Pastor Hulse at least refers to the confessions, though he does not use them for support of his view. When it comes to the latter, he also appeals to Scripture directly, though, as we shall see, erroneously.

Hence, in this section of our critique we will consider the scriptural evidence adduced by those who hold to the “free offer” view.

There are two rather striking facts about the scriptural proofs attempted by both the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet and by the Hulse pamphlet.

The first is that both of these pamphlets proceed from the theory of “common grace” in their argumentation in favour of the “free offer.” This is very strange. For so-called “common grace” has always been differentiated from “saving grace.” But the “free offer” is supposed to be concerned with a will of God unto *salvation*. The theory of “common grace” posits an attitude of favour and blessing on the part of God toward all men in the things of this present time—for example, in rain and sunshine, health and happiness, etc. “Common grace” allegedly has nothing to do with eternity. According to it, a man may very well be the recipient of temporal favours of God all his lifetime, but be damned in hell forever. In fact, it is exactly characteristic of the theory of “common grace” that it separates between time and eternity. Yet, as we said, the “free offer” has to do with salvation and with an alleged will of God that the reprobate, as well as the elect, should be saved.

This we find to be rather striking, we say. And the question arises immediately: what is the connection? “Common grace” is supposed to be by definition a *non-saving* grace. But the “free offer” by definition maintains a “desire on the part of God for the salvation of all,” (Murray-Stonehouse, p. 4). Erroll Hulse states bluntly: “The subject of common grace is inescapably connected with the free offer. It is not possible to deal adequately with the question of the offer without getting to grips with the subject of common grace.” (4-5) And when he faces the question of the connection between “common grace” and the “free offer,” he writes,

We have noted that the goodness of God extends to fallen mankind as a whole, not only in the provision of fruitful seasons, food and gladness, but in a multiplicity of benefits. But does God wish the very highest good for men, the highest blessing being eternal salvation?

We say, Yes! The quotation just made from Acts 17 shows that common grace finds its fullest expression in the provision of a Gospel to be addressed to all without exception (7).

But when he writes thus, he is departing from the definition of common grace as “non-saving.” He is confusing so-called “common grace” and so-called “saving grace.” The Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet actually does the same thing, but not quite so bluntly. In writing about Matthew 5:44-48, Murray and Stonehouse say: “This passage does not indeed deal with the overtures of grace in the gospel. But it does tell us something regarding God’s benevolence that has bearing upon *all* manifestations of divine grace.” (italics added)

Those of our readers who are acquainted with the First Point of 1924 will recall that the doctrine of the well-meant offer was almost accidentally adopted as a *proof* for the theory of “common grace” (a supposedly temporal and non-saving grace toward the reprobate). The Synod of 1924, in its desperation to find proof for “common (non-saving) grace” appealed to the theory of the general, well-meant offer of salvation, and then tried to adduce scriptural and confessional proof for the latter theory.

We may well face the question: is there, indeed, a connection between the two, in spite of the fact that the theory of “common grace” has historically tried to distinguish “common grace” as having nothing to do with salvation? Our answer is: Yes! And our reasons are as follows:

1. We have just cited three instances of those who, whether intentionally or somewhat by accident and through ignorance, maintain such a connection.
2. In the “Dekker Case” in the Christian Reformed Church during the 1960s, this same connection was claimed; and there were those who wanted to eliminate any distinction between two different graces.
3. The theory of a non-saving grace of God is actually an impossible theory. Logically it is impossible to entertain. How can God be *favourably inclined* toward a man, and at the same time be filled with *hatred* against him, so that He damns that man forever? Or, what kind of grace is it which lets a man go lost? Because of this inherent contradiction, no one can long entertain the theory of a common grace of God before he comes to the conclusion that God also wills and desires the salvation of the reprobate. To be sure, he then still faces the inherent contradiction between this desire to save the reprobate and the decree of eternal reprobation. But that difficulty is solved, of course, by ignoring or denying the latter. What is left, then, is rank universalism.
4. From another point of view, the theory of “common grace” and the theory of the “free offer” are both intrinsically universalistic. They differ as respects their ends, their results, their manifestations. But they have a common origin: a universal favour of God. This is evidently the approach of the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, which nevertheless does not explicitly point to a connection between “common grace” and the “free offer.”

True, Dr. Abraham Kuyper wanted to distinguish “common grace” sharply as having nothing to do with salvation; and when it came to the matter of salvation, he insisted upon sovereign,

particular grace. But it seems apparent that ultimately such an attempted distinction is doomed to failure. “Common grace” and the Arminianism of the “free offer” have their common ancestor in a universal favour of God which includes the reprobate.

The second striking fact about both the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet and the Hulse pamphlet is that they cite many of the very same passages of Scripture which were cited in 1924 for the theory of “common grace.” I cannot escape the impression, in fact, that Pastor Hulse failed to do much homework when it came to the exegesis of these passages, but rather slavishly followed Murray and Stonehouse. Nevertheless, the passages of Scripture are very familiar to us of the Protestant Reformed Churches; and we have long ago learned that they lend no support, in the light of the current teaching of Scripture, to a theory of “common grace.”

Next time, D.V., we shall begin to take a look at these passages.

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We have earlier referred to an excellent treatise on the subject of the “free offer” published by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. This brochure is entitled [\*Universalism and The Reformed Churches\*](#). It refers to the offer-theology as “modern modified Calvinism.” This brochure has many fine arguments; and we agree with its main thrust of opposition to the offer-theory. However, we find inconsistent—and ultimately impossible to maintain—its insistence upon common grace in the following paragraph on page 8:

Lest we be misunderstood when we deny the universality of the love of God, let it be clearly understood, that we are not controverting the fact that God is good to all, for ‘He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and unjust’ (Matt. 5:45). Rather, we are concerned with refuting the doctrine which teaches that God’s goodness *in sending temporal blessings upon all*, is indicative of His love and longsuffering in redemption toward the non-elect, and a desire in Him that they might be saved. We maintain that the gospel is given for the purpose of separating the elect from the reprobate, and in the providence of God, in the case of the latter who hear it, for their greater condemnation. (Italics added)

To the brethren of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia we suggest:

1. That apart from this question of the “offer,” they should give confessional and biblical account of this whole idea of temporal blessings—the traditional “common grace” theory. We believe they will discover it to be incorrect.
2. That they should consider the fact that the theory of “common grace” itself—apart from the offer-theory—has implications for life which are not acceptable. This is evident from the devastating results of the theory both in the Netherlands and in the U.S. The theory of “common grace” necessarily involves one in a denial of the antithesis and of the antithetical calling of the Christian.

3. That they should also consider the close historical and doctrinal connection between “common grace” and the very offer-theory which they combat. I am afraid that if they concede “common grace,” they will be helpless to combat the offer-theory.

We invite further discussion of this from the Evangelical Presbyterian brethren.

## *Part Eleven*

### **Analysis of Scripture Proofs (II)**

In this section of our critique we propose to examine, first of all, the scriptural evidence that is adduced by the proponents of the offer-theory and to face the question whether their scriptural evidence and their exegesis is *valid*. A second question, however, is necessarily involved, namely: is the exegesis of the scriptural passages cited in harmony with the current thought of Scripture? To this question we shall also address ourselves.

From time to time in the course of this discussion we shall also refer to the recent booklet by Pastor Erroll Hulse, *The Free Offer: An Exposition of Common Grace and the Free Invitation of the Gospel*. Pastor Hulse is not Reformed, but Baptist, but he is rather widely acknowledged as a “Calvinistic Baptist”—to my mind a contradiction in terms, but a name which is used by some to denote a Baptist who holds to the doctrine of sovereign grace and the so-called Five Points of Calvinism. Because this booklet has received rather wide distribution and because its teachings continue to be acknowledged as representative of true Calvinism, we shall include it in our present critique. This can rather readily be done because the position of the booklet does not differ substantially from that of the Murray-Stonehouse booklet. Both would be termed by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, which is critical of the offer-theory, as “modern modified Calvinism”—in my opinion, too good a name for what is actually a fundamental denial of Calvinism.

We begin with the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, and we allow the authors to present their first item of proof:

The Committee would now respectfully submit some exegetical material bearing upon this question and with a view to the resolution of it.

*Matthew 5:44-48*

This passage does not indeed deal with the overtures of grace in the gospel. But it does tell us something regarding God’s benevolence that has bearing upon all manifestations of divine grace. The particular aspect of God’s grace reflected upon here is the common gifts of providence, the making of the sun to rise upon evil and good and the sending of rain upon just and unjust. There can be no question but all without distinction, reprobate as well as elect, are the beneficiaries of this favour, and it is that fact that is distinctly stated in verse 45.

The significant feature of this text is that this bestowal of favour by God on all alike is adduced as the reason why the disciples are to love their enemies and do them good. There is, of course, a question as to

the proper text of verse 44. If we follow the Aleph-B text and omit the clauses, “bless them who curse you, do good to them who hate you” as well as the verb “despitefully use,” the sense is not affected. And besides, these clauses, though they may not belong to the genuine text of Matthew, appear in Luke 6:27-28 in practically the same form. Hence the teaching of our Lord undoubtedly was that the disciples were to love their enemies, do good to those who hated them, bless those who cursed them, and pray for those who despitefully used them and persecuted them. And the reason provided is that God himself bestows his favours upon his enemies. The particular reason mentioned why the disciples are to be guided and animated by the divine example is that they, the disciples, are sons of the Father. The obligation and urge to the love of their enemies and the bestowal of good upon them are here grounded in the filial relation that they sustain to God. Since they are sons of God they must be like their heavenly Father. There can be no doubt but that the main point is the necessity of imitating the divine example and this necessity is peculiarly enforced by the consideration of the final relation they sustain to God as *their* heavenly Father.

It is just here, however, that it becomes necessary to note the implications of the similarity established and enforced as the reason for such attitude and conduct with reference to their enemies. The disciples are to love their enemies in order that they may be the sons of their Father; they must imitate their Father. Clearly implied is the thought that God, the Father, loves his enemies and that it is because he loves his enemies that he makes his sun rise upon them and sends them rain. This is just saying that the kindness bestowed in sunshine and rain is the expression of divine love, that back of the bestowal there is an attitude on the part of God, called love, which constrains him to bestow these tokens of his lovingkindness. This informs us that the gifts bestowed by God are not simply gifts which have the effect of good and blessing to those who are the recipients but that they are also a manifestation or expression of lovingkindness and goodness in the heart or will of God with reference to those who are the recipients. The enjoyment on the part of the recipients has its ground as well as its source in this lovingkindness of which the gifts enjoyed are the expression. In other words, these are gifts and are enjoyed because there is in a true and high sense benevolence in the heart of God.

These conclusions are reinforced by verse 48. There can be no question regarding the immediate relevance of verse 48 to the exhortation of verses 44-47, even though it may have a more comprehensive reference. And verse 48 means that what has been adduced by way of divine example in the preceding verses is set forth

as epitomizing the divine perfection and as providing the great exemplar by which the believer's attitude and conduct are to be governed and the goal to which thought and life are to be oriented. The love and beneficence of God to the evil and unjust epitomize the norm of human perfection. It is obvious that this love and beneficence on the part of God are regarded by our Lord himself as not something incidental in God but as that which constitutes an element in the sum of divine perfection. This is made very specific in the parallel passage in Luke 6:35-36 where we read, "And ye shall be sons of the Most High, because he is kind towards the unthankful and evil. Ye shall be merciful, as your Father is merciful." This word translated "merciful" is redolent of the pity and compassion in the heart of God that overflow in the bestowments of kindness.

The sum of this study of these passages in Matthew and Luke is simply this, that presupposed in God's gifts bestowed upon the ungodly there is in God a disposition of love, kindness, and mercifulness, and that the actual gifts and the blessing accruing there from for the ungodly must not be abstracted from the lovingkindness of which they are the expression. And, of course, we must not think of this lovingkindness as conditioned upon a penitent attitude in the recipients. The lovingkindness rather is exercised towards them in their ungodly state and is expressed in the favours they enjoy. What bearing this may have upon the grace of God manifested in the free offer of the gospel to all without distinction remains to be seen. But we are hereby given a disclosure, of goodness in the heart of God and of the relation there is between gifts bestowed and the lovingkindness from which they flow. And there is indicated to us something respecting God's love or benevolence that we might not or could not entertain if we concentrated our thought simply on the divine decree of reprobation. Furthermore we must remember that there are many gifts enjoyed by the ungodly who are within the pale of the gospel administration which are not enjoyed by those outside, and we shall have to conclude that in respect of these specific favours, enjoyed by such ungodly persons in distinction from others, the same principle of divine benevolence and lovingkindness must obtain, a lovingkindness, too, which must correspond to the character of the specific gifts enjoyed.

Let us get the passage from Matthew 5:44-48 before us:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye

love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

What is to be said about all this?

First of all, let us notice that the authors themselves admit that “This passage does not indeed deal with the overtures of grace in the gospel.” But they go on to state that “it does tell us something regarding God’s benevolence that has bearing upon all manifestations of divine grace.” This is important, in the first place, because it is a departure from the traditional dogmatic position with respect to “common grace.” Dogmatically, so-called common grace has always been distinguished from anything connected with the gospel. It is supposedly only temporal, and it has to do only with the things of this present time. In fact, Dr. Abraham Kuyper, Sr., wanted to insist on, this difference by using a different name—*gemene gratie*, common grace, in distinction from *algemene genade*, general grace. But here the two are confused from the outset. We point this out, of course, not because we *agree* even with the traditional distinction; but we do so to show that this pamphlet represents a departure in this respect. Personally, we believe that the direction which this pamphlet (and also that of Erroll Hulse) takes is inevitable. After all, grace is *grace*. And if that grace, favour, or lovingkindness is universal (common) in one respect, what real reason is there to hold that it is not universal (general) with respect to the gospel as well? In fact, if God is at all gracious to the reprobate, how can one possibly avoid the idea that God also wants to *save* the reprobate ungodly? And the history of doctrine has shown that the latter position has been the inevitable development of the common grace position. This was the case in the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 amid all the confusion of that synod’s delegates. It has been the case in the Netherlands also; in fact, as I have shown in writing about the Netherlands situation, today they even speak of an “anonymous word of promise” that goes out to the non-Christian world. You see, any kind of universalism with respect to God’s grace is an extremely virulent poison!

But what about the *exegesis* of this “exegetical material” submitted in support of the offer-theory? As stated, we shall also judge what is stated in the lengthy quotation above in the light of the current teaching of Scripture. But even if we leave that aspect out of consideration for the time being, can the explanation as such of the passages in Matthew 5 and Luke 6 be accepted? If we consider these two passages all by themselves, can this explanation of the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet be considered valid? Can it indeed be called *exegesis*, an exposition of the text?

Our answer is negative.

And our fundamental reason for this negative evaluation is the fact that in this entire “explanation” the authors are guilty of the error of *begging the question*. That is, they *assume* that which they set out to prove. And after they have assumed it, they proceed to read it into the text.

This can be readily demonstrated.

It is done already in the opening paragraph of their explanation. The authors are on the right track when they speak of “the common gifts of providence, the making of the sun to rise upon evil

and good and the sending of rain upon just and unjust.” Sunshine and rain are indeed matters of God’s providence. But they already confuse matters when they say: “*The particular aspect of God’s grace reflected upon here* is the common gifts of providence ...” (italics added). This is not exegesis whatsoever: they have already *assumed* that the “common gifts of providence” are a matter of *common grace*. And then they make another unwarranted assumption in the last sentence of the same paragraph: “There can be no question but all without distinction, reprobate as well as elect, are the beneficiaries of this *favour*, and it is that fact that is distinctly stated in verse 45” (italics added). We will pass by the term *beneficiaries*, although even that term is already suspect. Correcting it would be simply to say that all are *recipients*. But notice that the sending of sunshine and rain has suddenly become a matter of “favour.” This is surely not the same as common sunshine and rain. Nor is it the same as “providence.” This is a term which says something about the *attitude* and the *intent* of Him who bestows the common sunshine and rain. Putting aside for the moment the question whether common sunshine and rain are indeed a matter of common “favour,” let us simply note that the authors are *assuming* this and reading it *into* the text, not drawing it *out* of the text. Hence, when the authors conclude the paragraph by saying, “... and it is that fact that is *distinctly stated in verse 45*” (italics added), their conclusion is simply *not true*. The text nowhere states this, either distinctly or indistinctly.

This is not exegesis, but “eisegesis.” And a child can understand this.

This same begging of the question permeates all that is written about Matthew 5:44-48. In the next paragraph the terms “bestowal of favour” and “favours” are simply substituted for the bestowal of rain and sunshine. And in the following paragraph this unproved assumption is made still more boldly. Notice: “Clearly implied is the thought that God, the Father, loves his enemies and that it is *because he loves his enemies that he makes his sun rise upon them and sends them rain*” (italics added). But notice that the text nowhere states this or even implies it. Murray and Stonehouse simply state that this is “clearly implied” without an iota of proof. Again: “This is just saying that the *kindness bestowed in sunshine and rain is the expression of divine love*” (italics added). But nowhere does the text say that sunshine and rain constitute kindness and that this alleged kindness is the expression of divine love. Again: “... that back of the bestowal there is *an attitude on the part of God, called love*, which constrains him to bestow these *tokens of his lovingkindness*” (italics added). But the text neither states this nor hints at it.

One could go on throughout this alleged explanation and show again and again how the authors simply make unfounded statements *about* these passages, rather than allow the passages themselves to speak.

Paired with the above error is the second unproved assumption in connection with Luke 6:35-36. There we read:

But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

The authors treat this passage along with the one from Matthew 5. And while they do not state this literally in connection with Luke 6, yet from their entire argumentation it is plain that they *assume, without proof* that Luke 6:35 states that God is kind unto *all* the unthankful and the evil. But again, regardless now of whether it be true or not, the text does not state this or imply it.

Finally, we should note how the authors slip in ideas at the end of their discussion of these passages which have nothing to do with the text and which are left entirely without proof. They write:

Furthermore we must remember that there are many gifts enjoyed by the ungodly who are within the pale of the gospel administration which are not enjoyed by those outside, and we shall have to conclude that in respect of these specific *favours*, enjoyed by such ungodly persons in distinction from others, the same principle of *divine benevolence and lovingkindness* must obtain, a *lovingkindness*, too, which must correspond to the character of the specific gifts enjoyed (8, italics added).

This, of course, is pure philosophy; and it certainly cannot be classified under the “exegetical material” which the authors are supposed to be submitting. I suppose it would have to be called a non-exegetical bonus?

## Part Twelve

### **Analysis of Scripture Proofs (III)**

Last time we pointed out that in their purported exegesis of Matthew 5:44-48 and Luke 6:35-36 the authors of *The Free Offer of the Gospel* beg the question, i.e., assume the very thing they are supposed to prove by means of these passages. Hence, we concluded that this part of their proof is a failure. They did not establish their claim of a divine love, or grace, to all men.

We shall also point out later that their proposed exegesis of these passages is completely contrary to the current thought of Scripture. Before we proceed with our discussion, however, we wish to present the correct explanation of the two passages in question, so that the reader may compare. We will do so very briefly, leaving for a later time some further reflection on the meaning and significance of these passages.

The following, in brief, is the Murray-Stonehouse explanation:

- 1) We must love our enemies.
- 2) The reason why we must love our enemies is that we are to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. We are children of the Highest, and therefore must be like Him.
- 3) Hence, if we love our enemies, we will be children of God and reflect His love: for He loves all His enemies in this present life.
- 4) This love to all men is manifested in God's common rain and sunshine on all men without distinction.
- 5) Although these passages do not speak directly of the gospel offer, yet here we are given a disclosure of goodness in the heart of God toward all men (something we cannot see if we merely concentrate on the divine decree of reprobation), and a disclosure of the relation there is between gifts bestowed and the lovingkindness from which they flow.

And what has always been our interpretation of these passages? Permit me to quote a brief explanation from Rev. Herman Hoeksema's [\*God's Goodness Always Particular\*](#), pp. 195-196:

1. God revealed His love and caused His people to know and to taste that love as a love that is capable of being merciful and kind to His enemies. [Note: not *all* His enemies. The point is rather that this is the *character* of the love of God as His people experience it. HCH] And this is the only love of God that is mentioned in the text and in the context of both passages.
2. The children of God, in whose hearts this love of God is poured out, and who experienced and tasted this love of God as a love to His

enemies, must manifest this love in their life and walk in the world. Hence, they must love not only those that love them, but also their enemies, that revile and persecute them. They must do good to them, pray for them and bless them. In doing this they manifest the image of their Father which is in heaven.

3. As a most general example of this, they must look at God's work in nature, where He causes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

As we said, we shall have occasion to return to this subject later, as well as to point out that the Murray-Stonehouse presentation is contrary to the current teaching of Scripture.

Now, however, we want to turn to the pamphlet by Pastor Erroll Hulse on this same subject, and to point out that in connection with this same subject of common grace and the free offer he is guilty of the same error of begging the question. In fact, this error is even more glaring in his pamphlet.

There is a certain amount of confusion in this pamphlet. Thus, for example, the author certainly sounds a good note when he writes:

Now this beautiful thing (preaching, HCH) is marred by two horrible errors which we should seek always to avoid. The one is to attribute power to fallen sinners which they do not have and make it appear that God is unable to save the sinner until that sinner gives him permission.

This is sound language, and clearly anti-Arminian. Yet the author later in the pamphlet insists that God is gracious in the preaching of the gospel to all who hear; and he never resolves the difficulty that arises from the obvious contradiction here. He never explains how it is that the "common grace" of the gospel offer is an *ineffectual* grace, i.e., it does not save those whom God is allegedly desirous of saving.

Another item of confusion. On page 4, the author writes: "The term free offer, of course, means that the Gospel should be preached indiscriminately to all men." Now if this were the meaning of the term, we would have no quarrel with it. In fact, there would be no controversy about the whole matter. Nor would the term be necessary. As we have said again and again throughout our history, and as our Reformed confessions plainly teach, the gospel must indeed be preached promiscuously and to all those to whom God in His good pleasure sends it. This is, however, by *no means* the doctrine of the free offer in the history of dogma; nor is this by any means the same as saying that God wills the salvation of all to whom the gospel is preached or that God is gracious to all in the preaching. Nor is this mere truth of the promiscuous preaching of the gospel the doctrine which Pastor Hulse sets forth later in his pamphlet. To cite just one example, he writes on page 7: "That God should thus address every creature with a saving Gospel is gracious, and it is here we see the connection between common grace and the free offer of the Gospel." In fact,

Mr. Hulse cites almost all the passages in support of the idea that God wills all men to be saved with which we have become very familiar in our Protestant Reformed Churches.

But I will pass this by for the time being. I will also pass by what I would criticize as a very defective definition of grace. And I will concentrate on his error of begging the question, of simply assuming what ought to be proved.

On page 5, Pastor Hulse begins to answer the question whether there is a grace of God which is common to all men as follows:

At the time of the fall, Adam and Eve are not cut off completely. God speaks to them and confirms his judgment upon sin; but he also announces the promise of the Gospel. Abel is saved through Jesus Christ, represented in the sacrifice of a lamb (Gen. 4:1-17; Heb. 11:4). Cain on the other hand is rejected but, nevertheless, God reasons with Cain and protection is afforded him (Gen. 4:7, 15). We see then that God continues to deal with men as men, even though they are reprobate. That he should do so is surely gracious.

We will pass by, for the sake of argument, Hulse's interpretation of God's dealings with Cain. We will accept at face value the statement "that God continues to deal with men *as men*, even though they are reprobate" (italics added). But notice that the next statement is a *pure, unproved assumption*. This is precisely the point that Pastor Hulse must *prove*, but fails to prove. Why and how is it necessarily gracious that God deals with men *as men*? How does the example of God's dealings with Cain "even though reprobate" show that God was gracious to him? I would ask the question: how else could God deal with men but *as men*? Surely, He could not deal with men as animals, or as devils, or as stocks and blocks? Does God not always deal with each of His creatures according to the nature which He Himself gave that creature? Or I could ask the question: is God, then, also gracious to the reprobate in hell? Also there, remember, He continues to deal with men *as men*, that is, He causes them *as men* to suffer the everlasting torments of hell-fire. But is this perhaps gracious?

There is simply a total lack of exegesis here, that is, a complete failure, to draw the meaning out of the text, and that, too, in the light of the whole of Scripture. I assure Pastor Hulse that he cannot find in Genesis or in the whole of Scripture an iota of proof that God was in any sense gracious to Cain—provided that he faithfully interprets Scripture with Scripture. But certainly there is no point proved in the above paragraph; there is only a point *assumed*.

The same is true of the next paragraph, which fails to give the reference (Gen. 6:3). Pastor Hulse writes:

In Genesis, the Holy Spirit is described as striving with men and women that they might repent. [Note: The text does not say: "that they might repent." HCH] "The Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with man." [A half quotation, HCH] God set a limit of one hundred and twenty years in which he would strive with man, "whose

every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” But that he should so strive is surely gracious. Hence emerges the concept of common grace.

A clearer example of begging the question could hardly be found! Pastor Hulse simply assumes his conclusion without any proof and without so much as beginning to explain the text: “But that he should so strive is surely gracious.” It is not my purpose at this time to explain the text. My point is that *Pastor Hulse* should explain the text and not simply draw conclusions. Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that this is indeed proof of common grace. It is not, of course; and we are well acquainted with this passage because it was used by the Synod of 1924 in support of the error of a common-grace-restraint-of-sin. But let us grant this for a moment. Then Pastor Hulse should *show* from the text, and that, too, in the light of Scripture, that this striving is gracious. The term *grace* is not so much as mentioned. One might even argue that the very term *strive*, which would seem to indicate opposition and conflict, indicates the opposite of a gracious attitude. My whole point is that there is an utter lack of exegesis and a mere assumption of what should be proved.

As one who is responsible before God rightly to divide the Word of truth, Pastor Hulse has no right to deal thus with the Scriptures. And he must not and may not expect people of God to accept his claim of a common grace of God merely on his say-so.

The same error pervades the following paragraph:

Such is the all-pervasive depravity of man that “it repented God that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.” Destruction, which came by the flood, was inevitable. Subsequent to the flood it was necessary that a covenant be established whereby God could continue to deal with mankind. A proper basis was needed upon which to provide for the whole fabric of the world, because of the evil effects of the fall. That the earth should not be destroyed again is part of this covenant (Gen. 9:11). Forbearance such as this toward a fallen world is gracious.

Again, it would be difficult to find a paragraph with more unproved assumptions and total lack of real exegesis. I have an idea that Pastor Hulse here accepts the whole (Kuyperian) notion of a covenant of common grace (sometimes called “the covenant of nature”). But this is beside the point. This one little paragraph contains Hulse’s view apparently of the whole passage of Genesis 9:8-17. But the paragraph of “explanation” is not even as long as the passage itself! Note the following unproved assumptions:

1) Subsequent to the flood it was necessary that a covenant be established whereby God could continue to deal with mankind. Not an iota of proof is offered that this was necessary, that this is any other covenant than that of Genesis 6:18, or that this was a covenant “whereby God could continue to deal with mankind.” For the sake of argument, let us grant that all this may be true. The point is that Pastor Hulse does not *show* this from Scripture. And for my part, I do not believe

either that it is true or that he can show it from Holy Writ. But I will stand corrected if he will come with Scripture, before which both he and I must bow.

2) A proper basis was needed upon which to provide for the whole fabric of the world, because of the evil effects of the fall. Proof, please?

3) This was a matter of divine forbearance. Proof, please?

4) Forbearance such as this toward a fallen world is gracious. Proof?

You see, if we are to deal with these questions correctly and convincingly, then we must come with more than human claims and assumptions. To me, it is nothing short of irresponsible to try to cover such a key passage of the Word of God in a few brief statements without an iota of proof, and then to build such a crucial and debatable doctrine as that of common grace and the free offer of the gospel on such a flimsy foundation.

## **Part Thirteen**

### **Contrary to the Current Teaching of Scripture (I)**

We are attempting in this series of editorials to treat both the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, and the more recent booklet by Pastor Erroll Hulse, *The Free Offer: An Exposition of Common Grace and the Free Invitation of the Gospel*. Thus far in this part of our critique—by way of summary—we have presented the first two items of alleged scriptural proof offered by the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, namely, Matthew 5:45-58 and Luke 6:35-36. We have criticized the Murray-Stonehouse misuse and misinterpretation of these passages. And we have presented briefly our explanation of the passages in question. Then we turned briefly to the pamphlet by Pastor Erroll Hulse, in order to point out that he also proceeds from the notion of common grace to the idea of the “free offer.” We criticized Pastor Hulse’s booklet on the ground that it is totally lacking in exegesis in connection with several passages of Scripture which it cites in support of the theory of common grace. And we noted that, like the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet, it is guilty of assuming that which it ought to prove, of begging the question.

We also promised to show, in the course of our discussion, that the entire idea of a favour of God toward the reprobate wicked is contrary to the current thought of Scripture. This we deem to be a very serious lack in both booklets. As we pointed out several months ago at length, when one adduces scriptural evidence in support of a certain doctrine, he must not merely be able to quote some passages of Scripture in isolation from the whole of Scripture. He must not merely cite a few texts which might sound, superficially at least, to support the theory of a favour of God toward the reprobate and the theory of a free offer. Such use of Scripture can only lead to grave errors. The question is: what is the current teaching of Scripture? And in this particular instance, the question is: is the Murray-Stonehouse understanding and the Hulse understanding of those scriptural passages cited in harmony with the current thought of Scripture? And we maintain that the position taken by both pamphlets in regard to these passages is contrary to the current teaching of Scripture. This we purpose to show conclusively at this time.

It is the position of the proponents of the “free offer” that God loves the wicked, also the wicked that never come to repentance, and that these wicked are the objects of God’s grace and lovingkindness. This is the first issue which must be put to the test of Scripture. The second is that it is in this alleged love to the wicked, also the wicked who do not repent, that God bestows the things of this present life on them. It is in this connection, you will recall, that the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet quoted Matthew 5:45-48 and Luke 6:35-36. While they admitted that these passages do not deal with the “free offer of the gospel,” they maintained that these passages tell us “something regarding God’s benevolence that has bearing upon all manifestations of divine grace,” and therefore upon the alleged manifestation of divine grace in the “free offer.” Over against this, we hold that God does not love, but *hates* the wicked who never come to repentance. The latter are, of course, the reprobate. But for the sake of argument, we will not even use the term *reprobate*, but simply speak of *the wicked*. And we will simply allow the Scriptures to speak, and show that the current teaching of Scripture literally contradicts the position of the Murray-Stonehouse pamphlet (and also, of course, that of the Hulse booklet). We can quote Scripture at length, and simply allow Scripture to speak for itself with respect to this question. And bear in

mind, please, that this is of the utmost importance. Scripture does not contradict itself. This means, therefore, that no individual passage of the Word of God can be in conflict with the current teaching of Holy Scripture. This is sound exegetical principle. It has always been the Reformed method of exegesis to explain a given passage in the light of the whole of Scripture. And this “light of the whole of Scripture” we will now allow to fall on the issue at hand. Parenthetically, we may remark that when the late Rev. Herman Hoeksema dealt with this subject in Volume 33 in a series of articles which he for some reason never completed, he compiled a large number of passages from Holy Scripture to demonstrate this current teaching of Scripture. For the most part we will quote those passages.

Turning to the book of Psalms we cite the following:

The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all workers of iniquity (Ps. 5:5).

Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing: the Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man (Ps. 5:6).

God judgeth the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword: he hath bent his bow, and made it ready. He hath also prepared for him the instruments of death; he ordaineth his arrows against the persecutors (Ps. 7:11-13).

The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God (Ps. 9:17).

The Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven: his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men. The Lord trieth the righteous: but the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth. Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup (Ps. 7:11-13).

With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright; With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure, and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself froward. For thou wilt save the afflicted people; but wilt bring down high looks (Ps. 18:25-27).

Thine hand shall find out all thine enemies: thy right hand shall find out those that hate thee. Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them. Their fruit shalt thou destroy from the earth, and their seed from among the children of men. For they intended evil against thee: they imagined a mischievous device, which they are not able to perform (Ps. 21:8-11).

The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth (Ps. 34:15-16).

Note carefully that it is literally true of many of the above passages, so that they need not even be further explained, that God's attitude toward the wicked not only for the future but even in this present time is the very opposite of an attitude of lovingkindness and grace. And this is also true according to the book of Proverbs. Pay attention to the following passages from this book which is replete with sharp antitheses:

Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways. For the froward is abomination to the Lord: but his secret is with the righteous. The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just (Prov. 3:31-33).

More graphically it would not be stated. Notice: Jehovah's *curse*, the word of His wrath, is right in the house of the wicked, under his very roof! We ask: does the Lord bless the house of the wicked at the same time that His curse is in that house? Such an idea is obviously contradictory and inexpressibly foolish.

The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish: but he casteth away the substance of the wicked (Prov. 10:3).

Blessings are upon the head of the just: but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked (Prov. 10:6).

The fear of the Lord longeth days: but the years of the wicked shall be shortened. The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish. The way of the Lord is strength to the upright: but destruction shall be to the workers of iniquity (Prov. 10:27-29).

A good man obtaineth favour of the Lord: but a man of wicked devices will he condemn (Prov. 12:2).

Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight (Prov. 12:22).

In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble (Prov. 15:6).

The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord: but the prayer of the upright is his delight (Prov. 15:8).

The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the Lord: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness (Prov. 15:9).

The thoughts of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord: but the words of the pure are pleasant words (Prov. 15:26).

The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous (Prov. 15:29).

The simple fact is that it is impossible to find in this book of Proverbs a love or favour of God to the wicked.

And the same is true of the prophets. The fundamental note of the prophets is found in a passage like Isaiah 3:10-11:

Say ye to the righteous, that it shall be well with him: for they shall eat the fruit of their doings. Woe unto the wicked! it shall be ill with him: for the reward of his hands shall be given him."

Or attend to a passage such as Isaiah 5:20-25:

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! Therefore as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust: because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel. Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them, and hath smitten them: and the hills did tremble and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

And to mention but one more passage, take note of Isaiah 57:20-21: "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

## *Part Fourteen*

### **Contrary to the Current Teaching of Scripture (II)**

In our last instalment on this subject we began to call attention to the current teaching of Scripture with respect to God's attitude toward the ungodly reprobate, a current teaching with which any honest exegete must reckon when he wants to explain those passages of Scripture which have frequently been quoted as proof for an attitude of favour and loving kindness on the part of God toward the wicked. This matter of Scripture's *current teaching*, as over against the method which merely cites a few texts in isolation from that current teaching, is of the utmost importance. For the Word of God is one, and does not contradict itself.

Hence, this is a matter of utmost seriousness for the proponents of the "free offer." If they are honest exegetes of Holy Scripture, they must face up to this current teaching of God's Word. And then they must do one of two things: 1) Either they must show plainly that their doctrine of a "free offer" and of an attitude of love on the part of God toward the reprobate wicked, as it rests upon a relatively few passages of Scripture, is in *harmony* with that current teaching of the Bible. And this, I am convinced, they cannot do. 2) Or they must frankly and honestly admit that their doctrine does not meet the test of God's Word. A third possibility does not exist: for Scripture does not contradict Scripture.

And it is a striking fact that men like Murray and Stonehouse in their pamphlet and Erroll Hulse in his pamphlet never trouble themselves about this problem. Striking it is, because the passages which constitute a problem—I say it is an *insurmountable* problem—for their view outnumber by far the passages to which they appeal for support. I myself have only quoted these passages, without expounding them. I did this for two reasons. In the first place, as far as the fundamental teaching of these passages is concerned, they are clear. They speak for themselves. Most of them speak literally of the fact that God *hates* certain men, that He is filled with wrath against them, that He purposes to destroy them, that His curse rests upon them. And, secondly, the burden of proof is upon the proponents of the "free offer." They must prove to the satisfaction of any simple child of God that their doctrine is in harmony with this current line of Scripture.

At the same time, I make bold to say that we, on our part, can explain—and have many times in the past explained—any passage which the proponents of the "free offer" may put forth in a way that is in plain harmony with this current doctrine of Scripture. And now we turn to the New Testament, in order to cite a few more passages. For there we find the same teaching as in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Think, first of all, of the Lord's teaching that it is the poor in spirit, they that mourn, the meek, they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, who are blessed and who enjoy the favour of God (Matt. 5:3-9). And consider the opposite truth as it is taught in Matthew 7:15-23:

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits.

Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the oven. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you; depart from me ye that work iniquity.

These words of the Saviour Himself emphasize the same truth as that set forth in the passages cited from the Old Testament: God's favour and love are on the righteous, and He hates all the workers of iniquity.

Or consider a chapter like Matthew 23, where the Lord Jesus pronounces manifold woes upon the scribes and Pharisees. These are the self-righteous ungodly who never come to repentance, who do not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Note that Christ pronounces nothing but woes upon them, finally declaring:

Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell? Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them ye shall scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city: That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zacharias the son Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily, I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation (vv. 33-36).

Where, I ask, is there so much as a hint of the love or favour of God upon these wicked?

A very significant passage in this connection is Romans 1:18-32, which speaks of the wrath of God revealed from heaven over all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Note carefully that this passage does not speak of a wrath of God that is to be revealed after the Day of Judgment, but of a wrath in this present time, operating from heaven upon mankind as it exists in this present world. About this passage the Rev. Herman Hoeksema writes, in part, in his [\*God's Goodness Always Particular\*](#), pp. 141ff:

This explains the revelation of wrath from heaven and of which Romans 1 speaks. The very fact that man knew God and would not serve him as God makes him the original object of God's wrath. God is terribly displeased with man's original and actual sins and will punish them in time and eternity. When man holds the truth in

unrighteousness, God's wrath is revealed from heaven upon him. It is revealed in its terrible operation, and this operation of God's wrath is the curse. This curse pursues man and makes him wretched and foolish and he bends the knee in worship before man, beast, and creeping things. Idolatry is no proof of grace, but is the result of the operation of God's wrath revealed from heaven. Man, who pretends to be wise, is made foolish by God in His wrath, so foolish that instead of calling upon the living God he seeks his refuge with brute beasts and dumb idols.

This wrath of God operates to the bitter end. This is the teaching of Romans 1, which does not teach a restraining grace but an always-pursuing wrath. Always this wrath abides on the ungodly. Always it presses him more deeply into degradation. Always it makes him more foolish, more wretched, and more of a reprobate mind. This is the meaning of the repeated "God gave them up" and "God gave them over" that occur in this chapter. The words do not express a merely negative notion; they do not mean the same as "let go." They denote an operation of God's wrath whereby the ungodly wander away into the death-ways of their ungodliness and corruption to the end. They changed the truth of God into the lie. They glorified the creature in preference to the Creator. Let then that awful lie become fully manifest as the lie! That is God's purpose. That is the reason He gives them over. He does this through the sinful lusts of their own hearts. God's wrath operates upon and into those lusts, cursing and corrupting. They reveal themselves in all kinds of debauchery. They practice uncleanness. Men burn in their lusts one toward another, and men with men work that which is unseemly. Women seek satisfaction of their carnal lusts in ways contrary to nature. The ungodly are filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, deceit, debate, murder, and malignity. They reveal themselves as whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, and unmerciful. This corruption, wretchedness, death, and misery are the result of God's righteous wrath revealed from heaven over those who hold under the truth in unrighteousness.

Who, when he reads this chapter, still has any desire to speak of a general goodness of God?

The same writer adds—and we conclude with this quotation:

Nor do we ever find different language in the New Testament. It knows nothing of a goodness, favour, grace, lovingkindness, and

blessing of God on the ungodly reprobate. He who believes on the Son has everlasting life; he who obeys not the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36). God is merciful to whom He will be merciful, and whom He will He hardens (Rom. 9:18). The Scripture says that God raised Pharaoh for the purpose of manifesting God's power and wrath in Pharaoh and to serve the proclamation of God's glorious name over the whole earth. Unto this purpose He endures with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction (Rom. 9:17, 22-23). The elect indeed obtained salvation, but the rest were hardened. God gave them a spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear. Their table became a snare unto them, a trap, a stumbling block, and a recompense (Rom. 11:7-9). Unto those who are without, all "things are done in parables: that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them (Mark 4:11-12). "Therefore they could not believe, because Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them" (John 12:39-40). God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the lowly (I Pet. 5:5).

Notice that all these passages speak of God's wrath operating in this present time, in this present world, in and through the things which also the ungodly receive. They speak of the fact that in this present world God is angry with the wicked, that He reveals His wrath, makes the ungodly miserable, foolish, hardens him, and through the things of this present time—even through his very prosperity—sets him on slippery places and casts him down into destruction.

And he who would speak of a "common grace" and of a favour or lovingkindness of God extended to the reprobate ungodly and who would claim that Scripture teaches this will have to contend with the fact that the current teaching of Scripture is the very opposite.

What is your conclusion, reader?