

# Does God *Really* Desire to Save the Reprobate? (2)

*Rev. Angus Stewart*

We need to analyse further the free offer position that God really desires to save the reprobate.

## **Antichrist and Judas**

If He earnestly wants to save everybody, then God desired to regenerate and sanctify Hitler and Stalin. Similarly, He wants to effectually call and justify Antichrist, because Antichrist too is part of the “everybody.” Yet the purpose of God in the coming of Jesus Christ is to destroy Antichrist with the brightness of His coming (II Thess. 2:8). If God desires to save everybody then He wanted to glorify Judas who is called “the son of perdition” (John 17:12). “Perdition” is perishing, the perishing of hell. Judas was the son of hell, as one eternally destined for hell, who by his sins heaped up wrath for himself in hell. But we are told that God really wanted to save Judas. What sort of foolishness is this?

## **Esau and Pharaoh**

If God desires to save everybody, then He wanted covenant fellowship with Esau. Yet Scripture says, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated” (Rom. 9:13). So God wants to commune with people whom He hates! This would also mean that God wanted to save the Pharaoh of the exodus, of whom we read in Romans 9:17: “Even for this same purpose [singular] have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee.” God’s purpose and desire with Pharaoh was not to save him; God’s purpose and desire with Pharaoh was to destroy him in the Red Sea in order to magnify His power in the eyes of mankind, including us today! This is in effect what God said to Pharaoh: “Pharaoh, I have given you the throne of Egypt, a mighty kingdom. I have given you riches, many thousands of servants, and a massive army. By my providence, you are engaged in great building projects. *I* have raised you up. And I have done it for one purpose. I have not raised you up and given you these things because I love you and want to save you. I have raised you up to show my might in destroying you.

‘Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared in all the earth.’”

Moreover, these last two men of whom I have spoken, Esau and Pharaoh, are not one-off cases. Esau and Pharaoh are set forth to illustrate God’s dealings with *all* the reprobate, just as all the true sons of Abraham are like Jacob beloved of God even in their mother’s womb (Rom. 9:11, 13). From the particular case of Pharaoh (Rom. 9:17), the inspired Scripture draws a universal rule regarding all the reprobate: “whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom. 9:18). All the reprobate are hated by God in the way of their sins (as Esau), and, through all the earthly good they receive (as Pharaoh), God is raising them up to destroy them and magnify His own glorious sovereignty, justice and power (Rom. 9:21-22; *Westminster Confession* 3:7).

### **The Failing God**

This idea that God earnestly wants to save the reprobate has terrible consequences for our understanding and knowledge of God. Sadly, many embrace the free offer without thinking through its implications concerning the Most High.

Just think about it: God’s desire to save the reprobate has failed with millions, nay billions, of people. God earnestly wanted to save billions but they perish. God’s desire to save everybody has failed with the majority of people. God’s ardent wish to save everybody has failed for over 6,000 years. Moreover, if God’s will to save them fails, *God Himself* fails.

### **The Frustrated God**

Not only does God fail, but logically God is also frustrated (to speak as a fool). For to the extent that one’s desires are not carried out, one is frustrated, and the greater the desire, the greater the frustration. If a weak desire is unfulfilled, one is slightly disappointed or frustrated. If God’s ardent, sincere and earnest desire to save billions of reprobate fails, then God would be deeply frustrated, for the 6,000 or so years since the creation.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Contradictory God**

Moreover, according to the free offer, God not only fails, and God not only is frustrated, but God is also contradictory. He passionately wants to

---

<sup>1</sup>The eternal God is, of course, timeless, transcending time as well as space.

save the reprobate, we are told, but He does not elect them; He reprobates them. He really desires to bring them out of spiritual jail, but He does not pay the ransom for them. He sincerely wants to give them the new birth, but He wills that the life-giving Spirit not blow on them. He ardently desires that they grasp the truth of the gospel, without which there can be no salvation, but He hides the truth from them, and this, Jesus says, “is good in [God’s] sight” (Matt. 11:25-26). He really wants to save Pharaoh, yet He raises him up in order that He might destroy him. The free-offer god is a contradictory god.

### The Lying God

Logically, the free offer not only portrays God as failing, frustrated and contradictory, but it also makes God a liar. For it says that He earnestly wants to save the reprobate, yet He takes absolutely none of the necessary steps to save them. Last time I mentioned some ten or so elements of salvation—and I could have mentioned others—yet God does not work even one of them! Moreover, there are many people who never even hear the gospel during their lifetime, yet we are told that God sincerely and ardently wanted to save them.

I remind you of the illustration I used in the first part of this article in the last *BRJ* of the man who said that he really wanted to go to church, but he took none of the necessary steps and went to the rugby match instead. Did he really want to go to church? No. His actions falsified his claims. The man who says he earnestly desires to go to church but goes to watch a rugby match is telling lies. Similarly, the god who says that he earnestly desires to save the reprobate but does nothing to effect their salvation and instead reprobates and hardens them is telling lies. To speak more accurately, the people who portray God as sincerely desiring to save the reprobate are lying about God for His Word reveals that He does not do any of the things necessary to effect this alleged desire.

### God’s Unity

To go a step further, the failing, frustrated, contradictory, lying god who is said earnestly to desire to save the reprobate is not really God at all. The true God is absolutely one in His essence or nature. That God is one means is that He is one in mind, will and desire. He does not have two desires or two wills or two minds. We are called to hearken to the truth of

God's perfect unity or simplicity: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is *one* Lord" (Deut. 6:4). "*Hear, O Israel*"—God is telling us something very important. "*Hear, O Israel*" means "Hear, church of Christ," because Israel was the church in the Old Testament. "Hear, O church, the Lord our God is *one* Lord, with one mind and one will and not two minds or two wills (Job 23:13) as the free offer portrays Him, because He is God and God is one!"

### God's Immutability

Think too of the immutability or the unchangeableness of God. According to the free offer, in time God desires to save the reprobate. But if you are going to hold to the truth of reprobation—a biblical and Reformed doctrine—you have to hold that God in "eternity past" did not choose or will to save the reprobate, *because He reprobated them*. Then, in "eternity future," when the reprobate are in hell, clearly God does not will to save them.

The free offer position says that God passionately wants to save them, yet He reprobates them before the foundation of the world. So before the creation, He *does not* want to save them, but then in time He *does* want to save them, but when they die He *does not* want to save them. He does not want to save them, but then He does want to save them, but then He does not want to save them. If that is not change, then I do not know what is. The Bible says that there is "no shadow of turning" with God (James 1:17). God does not change. There is not even a flicker of His shadow as if God shifted just slightly and His shadow moved a little bit. There is absolutely "no shadow of turning" with God.

Nor did God decree a sequence of dispositions in Himself so that He would not desire in "eternity past," desire in time, and not desire in "eternity future," to save the reprobate. God cannot change nor can He decree to change. *God decrees things outside of Himself*. God does not decree Himself or His dispositions. God *is* Himself. The decree pertains to everything *outside* of Himself, not Himself at all. He is the decreeing Creator; the universe is the decreed creation.

### God's Power

What about God's power? Job 23:13 declares, "What his soul desireth, even that he doeth." There is an absolutely perfect correspondence between

God's desire and what He does. If He does it, it is because He desired it. If He desires it, then He does it. If He does not desire something, He does not do it. If He does not do something, He did not desire it. This is the absolutely perfect correspondence between God's desire and what He does. What His soul desireth, even that (and no other) He doeth.

Listen to Psalm 135:6: "Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places." "Whatsoever the Lord pleased"—that is the realm of God's desires, His wishes, His wants. "Whatsoever the Lord pleased that did He." He did it "in heaven," He did it "in earth," He did it "in the sea," and He did it "in all the deep places."

Similarly, Psalm 115:3 testifies, "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." A God who does not do whatever He pleases is not God, and He certainly is not in the heavens. But our God is in the heavens! Whatsoever He pleased, He does. Psalm 115 presents the true God over against idols. The idols have eyes but they do not see; they have ears but do not hear; they have hands but they do not do anything; they have feet but they do not move (vv. 5-7). But our God, He is in the heavens. He does whatsoever He pleases. Whatever He pleases, He does. Whatever He does, it is because He is pleased to do it. There is nothing that He wants to do, wills to do, is pleased to do and does not do, because "our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

In Augustine's treatment of election and reprobation in sections xciv-ciii of his *Enchiridion* he refutes the free offer, using similar arguments as advanced in this article, from God's unity, immutability and power, and twice quotes Psalm 115:3:

And assuredly there was no injustice in God's not willing that they should be saved, though they could have been saved had He so willed it. Then shall be seen in the clearest light of wisdom what with the pious is now a faith, though it is not yet a matter of certain knowledge, how sure, how unchangeable, and how effectual is the will of God; how many things He can do which He does not will to do, though willing nothing which He cannot perform; and how true is the song of the psalmist, "But our God is in the heavens; He has done whatsoever He has pleased." And this certainly is not true, if God has ever willed anything that He has not performed; and, still worse, if

it was the will of man that hindered the Omnipotent from doing what He pleased. Nothing, therefore, happens but by the will of the Omnipotent, He either permitting it to be done, or Himself doing it .... so long as we are not compelled to believe that the omnipotent God has willed anything to be done which was not done: for setting aside all ambiguities, if “He has done all that He pleased in heaven and in earth,” as the psalmist sings of Him, He certainly did not will to do anything that He has not done.<sup>2</sup>

### God’s Wisdom

Moving on from God’s power, we turn to God’s wisdom. What is the wisdom of God? It is His adapting everything to the glory of His name. In His wisdom, God fulfils all His plans and desires. Unfulfilled desires not only mean limited power but also limited wisdom.

There are some things that we would like to do. But things do not work out that way. It shows that we have not the perfect wisdom to dispose and arrange everything in our lives; that we are lacking in some area. God’s wisdom means that all His desires and wishes and wants for the entire universe are always perfectly fulfilled. The idea that God desires to save the reprobate conflicts with the wisdom of God because, although He desires to save the reprobate, He does not adapt all things for their salvation. Instead all things, including reprobation (Rom. 9), prosperity (Ps. 73), and preaching (II Cor. 2:15-17), are always perfectly adapted for their destruction.

### Reprobation

Not only does the free offer have terrible consequences for your doctrine of God, but it also has terrible consequences regarding Calvinism. When the free offer is held and thought through and applied to other aspects of a person’s theology, doctrinally and historically, reprobation has to go. For if God really wants to save everybody, then would He decree that some not be saved? Think about it. God really wants to save everybody, but what does He do? He chooses not to save them. These two

---

<sup>2</sup>Augustine, *The Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, ed. Henry Paolucci, trans. J. F. Shaw (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1961), xcvi, p. 109; ciii, pp. 121-122.

things do not fit. This argument, that a desire of God to save everybody overthrows the eternal decree of reprobation, has won the day in most Presbyterian and Reformed churches. The Christian Reformed Church in North America embraced the free offer and made it binding doctrine in 1924. Henry R. Boer came to their 1974 Synod saying, “Hold on a minute, if God *really* wants to save everybody, why does our confession state that God eternally chose not to save some people?” The Synod could not stand against that free offer argument. Head I of the *Canons of Dordt* on (election and) reprobation (with its Rejection of Errors) became a dead letter.

Moreover, what of the preacher of the free offer who claims to be a Calvinist? Before God and man, he must boldly and unashamedly proclaim the biblical and Reformed doctrine of sovereign, unconditional, double predestination. Yet he believes that God ardently desires to save the reprobate. His is the difficult task of preaching two contradictory messages and trying to reconcile them some way both in his own mind and in those of his hearers.<sup>3</sup> No easy task! In the face of this conundrum and given the more palatable nature of the free offer (both to his own sinful flesh and to Arminian hearers), it is no wonder that both in the preaching and in the minds of the preacher and people, the truth of reprobation recedes into the background as an indistinct and hazy doctrine, loaded with all sorts of difficulties and problems. The seven lean kine eat up the seven fat kine, for biblical reprobation is silenced as the alleged passionate desire of the Almighty to save *everybody* takes centre stage.

### Limited Atonement

Another doctrine to go, logically and historically, is the doctrine of limited or particular atonement. Think about it. God really desires and wants to save everybody. But salvation is impossible unless Christ dies for them. Then surely God must have sent the Lord Jesus to die for everybody. Thus we have the heresy of universal atonement which the *Canons of Dordt* describe, in connection with the whole doctrine of Arminianism, as the Pelagian heresy dragged out of hell (*Canons 2:R:3*).

In the 1960s Harold Dekker of the Christian Reformed Church argued, “Hold on a minute, if God *really* wants to save everybody, and the

---

<sup>3</sup>Free offer preachers try various tacks here, such as “mystery,” “paradox,” two levels in God, God decreeing a sequence of dispositions in Himself, etc.

creeds say that Christ died for the elect only, we have a problem. Since God really wants to save everybody—if that means anything at all—then He must have sent Christ to die for everybody.”

Thus today you have alleged Calvinists quoting John 3:16: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son,” and arguing for a love of God in the cross of Christ for everybody. Never mind that this is one of the key texts that the Arminians abuse, and that modern so-called Calvinists actually agree with their interpretation of John 3:16. Then they say, “We are the true Calvinists and people who do not hold to the free offer are hyper-Calvinists.” The definitions are changing. Scripture is being twisted. People are being deceived.

### **Irresistible Grace**

Irresistible grace is the fourth point of Calvinism. The notion that God ardently desires to save everybody, including the reprobate, is by definition a resistible grace. God ardently desires to save everybody—there is some sort of grace for the reprobate, a resistible and always resisted grace. Thus, you have a resistible grace *and* an irresistible grace—two graces. What in the world are two graces? There is one God. One God has one grace. But the free offer teaches *two* graces. There is a resistible grace and there is an irresistible grace. What is happening here?

### **Total Depravity**

What about total depravity? If God wants to save everybody, why is everybody not saved? Maybe they rejected God’s grace while other people were a bit more willing. This is how free will comes in. This departure takes you further over the line between God’s truth and error, and a lot of people who wish to hold on to the free offer and some form of Calvinism would repudiate it. But that is where it has gone with many people, and that is where it is going with other people.

*to be concluded (DV)*