

**The Gospel of John (21);
“Jesus, the Brazen Serpent, and Saving Faith” (part 4)**

Introduction:

Today we will progress further in our passage under study, as we continue to address, “**Jesus, the Brazen Serpent, and Saving Faith.**” Today is the fourth Lord’s Day that we have considered this passage in John 3. Let us begin by reading once again **John 3:14-21.**

¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

¹⁸He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

On the past two Sundays we addressed the glorious declaration of John 3:16, attempting to correct several misinterpretations and wrong conclusions that are commonly, but wrongly drawn from this verse, even while we affirmed the glorious truth that this verse sets before the fallen world. God has been loving to this world, even though the human race has rebelled against Him and disregards Him. Yet God has been loving toward fallen mankind, because that is His nature—“God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). And the supreme loving action of God toward sinners was in giving His Son to die so that sinners anywhere and everywhere might receive the gift of everlasting life through faith in His Son whom He sent to be the great Savior of great sinners.

Verse 17 serves to explain further God’s purpose for sending His Son. It reads, “*For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.*” God had sent His Son into the world on a mission. Here it is stated *first* “what the sending of the Son was *not* intending to accomplish”¹; “God did not send His Son to condemn the world.” It is states *secondly* to what end the Father did send His Son, “that the world through Him might be saved.” The fact is that the world, that is the human race, was condemned already, and its condemnation was not due to God sending His Son. Jesus Christ was sent on a rescue mission, to save the world from God’s condemnation upon sin and sinners.

The next verse speaks of this condemned condition of the world as already in place before Jesus Christ came and that it remain on any and all who fail or refuse to believe on Jesus. We read in **verse 18**, “*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*” The entire human race is condemned, being under the wrath of God. Only through believing on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior is this state of condemnation removed and salvation from sin is obtained in which the believer is granted forgiveness of sin and the gift of righteousness.

¹ Edward W. Klink, III, **John**. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 206.

We read a somewhat similar statement in John 3:36, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, *but the wrath of God abides on him.*” The wrath of God continues to be upon the one who fails or refuses to believe on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The unbeliever is condemned already. **Arthur Pink** wrote of the wrath of God, showing that it is a divine perfection in the same way and infinite degree as the love of God.

Now the wrath of God is as much a Divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power, or mercy. It must be so, for there is no blemish whatever, not the slightest defect in the character of God; yet there would be if “wrath” were absent from Him! Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who hates it not is a moral leper. How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His “severity” (Rom. 9:12) toward it? How could He who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, loathe and hate not that which is impure and vile? The very nature of God makes Hell as real a necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite as Heaven is. Not only is there no imperfection in God, but there is no perfection in Him that is less perfect than another.²

And yet, the wrath of God is an unmentioned or even downplayed doctrine of God’s Word even in Christian circles. This should not be. The love of God will not be truly apprehended or fully appreciated unless and until there is a right conception of one’s deliverance from the abiding wrath of God. Pink went on to write of the wrath of God:

The wrath of God is His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It is the displeasure and indignation of Divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which He passes upon evil-doers. God is angry against sin because it is a rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God’s government shall be made to know that God is the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded. Not that God’s anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No; while God will vindicate His dominion as the Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive.³

Now let us remember the context of the passage that we are considering. The Lord Jesus was engaging in conversation with Nicodemus. Nicodemus may have felt threatened by the presence and message of Jesus. Jesus just declared to him that “he who does not believe is condemned already.” Jesus had declared to this supremely devout man that unless he was first born again, he would never enter the promised kingdom of God, but he was under God’s wrath. This must have not only been unsettling to Nicodemus, but if he understood its weight and implications, and he probably did so, Jesus’ words would have been terrifying. But Jesus was assuring him that His mission and message was redemptive, not condemning. As one put it:

This clarification sheds further light on the social challenge with Nicodemus. The intention of Jesus was not to gain his own honor at the expense of Nicodemus but to gain honor for Nicodemus at the expense of his own.⁴

The words of the Lord Jesus have brought encouragement and comfort to multitudes of sinners who were fearful of His authority and fearful of God’s judgment upon them for their sins. These words, however, are also encouraging to tender-hearted Christians, who are sensitive to the presence and the wretchedness of their sin, and who are often in need of spiritual encouragement and reinforcement. Here are the words of **J. C. Ryle** on this matter:

² Arthur Pink, **The Attributes of God** (Reiner Publications, n.d.), p. 97.

³ Ibid, pp. 97f.

⁴ Klink, **John**, p. 206.

The readiness of natural man everywhere to regard Christ a Judge much more than as a Saviour, is a curious fact. The whole system of the Roman Catholic Church is full of the idea. People are taught to be afraid of Christ, and to flee to the Virgin Mary! Ignorant Protestants are not much better. They often regard Christ as a kind of Judge, whose demands they will have to satisfy at the last day, much more than as a present personal Saviour and Friend. Our Lord seems to foresee this error, and to correct it in the words of this text.

Calvin observes on this verse, “Wherever our sins press us, whenever Satan would drive us to despair, we ought to hold out this shield,—that God is unwilling that we should be overwhelmed with everlasting destruction, because He has appointed His Son to be the salvation of the world.”⁵

There is another verse in John 12 that expresses a similar statement of the Lord Jesus that His mission was not to judge the world. We read our Lord’s words in John 12:47, “And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; *for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.*” But it is interesting that though John 3:17 and John 12:47 declare that the Lord Jesus was not sent into the world to condemn the world, the Lord declared that *was* His mission in **John 9:39**. It reads, “And Jesus said, ‘For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.’” How do we reconcile these verses? It appears that in one setting Jesus declared that His mission was not to condemn the world, but in another setting He seems to have declared that this was indeed the nature of His mission. For those who do not believe that the Holy Bible is the inerrant Word of God, a difference in teaching is not a problem for they expect to see “contradictions”; in fact, they “see” them where they are not. But for us who believe the Bible to be the Word of God, we seek to reconcile the teaching of one verse with all other verses of Scripture. The principle that we hold that leads us in this endeavor is commonly called *the analogy of faith*. Here is a good definition of this principle of biblical interpretation:

The “analogy of faith” is a reformed hermeneutical principle which states that, since all scriptures are harmoniously united with no essential contradictions, therefore, every proposed interpretation of any passage must be compared with what the other parts of the Bible teach. In other words, the “faith,” or body of doctrine, which the scriptures as a whole proclaim will not be contradicted in any way by any passage. Therefore, if two or three different interpretations of a verse are equally possible, any interpretation that contradicts the clear teaching of any other scriptures must be ruled out from the beginning.⁶

In other words, we understand that though the Holy Bible was written by perhaps 40 different writers over a span of 1500 years, God is the actual, single author. We affirm Peter’s declaration that God superintended the writing of all of Scripture. He wrote:

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. ²¹For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:19-21)

We affirm the analogy of faith. The Bible teaches the same spiritual truth in all of its parts. There is a consistency and harmony of all of its parts. When we see what appears to be a contradiction, we know that it though it may be paradoxical—it seems on the surface to be contradictory—actually it is not. In the light of the analogy of faith, therefore, how do we address the teaching of John 3:17 and 12:47 with John 9:39? **F. F. Bruce** addressed the matter well:

⁵ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 163.

⁶ From Monergism.com (<https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/qna/analogyfaith.html>)

There is a *prima facie*⁷ discrepancy between this passage (John 9:39-41) and those in which Jesus says that he did not come to judge the world (John 3:17; 12:47). But there is no real discrepancy. Jesus is not saying here that that he has come to execute judgment; rather, his presence and activity in the world themselves constitute a judgment as they compel men and women to declare themselves for or against him, as they range themselves on the one side or the other. Those who range themselves against him are ‘judged already’ (John 3:18), not because he has passed judgment on them but because they have passed it on themselves.⁸

We need to speak to another matter in verse 17 before moving on. We have already addressed it in earlier verses, but it is present here also. What is meant by the term, “world” in this verse? Again, it reads, “For God did not send His Son into the *world* to condemn the world, but that the *world* through Him might be saved.” Earlier we read that Jesus Christ is the Lamb that takes away the sin of the *world*” (John 1:29). This word is used 70 times in this Gospel. The context in which the word is found will suggest (determine) the meaning of the word. Here it may be that our Lord was speaking of the entire human race. It was not God’s purpose for the entire “world” to be condemned, but that He would save the “world” from His condemnation through sending His Son to die. One day the world will be delivered from the presence and defilement of sin and of His condemnation upon sin. This is certainly not to say that all of the human race will be saved. That is universalist heresy. This verse is not a declaration of God’s intention and effort to save the entire human race. No, He determined to save a chosen people out of fallen humanity. Rather, God through His Son will remove sin from the world in judgment of all unbelievers and He will remove the presence and condemnation of His sin from all true believers, for whom He made atonement in His death.

Another error that is commonly derived from this verse is that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ provided a **universal atonement** for all of the world, that the sins of the whole world have been paid for by Jesus Christ when He did on His cross. The Unitarian Universalists argue from this that the entire human race will be saved from sin and will inherit eternal life. There is no hell and damnation, for Jesus Christ died for everyone, paying for their sins. But many evangelicals, who are Arminian in their theology, who would claim that they believe the Bible, also teach a universal atonement of Christ’s death on His cross. They do believe in two destinies for mankind, heaven and hell; nevertheless, they teach that Christ died for all the sins of the entire human race, for the world. Many of them argue, therefore, that when people are damned on the Day of Judgment, it will not be due to the sins they committed in life, for Christ paid in full for their sins, but that they will be damned for the one sin of unbelief, a failure and refusal to believe on Jesus Christ for salvation. This is error. Our Lord Jesus Himself said, “I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he *you will die in your sins*” (John 8:24). Jesus Christ died to atone for the sins of His people. Although the value of His death is infinite, for He as the God/Man died upon His cross, His intention was to die as an atonement for the sins of His people, and for their sins only.

Arminians teach a universal atonement. They argue this way: because God loves everybody in the same way and to the same degree, Christ died for everyone, and that the Father is not willing that any should perish. They hold that redemption (used casually as a synonym for atonement) is general. In other words the death of Christ provided grounds for God to save all men. However, each must exercise his *free will* to accept Christ in order to make Christ’s atonement effectual for the forgiveness of one’s sins.

Let us consider more fully this Reformed doctrine of Christ’s atonement, which is commonly called **limited atonement** or **particular redemption**. Here is the doctrine stated:

The death of Jesus Christ was intended to secure the remission of sins and eternal life for His elect--the people the Father had chosen to give unto Him. By His substitutionary death on their behalf, He redeemed them from sin, having paid their debt; He propitiated God’s wrath towards them, satisfying

⁷ *Prima Facia* describes a first impression that is accepted as correct until proved otherwise. The origin of the expression is Latin, from *primus* ‘first’ + *facies* ‘face.’

⁸ F. F. Bruce, **The Gospel of John** (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 220.

God's justice on their behalf; and He reconciled them to the Father, having established peace between God and His people.

Let us better explain this doctrine and attempt to correct misunderstandings respecting it.

1. Although Christians who are Reformed (Calvinists) hold to the biblical teaching of Christ's atonement for God's elect only, we do acknowledge that there is an "unlimited" aspect to the atonement.

This doctrine does not mean that any limit can be set to the value or power of the atonement which Christ made. The value of the atonement depends upon, and is measured by, the dignity of the person making it; and since Christ suffered as a divine-human person the value of His suffering was infinite. The Scripture writers tell us plainly that the "Lord of glory" was crucified (1 Cor. 2:8); that wicked men "killed the Prince of life" (Acts 3:15); and that God "purchased" the Church "with His own blood" (Acts 20:28). The atonement, therefore, was infinitely meritorious and might have saved every member of the human race had that been God's plan. It was limited only in the sense that it was intended for, and is applied to, particular persons; namely for those who are actually saved.⁹

2. Those who are Reformed teach that some benefit of Christ's death is received by the non-elect.

Let it be said that Reformed Christians (Calvinists) do not deny that mankind in general receive some important benefits from Christ's atonement. Calvinists admit that it arrests the penalty which would have been inflicted upon the whole race because of Adam's sin; that it forms a basis for the preaching of the Gospel and thus introduces many uplifting moral influences into the world and restrains many evil influences. Paul could say to the heathen people of Lystra that God "left not Himself without witness, in that He did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with food and gladness" (Acts 14:17). God makes His sun to shine on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. Many temporal blessings are thus secured for all men, although these fall short of being sufficient to insure salvation.

William Cunningham stated the belief of Calvinists very clearly in the following paragraph:

"It is not denied by the advocates of particular redemption, or of a limited atonement, that mankind in general, even those who ultimately perish, do derive some advantages or benefits from Christ's death; and no position they hold requires them to deny this. They believe that important benefits have accrued to the whole human race from the death of Christ, and that in these benefits those who are finally impenitent and unbelieving partake. What they deny is, that Christ intended to procure, or did procure, for all men these blessings which are the proper and peculiar fruits of His death, in its specific character as an atonement, that He procured or purchased redemption - that is, pardon and reconciliation for all men. Many blessings flow to mankind at large from the death of Christ, collaterally and incidentally, in consequence of the relation in which men, viewed collectively, stand to each other. And these benefits were of course foreseen by God, when He resolved to send His Son into the world; they were contemplated or designed by Him, as what men should receive and enjoy. They are to be regarded and received as bestowed by Him, and as thus unfolding His glory, indicating His character, and actually accomplishing His purposes; and they are to be viewed as coming to men through the channel of Christ's mediation, of His suffering and death."¹⁰

There is, then, a certain sense in which Christ died for all men, and we do not reply to the Arminian tenet with an unqualified negative. But what we do maintain is that the death of Christ had special reference to the elect in that it was effectual for their salvation, and that the effects which are produced in others are only incidental to this one great purpose.

⁹ Lorraine Boettner, **Reformed Doctrine of Predestination**, (The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1932), p. 151.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 161.

3. This doctrine is the teaching of the historical confessions of Protestantism.

(1) First (Baptist) London Confession of Faith with an appendix by Benjamin Cox, 1646.

We affirm, that as Jesus Christ never intended to give remission of sins and eternal life unto any but His sheep (John 10:15; 17:2; Eph. 5:25,26,27; Rev. 5:9); so these sheep only have their sins washed away in the blood of Christ: The vessels of wrath, as they are none of Christ's sheep, nor ever believe in Him, so they have not the blood of Christ sprinkled upon them, neither are partakers of Him: And therefore have all their sins remaining upon them, and are not saved by Christ from any of them under any consideration whatsoever; but must lie under the intolerable burden of them eternally. The truth of this appears unto us by the light of these Scriptures compared together, Heb. 12:24; 1 Pet. 1:2; Heb. 3:14; Matt. 7:23; Eph. 5:6; 2 Tim. 1:9; John 8:24.¹¹

(2) The Westminster Confession of Faith, and our own Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689

This office the Lord Jesus did most willingly undertaken which that He might discharge, He was made under the law, and did perfectly fulfill it; endured most grievous torments immediately in His Soul, and most painful sufferings in His body; was crucified, and died, was buried, and remained under the power of death, yet saw no corruption. On the third day He arose from the dead, with -the same body in which He suffered, with which also He ascended into heaven, and there sitteth at the right hand of His Father, making intercession, and shall return, to judge men and angels, at the end of the world.

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; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.*

Although the work of redemption was not actually wrought by Christ till after His incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated unto the elect, in all ages successively from the beginning of the world, in and by those promises, types, and sacrifices, wherein He was revealed and signified to be the seed which should bruise the serpent's head; and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, being the same yesterday, and to-day and forever.

To all those for whom Christ hath purchased redemption, He doth certainly and effectually apply and communicate the same; making intercession for them, and revealing unto them, in and by the Word, the mysteries of salvation; effectually persuading them by His Spirit to believe and obey, and governing their hearts by His Word and Spirit; overcoming all their enemies by His almighty power and wisdom, in such manner, and ways, as are most consonant to His wonderful and unsearchable dispensation.¹²

4. Scripture verses which teach this doctrine

Matthew 1:21. "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for *He will save His people* from their sins." (Matt. 1:21).

John 10:14, 15. "I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father; and *I lay down My life for the sheep.*"

John 15:13. "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life *for his friends.*"

John 17:2. "...even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He should give eternal life."

¹¹ This statement was in the appendix to the First London (Baptist) Confession, which was written by Benjamin Cox.

¹² **The Westminster Confession of Faith** of 1647, Art. 8, pars. 4-8.

Romans 8:31-33. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up *for us all*, how shall he not also with Him freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s *elect*? It is God that justifies...”

Ephesians 5:23, 25, 26, 27. “For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the church, being Himself the Saviour of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as *Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it*; that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the church to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

Revelation 5:9. “And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for *You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood* out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation...’”

5. Rational defense of the doctrine

(1) If one considers the matter rightly, he will see that every position on the atonement is “limited” in one way or another. Either Christ provided a “limited” atonement in that He secured a salvation for His people, which is the Reformed understanding, or He provided a “limited” atonement in that He did not secure anyone’s salvation, having only made possible a salvation for everybody, which is the Arminian assertion.

(2) If Christ intended to die equally for everybody and He paid the same price for everybody, then there are souls in hell who have their sins paid for twice.

(3) If Christ intended to die equally for everybody, then you have a divided Godhead, for He attempted to atone for more than the Father ever intended to give to Him.

(4) Here is the classical argument of **John Owen** in defense of limited atonement that has never been refuted logically or biblically by Arminians:

I may add this dilemma to our Universalists:-God imposed his wrath due unto, and Christ underwent the pains of hell for, either all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some sins of all men. If the last, some sins of all men, then have all men some sins to answer for, and so shall no man be saved?... If the second, that is it which we affirm, that Christ in their stead and room suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the world. If the first, why are not all freed from the punishment of all their sins? You will say, “Because of their unbelief, they will not believe.” But this unbelief, is it a sin, or not? If not, why should they be punished for it? If it be, then Christ underwent the punishment due it, or not. If so, then why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died?... If he did not, then he did not die for all their sins. Let them choose which part they will.

6. The error of Amyraldism

There is another view of the atonement of Jesus Christ that is quite popular among evangelicals. It is called Amyraldism, or sometimes called Amyraldianism. This is a modified view of Calvinism, according to its advocates. Now those who are Reformed in their understanding of the Scriptures assert the Bible teaches the way of salvation through what they affirm as the Five Points of Calvinism, or better, the Doctrines of Grace.¹³ Amyraldians often claim to be 4 point Calvinists, or sometimes 4½ point Calvinists, rather than 5

¹³ The Five Points of Calvinism, or the Doctrines of Grace, affirm these five doctrines:

(1) Total Depravity – Man, in his fallen state, is completely incapable of doing any good that is acceptable to God.

(2) Unconditional Election – As a result of man’s total depravity, he is unable (and unwilling) to come to God for salvation. Therefore, God must sovereignly choose those who will be saved. His decision to elect individuals for salvation is unconditional. It is not based on anything that man is or does but solely on God’s grace.

point Calvinists. Amyraldism, or four-point Calvinism, is believed and taught today by many evangelicals, including independent Bible churches, Baptists, and some Presbyterians.

The point of which Amyraldians differ from classical Reformed theology is on the atonement of Jesus Christ, the third point of the five doctrines of grace. Whereas classical Reformed theology asserts that the Bible teaches limited atonement, or rather, particular redemption, that the death of Jesus Christ was intended and accomplished the payment of the sins of only the elect, and whereas Arminians argue that Christ died for the whole human race equally, paying for all the sins of all the human race, Amyraldians claim to be a mediating position between Calvinism and Arminianism. They teach that when Jesus Christ died, He paid for the sins of the entire human race, but that His atonement is only made effective to the sinner when the sinner believes the gospel.

This view of the atonement, Amyraldism, was named after Moses Amyraut (Moyses Amyraldus), a 16th-century French theologian, who promoted this doctrine. A description of this teaching has often been referred to as “hypothetical universalism.” The doctrine has been described in this way:

Admitting that, by the purpose of God, and through the death of Christ, the elect are infallibly secured in the enjoyment of salvation, they contended for an antecedent decree, by which God is free to give salvation to all men through Christ, on the *condition* that they believe on him. Hence their system was termed *hypothetic(al) universalism*. The vital difference between it and the strict Arminian theory lies in the absolute security asserted in the former for the spiritual recovery of the elect. They agree, however, in attributing some kind of universality to the atonement, and in maintaining that, on certain *condition*, within the reach of fulfillment by all men... all men have access to the benefits of Christ’s death.

As mentioned above, the particular point that Amyraldism denies is the third point, limited atonement. Amyraldism replaces it with unlimited atonement, or the concept of “hypothetical universalism,” which asserts that Christ died for the sins of all people, not just the elect. Amyraldism affirms the doctrine of unconditional election, even while teaching unlimited atonement. They argue this way: because God knew that not all would respond in faith to Christ’s atonement (due to man’s total depravity), He elected some to whom He would impart saving faith. Those who fail or refuse to believe had their sins paid for by Christ, but His death was not applied to them because they fail to place their faith in Jesus Christ.

The difference between the historical Reformed view of Christ’s atonement and the view of Amyraldism is not over the value of Christ’s atonement, but rather with what God accomplished by Christ’s death. Certainly Calvinists assert the infinite value of Christ’s death. His death could have atoned not only for the entire world, but ten thousands of world. But that was never God’s intention. Amyraldians claim, however, that Christ actually intended to pay, and actually did pay for the sins of every human being. It is one’s faith that determines whether or not Christ’s death is effectual or not. ***Amyraldism is not biblical.***

A number of sound arguments can be given which shows that Amyraldism is a false doctrine. Here are a few of these:

(1) Amyraldism is not biblical because it asserts that Christ’s death made *possible* the salvation of all people, but that it secured the salvation for no one. They say that faith is the determining factor, not Christ’s death. But the Bible is clear that Jesus Christ accomplished the redemption of His people when He died in their stead on His cross.

(2) Amyraldism is not biblical because it makes the intentions of the three persons of the Trinity differ from one another, thus dividing the godhead. To say that Christ died to atone for the sins of the entire human race but God the Father gave His Son to pay only for the sin of His people, makes the Trinity at odds with

(3) Limited Atonement – In order to save those whom God has unconditionally elected, atonement for their sin had to be made. God the Father sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to atone for the sins of the elect and secure their pardon by His death on the cross.

(4) Irresistible Grace – The Holy Spirit applies the finished work of salvation to the elect by irresistibly drawing them to faith and repentance. This saving call of the Holy Spirit cannot be resisted and is referred to as an efficacious call.

(5) Perseverance of the Saints – Those whom God has elected, atoned for, and efficaciously called are preserved in faith until the last day. They will never fall away because God has secured them with the seal of the Holy Spirit. The saints persevere because God preserves them.

itself. Moreover, the Amyraldian position clearly implies that while Christ attempted to secure the redemption of the entire human race, the Holy Spirit only intends to apply His death to the elect. This is not possible. All the persons of the Trinity are one God and have one and the same purpose and end of the work of salvation for His people.

(3) Amyraldism is not biblical because it asserts that the purpose and work of Christ while on earth were different than what they are in His glorified state. Amyraldism has Christ on earth attempting to redeem the entire human race, while in His glorified state He is applying His death only to the elect. Jesus prayed, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him” (John 17:1f).

(4) Amyraldism asserts a “hypothetical universalism”, but the Bible nowhere suggests that the salvation of the entire human race is “possible.”

(5) Amyraldism makes the sinners’ faith equally salvific as Christ’s death, for apart from the sinner’s faith, His death accomplished the salvation for no one. This strips Jesus Christ of His glory seen in His death on the cross. Salvation is not due to the combining of His death and our faith. His death completely secured the salvation of his people. God applies the benefit of Christ’s death through faith wrought by God’s grace, not due to faith making His death effectual.

Now let us consider further the paragraph of **John 3:18-21**. Again it reads as follows:

¹⁸He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

We considered briefly verse 18 earlier. Those who fail or refuse to believe on Jesus Christ are already condemned. **Verse 19** describes the reason for their condemnation. Again, “***And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.***” Men are sinners. They are described here as lovers of darkness, who prefer darkness to light. Here the “light” is Jesus Christ Himself. We read this earlier in chapter 1.

⁴In Him was life, and the life was the ***light*** of men. ⁵And the ***light*** shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.

⁶There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ⁷This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the ***Light***, that all through him might believe. ⁸He was not that ***Light***, but was sent to bear witness of that ***Light***. ⁹That was the true ***Light*** which gives ***light*** to every man coming into the world. (John 1:4-9)

And then here in John 3:19 men (and women) are said to have “loved darkness rather than light.” Because of sin, there is an aversion of people to Jesus Christ. Because they love their sin, they do not and cannot truly love Jesus Christ. **J. C. Ryle** wrote of this cause for man’s condemnation:

But the real account of the matter is that men have naturally no will or inclination to use the light. They love their own dark and corrupt ways more than the ways which God proposes to them. They therefore reap the fruit of their own ways, and will have at last what they loved. They loved darkness, and they will be cast into outer darkness. They did not like the light, so they will be shut out from light eternally. In short, lost souls will be what they willed to be, and will have what they loved.¹⁴

¹⁴ J. C. Ryle, **Expository Thoughts on John**, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), pp. 166.

All people everywhere are evil, and they are shown that they are evil when the light of God's truth shines upon them, particularly as that light is shown through Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke to the *Pharisees*, "You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, *when you are evil*? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (Matt. 12:34). But their characteristic of being evil was not only true of the Pharisees. Jesus said to His own *disciples*, "*If you then, being evil*, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" (Matt. 7:11). Again, here are Ryle's comments:

The words, "because their deeds were evil," are very instructive. They teach us that where men have no love to Christ and His Gospel, and will not receive them, their lives and their works will prove at last to have been evil. Their habits of life may not be gross and immoral. They may be even comparatively decent and pure. But the last day will prove them to have been in reality "evil." Pride of intellect, or selfishness, or love of man's applause, or dislike to submission of will, or self-righteousness, or some other false principle will be found to have run through all their conduct. In one way or another, when men refuse to come to Christ, their deeds will always prove to be "evil." Rejection of the Gospel will always be found to be connected with some moral obliquity. When Christ is refused we may be quite sure that there is something or other in life or heart, which is not right. If a man does not love light his "deeds are evil." Human eyes may not detect the flaw; but the eyes of an all-seeing God do.¹⁵

Rejecting the Gospel of Jesus Christ reveals the presence of our evil nature. This reaction and rejection of Christ would characterize each of us if it were not for a work of God's grace in our souls. **Verse 20** declares, "*For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*" People do not want their sinful condition exposed. They do not want their evil ways to be exposed to others, to themselves, and certainly most of all to God. They love their sin and love themselves. But they know that in reality their souls are not righteous, but they love that it is so. To come to Christ would expose their deeds, so they choose to stay away.

Such a person is always avoiding the light; i.e. he will have nothing to do with Christ, the source and embodiment of God's truth and love. Hence, he never reads the Bible; refuses to attend church, etc. In his heart he really *hates* the light.¹⁶

Matthew Henry wrote these words:

Observe, [1.] How great the *sin* of unbelievers is; it is aggravated from the dignity of the person they slight; they *believe not in the name of the only-begotten Son of God*, who is infinitely *true*, and deserves to be believed, *infinitely good*, and deserves to be embraced. God sent one to save us that was *dearest* to himself; and shall not he be *dearest to us*? Shall we not believe on his name who has a name above every name? [2.] How great the *misery* of unbelievers is: they are *condemned already*; which bespeaks, *First*, a *certain* condemnation. They are as sure to be condemned in the judgment of the great day as if they were condemned already. *Secondly*, A *present* condemnation. The curse has already taken hold of them; the wrath of God now fastens upon them. They are condemned already, for their own hearts condemn them. *Thirdly*, a condemnation *grounded upon their former guilt*: He is condemned *already*, for he lies open to the law for all his sins; the obligation of the law is in full force, power, and virtue, against him, because he is not by faith interested in the gospel defeasance (reversal of sin); *he is condemned already, because he has not believed*. Unbelief may truly be called *the great damning sin*, because it leaves us under the guilt of all our other sins; it is a sin against the *remedy*, against our *appeal*.

We then read of some who do come to the light. **Verse 21** reads, "*But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.*"

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ William Hendriksen, **John**, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 143f.

The expression, “does the truth” is somewhat unusual. We usually speak of believing the truth, or knowing the truth, or loving the truth, but here it speaks of “he who does the truth.” True faith in Christ is seen in people obeying the truth, even doing the will of Jesus Christ their Lord.

The true Christian shows in his manner and life that his deeds “*have been done in God.*” When one becomes a Christian, especially when he can be compared and contrasted to that which he was and did before, it becomes apparent to him and others that God Himself must be the author and finisher of the work taking place. Salvation is only and wholly due to the grace of God working in the souls of His people to bring them to the Light, to bring them to faith in Jesus Christ.

May our Lord enable each of us to see ourselves as we truly are, and may He enable us to have the desire to always be coming to Christ. May He show us our evil deeds, but that through coming to Christ we are no longer under condemnation, but that we have come to enjoy His unending favor.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love... (Eph. 1:3, 4)
