

Redemption Secured And Applied As Seen By John Gill

George M. Ella | Added: Jun 29, 2017 | Category: Theology

For whom did Christ die?

Nowadays many Christians speak of a redemption which Christ accomplished theoretically for all but which worked out practically only for a few. This would seem like a great waste of divine energy – if it were true. Fancy preaching on a redemption accomplished but not applied. What a false gospel that would be! We rarely meet up with Absolute Universalism amongst Evangelicals; that is the idea that Christ has died for all and thus all will be ultimately saved. We do, however, meet up with the teaching that Christ has died for all men everywhere, should they wish to accept it. This belief, once found only amongst Pelagians and Arminians, is an even more questionable dogma than Universalism. The latter still looks to God to provide the salvation of all, whereas those who preach a universal salvation for all those who wish to accept it, leave salvation ultimately to the will of man. This view is surprisingly claimed nowadays as being true Reformed evangelicalism and those who hold on solid grounds that this view is a scandalous departure from orthodox, full-gospel preaching are denounced by these Revisionists as ‘Hardshells’, ‘Antinomians’, ‘Hyper-Calvinists’ and ‘Extremists’. However, to support this new idea of orthodoxy, these Neo-Liberals preach a man-made gospel based on a low view of our Triune God in whom they see nothing but a clash of different wills; a low view of the Scriptures which they argue are self-contradictory and a very high view of man whom they believe is not fallen in all respects but there is enough of God’s image and natural abilities in him to see his sense of duty to believe savingly and thus become an agent in his own salvation.

An overview of this downgrade

Reformed Orthodoxy suffered a major blow in the late 18th century when the Grotian and New Divinity teaching of a theoretical redemption for all made harmful inroads into evangelical preaching. Andrew Fuller, through his revolutionary, rationalist and radical book *The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation* sought to make this error palatable by speaking of an atonement sufficient for all but only applicable to some. His argument was that Christ died sufficiently for all men, should they be willing to accept it, but as man is basically unwilling, though not unable, the Father applied Christ’s universal atonement merely to some. In this way, Fuller sought to

merge all the difficulties he found in Calvinism and Arminianism. This theory is usually known as 'Theoretical Universalism' but John Gill called it rank 'Universalism'. As James P. Boyce argued in his Abstract of Systematic Theology, Fuller's theory is clearly a Universalism which effects no actual reconciliation at all. Fuller, himself, called this 'Strict Calvinism', though his followers nowadays tend to call this error 'Moderate Calvinism'. Fuller argued that his theory was consistent with reason, nature and grace, three elements which he summed up as 'the nature and fitness of things' or Natural Law. As recently argued by Hong-Gyu Park in his University of Aberdeen doctoral thesis *Grace and Nature in the Theology of John Gill* (2001), this makes Fullerism a philosophy and not a theology as has been previously pointed out in a number of New Focus essays and books.

Obviously, this view of Redemption is most ill thought out. If only a choice number are saved, it must be asked, why did Christ die for all men everywhere? If He knew that only some would be saved, why did He provide a provisional atonement for all? What went wrong? Fuller's answer is that if man rejects this universal salvation, it is his own fault. But this will not do. All men, in that they are sinners, stand without excuse before God. It is not that they become sinners and therefore without excuse after they reject the gospel, they reject the gospel because they are sinners. Thus the question remains, if Christ died for all sinners, why are they not all saved? What Fuller and his followers are actually preaching is that man has frustrated Christ's universal atonement and caused Him to die in vain for many whom He wished to save.

Errol Hulse, in his booklets *The Free Offer* and *The Great Invitation*, in which he aims, he says, to be clearer than Fuller on the subject, maintains that we are dealing here with a paradox which is, nevertheless, true because Christ's salvation goes out to all men but all men are not saved. To overcome this difficulty he postulates two kinds of grace, common grace which displays God's love and saving desire to all but does not save all, and saving grace which procures salvation for some only. This is no help at all as we are still left with a redemptive provision for all which fails to redeem all. Christ is displayed as creating an atonement for all which He does not give all. Hulse gives no Scriptural backing to his idea that common grace demonstrates God's will to save all, though not all are saved. Indeed, Hulse confuses his so-called common grace so completely with saving grace that the reader is bound to understand Hulse as preaching that the very fact that the sun shines on the just and unjust is an indicator that God wishes to save all. This reminds us of the old adage:

The rain it raineth on the just
And also on the unjust fella;
But chiefly on the just because
The unjust hath the just's umbrella.

Hulse is admittedly simpler to follow than Fuller and far less prone to launch out into philosophical speculation, but he is in no way 'clearer', as

he professes to be, and he does not convince us that his 'appearances of contradiction' is, in fact, 'no contradiction' and merely 'two sides of a vice.' What Hulse destroys is the Biblical teaching of God's Providence to all men and his calling in of Christ's Bride.

Hulse leans heavily on John Murray's essay, *The Free Offer of the Gospel* here which he seeks to simplify as he has done Fuller. Hulse presents Murray's 'special study' less complicatedly but does not make it more persuasive. Murray takes up the supposed antonym of 'a redemption for all' versus 'a redemption for some' and claims that he has found the solution to this enigma. Murray deduces that God has two different wills. He has both a benevolent will and also a decretal will. God does not always do what he likes and cannot do what He wants. God's benevolent will loves all men and would have all men saved but His decretal will compels Him to save some only. Here is the old picture commonly used of man with a devil sitting on one shoulder and an angel sitting on the other, one saying "spare him", the other saying "damn him". Thus Murray uses his gospel of contradictions to divide the one will of the Trinity in salvation.

The task of the evangelist and preacher, says Murray, is to preach God's benevolent will to all men and keep his decretal will, i.e. to save only some, secret. He can thus conclude:

We have found that God himself expresses an ardent desire for the fulfilment of certain things which he has not decreed in his inscrutable counsel to come to pass. This means that there is a will to the realization of what he has not decretively willed, a pleasure towards that which he has not been pleased to decree. This is indeed mysterious, and why he has not brought to pass, in the exercise of his omnipotent power and grace, what is his ardent pleasure lies hid in the sovereign counsel of his will. We should not entertain, however, any prejudice against the notion that God desires or has pleasure in the accomplishment of what he does not decretively will.

John Murray wrote a book entitled *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. That title is misleading as he sees a paradox between what Christ accomplished and what He applied. Biblical Christianity, and there can be no other Christianity, is *Redemption Secured and Applied* because all for whom Christ died are secure in their redemption which is applied to them. Murray preaches that the gospel which is to be freely offered is the gospel that God wills to do what He does not will but if it is preached in a 'well-meant' manner, it will be affective! One must drive this scandalous opinion ad absurdum in their own words so that these modern scoffers may realise what they are doing! This is truly a religion dishonouring to God which preaches a gospel of deceit and it is a most worrying thing to realise that such writers are claimed to be present day authorities and leaders in our Reformed churches. This down-grading of religion in the English-speaking world is, in many ways, a more severe down-grading than that against which Spurgeon fought so bravely.

A special and distinct people

Gill will have nothing to do with the religion of Mr Facing-Both-Ways. The object of redemption, he argues, is that God might secure a people out of the world for Himself and make them special and distinct from other peoples. Redemption is God's own divine choice and not the prerogative of all men to choose God. Gill gives seven reasons for this:

1. The objects of redemption are the objects of God's love

God has a special saving love which must be distinguished from His general, providential goodness to all men. God does not love all men savingly. For instance, He says, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated." There is thus no common grace pointing to the possibility of salvation for all men, but only a selective saving grace through which Christ secures a people whom He calls variously His Bride, His Church, or His sheep. These people are in a special relationship to God as His right and property.

2. The objects of redemption are the same as the objects of election

Christ died for His elect ones. Romans 8:30-33 and Ephesians 1:4-7 show that the election, predestination, calling, justification and glorification of God's loved ones were sealed in eternity. Those who are elected are those whom God loves and who are redeemed. These are not restricted to any nation but are freely chosen by God from all peoples as vessels of mercy. What Christ has purchased with His blood belongs to Him and there is no danger of His losing His possessions. God has not left salvation to the whims of man as thus none would be saved.

3. The objects of redemption are the same as those for whom Christ is a Surety

Christ is the Surety of a better covenant, commonly called the covenant of grace. This suretyship is the grounds and foundation of redemption and in His engagement of it, Christ bore the sin and punishment of His people to redeem them from the hands of justice. He, however, was not obliged to redeem those for whom He was not a Surety. Christ is not the Surety of every man but only those who were put under that suretyship from the foundation of the world. Thus, Christ's suretyship and redemption are of equal extent and the same people are placed under both.

4. The objects of redemption are a chosen people

Both the Old and New Testaments proclaim that Christ is to die for and thus redeem His own people (Isaiah 53:8; Matthew 1:21 etc.). Though all men are created by God, they are not accounted on that ground as belonging to His redeemed children. Christ does not redeem all universally but He universally chooses people from out of "every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" worldwide (Revelation 5:9). These are God's covenant people of whom He said "They shall be my people, and I will be their God" (Jeremiah 11:4 etc.).

5. The objects of redemption are those for whom Christ paid a ransom

Christ gave His life for His sheep who are a definite people discernible by

Him from others, also called goats in Scripture. Only Christ's sheep know Him, are led by Him and follow Him (John 10:15-29). To others, He says, "Depart from me; I know you not." Indeed, the gospel is revealed to the sheep but hid from the goats. It is Christ's sheep alone who shall never perish and enjoy their Saviour for ever.

6. The objects of redemption are the sons of God

These children of God are predestined and adopted to be fellow-heirs with Christ and as such are distinguishable from the children of flesh. They are a fixed number which cannot be altered and thus partakers of a special grace which is given to none but them (John 11:52; Romans 9:8; Galatians 3:26; John 1:12; John 3:1).

7. The object of redemption is Christ's Bride, the Church

The Old Testament tells believers that their maker is their Husband and their Redeemer the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 54:5). In the New Testament Christ is depicted as the Husband who so loved His Bride, that He gave Himself for her (Ephesians 5:25). This Bride is also called God's 'general assembly and church of the first-born which are written in heaven', i.e. in the Lamb's book of life, who are members of the New Covenant and sealed through the shedding of Christ's blood (Hebrews 12:23 ff.).

Theoretical Universalists deny God's perfections

The idea that God loves savingly those whom He will not save is a total denial of God's love. The idea that God in His wisdom planned a scheme whereby redemption is made for all but God does not succeed in redeeming all, is a total denial of God's planning wisdom. The idea that God, in His justice, contrived a means by which Christ was punished for all men and bore all men's sins and yet God did not allow all men to go free is to deny God's justice. If Christ has paid the debts of all men, all men must, for the sake of justice, be declared free. If God designed to save all and all are not saved, this denies the power of God to do that which He desires and wills. This dogma would even make man more powerful than God as God proposes but man overrules God's proposal. The Bible, however, reveals a God for whom nothing is too hard or impossible and whose will is almighty. The Universalist error also denies the immutability of God as it represents Him as being of two minds in salvation and both willing and not willing the salvation of all men at the same time. His love for all is changed into His hatred of some. The Bible teaches that in God there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning. This universal scheme robs God of His chief end and glory. If His ultimate aim is the redemption of all men to His own glory, and some for whom Christ became a ransom are not saved, He has failed in both His aim and glory. The Universalist has thus a god void of all his perfections and who is in the end, less powerful than man.

Theoretical Universalism denies Christ's love and grace

If Christ loved all men so that He died for all and all men do not partake of that love and vicarious death, then Christ's love and grace were not sufficient for their task. Christ says that "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends". If 'friends' are interpreted, in Christ's case, as all, Christ loved and died in vain. If 'friends' are the sum total of those for whom Christ intended to die and for whom He died successfully, then Christ's love and grace for His own is established as complete. This universal scheme also reflects negatively on the work of Christ. If He has made satisfaction for everyman, everyman must go free. If Christ has paid a price for all, but many remain unpaid for, then either the price was not valid or the payment was not enough. In dying for His people, Christ purchased not only their redemption but also their reconciliation with God. The Universalists, however, only teach a one-sided reconciliation, i.e. that of God being reconciled to man, which is no reconciliation at all because a reconciliation is always of at least two parties. Where man is not reconciled to God, Christ's work of reconciliation was in vain. That is if Christ had died to reconcile all men everywhere. The Bible, however, teaches clearly that Christ was a ransom for the many but not for all.

Theoretical Universalism denies any redemption at all

If Christ died for the redemption of all and all are not redeemed, that redemption never took place. Furthermore, Christ's failed redemption is thus no security against condemnation either. Scriptures tell us, however, that there is no condemnation for those whose sins are condemned in Christ. If some sinners are condemned and some not, either something has gone wrong with Christ's universal engagement or the Universalists have quite misunderstood the gospel.

Universal redemption separates the work of Christ from its accomplishment

Christ did not die, rise again and now intercedes for all men. If He did, all would be the objects of Christ's intercession. But Christ says that He does not pray for the world (i.e. all men) but for those whom God has given Him only (John 17:9). It is absurd and incredible to think that Christ separates His work from what resulted from that work. Those for whom He died are those for whom He prays. It is absurd and incredible to think that Christ died for those for whom He would not pray. Boyce takes up this dichotomy in Fuller's doctrine of an atonement which does not reconcile, arguing conclusively that Fullerism entails two separate works of Christ: the work of Redemption which is for all and the work of atonement which is for some. Redemption merely means that a mode of reconciliation and a medium of acceptance has been provided – even for those who shall not be saved and for those who are already damned. This is a theory of no practical saving value and is incompatible with scriptures concerning the choosing of the elect before the foundation of the world and Christ's dying for them before the foundation of the world. These passages show that

Christ died solely for those whom He redeemed and reconciled to God (See John 10:11, 15, 26-28; John 17:9, 19; Romans 5:8, 9; Ephesians 5:25; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 1:20). As Boyce points out, Fuller never explains how it comes about that a redeemed all become reconciled and how they lose that theoretical redemption and possible reconciliation and become either practically an atoned-for few or a lost many.

A Christ who cannot see the travail of His soul and be satisfied

If Christ died for all men but all men are not saved, Christ will never see the travail of His soul and be satisfied (Isaiah 53). The joy that was set before Him in enduring the cross must now be turned into disappointment because the plan of salvation failed. Now the millions whom He loved are howling in hell because His atonement failed to atone.

Outcome of the Theoretical Universalist's scepticism

Such Universalists believe that Christ died for sins that are irremissible (Matthew 12:31, 32; 1 John 5:16). His redemption for all is useless for most or, at least, many. Christ affords no grounds for faith and hope if those who are redeemed can fall and perish. The Bible exhorts, however, sinners to trust in Christ "for with him is plenteous redemption" (Psalm 130:7). Nor, if Universalism were true, have would-be believers any grounds to love Christ or to be thankful for Him as they would have been destroyed had they not appropriated salvation for themselves. This would cause self-love but hardly love for a god who merely provides a means of reconciliation but leaves all the struggle to accomplish it to the sinner himself. The efficacy of salvation is then not Christ's death so much as the sinner's will and work in grasping the benefits for himself.

Summary and conclusion

Redemption is not universal in that all men are redeemed but is limited to those for whom the redemption price is paid. Redemption is bought for God's people at the highest possible price and given to the elect freely for no other reason than God's love for them. This gift is all of grace and sinners have no agency whatsoever in it. Any claim from believers that their agency helped procure their salvation, is a testimony of ungratefulness and unbelief and not the fruit by which true believers are known. Christ saves all those whom He redeems and Christ's redemption is for those alone.

This redemption is agreeable to all the perfections of God, springing from His love, grace and kindness. It is planned and carried out in and by the infinite wisdom of God and reflects His peace-bringing justice, honour, mercy, truth, and righteousness which are pledged for ever to a people who

are the apple of His eye and whom He will never forsake. No sinner could redeem himself like this or perform any works of salvation on his own. Man's infinite sin demands an infinite ransom leading to an infinite satisfaction. Only God in Christ has the power to do this and only He has truly done this.

The redemption which Christ obtained as its Author and Finisher is freely given to those and those only for whom Christ worked it out (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:30). This redemption is particular, choosing out a special people from the nations, the Church, and the redemption these chosen ones are given is definite, full and complete. The Lord Jesus Christ's atonement did not merely make salvation possible but it accomplished salvation in every aspect and for all for whom it was meant and to whom it is given. This full salvation is eternal (Hebrews 9:12) and none who are saved shall perish but all of them are given everlasting life.

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