

THE SERIOUS CALL OF THE GOSPEL

Is the “Well-Meant Offer” One?

Lau Chin Kwee

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Introduction

In the midst of rampant Arminian offers of and invitations to salvation, the Reformed community would do well to reconsider the usefulness and legitimacy of “the well-meant offer of salvation” as a serious call of the gospel.

Where should we turn for a united Reformed front on this matter? In the history of dogma, we learn that the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) was the last ecumenical assembly where delegates were drawn from all over the then-known Reformed world. If ever there was a united, official, and carefully formulated Reformed refutation of the Arminian errors, it must be the *Canons*, the product of this synod for that very purpose. But the *Canons* are much neglected these days, even by those who purportedly promote the Five Points of Calvinism (the popular name for the *Canons*). One wonders if it is not due to the shying away from the *Canons*, that Reformed people are drifting apart from one another in the matter of Reformed soteriology. The *Canons* shall not be neglected in our attempt to determine what is truly the serious call of the gospel and whether the well-meant offer may be classified as one.

In this paper we are not particularly concerned about the legitimacy and possibility of the work of evangelism in the light of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. Dr. R. C. Sproul, in his book, *Chosen By God*, saw the implication of the doctrine of predestination on the task of evangelism. He asked, What does predestination do to the task of evangelism? His answer essentially is that it does not affect evangelism at all, as evangelism is a matter of the church obeying the command of Christ, her Head, and considering it a privilege on her part to be involved.¹ We agree with him and here in this paper we would ask how the doctrines of grace affect *the form of gospel presentation* to the lost.

That there are serious errors in presenting the gospel as a “well-meant offer” can be discerned in the following words of the late Dr. John H. Gerstner:

I had the incomparable privilege of being a student of Professors Murray and Stonehouse. With tears in my heart. I nevertheless confidently assert that they erred profoundly in *The Free Offer of the Gospel* and died before they seem to have realized their error which, because of their justifiedly high reputations for Reformed excellence generally, still does incalculable damage to the cause of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of His gospel.²

Chapter 1

What is the Call of the Gospel?

Before His ascension, Christ commanded His church to bring the gospel to the ends of the earth and make disciples of all nations. None should doubt the importance of the accuracy of the message which we must bring and of the knowledge of its effect in this world. Heppe tells us of the three important ingredients of the gospel:

This word is of three kinds: (1) witness or proclamation, that God in Christ has given the world new salvation and life; (2) the command that those who hear this proclamation believe it with remorseful and penitent hearts; and (3) the promise that those who believe this proclamation with upright hearts really attain to the salvation prepared in Christ.³

A. What is the Gospel?

1. It is the good news of salvation through the Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God.

The bad news of the Fall.

The Fall of man into sin in the Garden of Eden is bad news for mankind, notwithstanding the fact that God did turn that evil around even for the good of His people. Before the Fall, God saw that everything that He had created was “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Every change was good news, but not the good news of salvation, as there was no Fall as yet to make salvation necessary. So the gospel presupposes the Fall—the “bad news” in the history of mankind.

It was good that man was created “in our image, after our likeness” according to God’s own Word. Without the understanding of this original goodness in the human race, there would be no proper understanding of the Fall of man. The concept of the Fall implies a standing position from which the Fall took place. This standing position is obviously the original rectitude of man. Without this original righteousness, holiness, and true knowledge of man, there would be no Fall to talk about.

The story of the Fall in Genesis 3 is the Bible’s bad news of what happened to our first parents. The *Belgic Confession* confesses,

But being in honor he understood it not, neither knew his excellency, but willfully subjected himself to sin, and consequently to death and the curse, giving ear to the words of the devil. For the commandment of life which he had received he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life, having corrupted his whole

nature; whereby he made himself liable to corporal and spiritual death.⁴

It is obvious that the bad news is very bad. Death has come upon this creation, with man in the forefront to experience both corporal and spiritual death. Death is not a natural phenomenon, but the judgment and curse of God upon man and this creation because of the Fall. Man by nature does not like this truth about himself, as it is truly humbling to his sinful pride. By all means he would rather think of himself otherwise than in terms of the Fall. Yet, he must explain the obvious imperfection of man. Hence, he came up with the theory of evolution.

All theories of evolution are the devil's wiles to rob man of any idea of the Fall in man. In evolution, the lower forms of life evolve to more complex and better forms of life, culminating in the nature of man. Therefore, any weaknesses and failures (and sinfulness) in man is attributed to parts of the evolutionary process. There is, therefore, no Fall at all, but only the process of evolution to a better being. This is the lie of the devil.

Without the bad news of the Fall there is not good news of redemption.

The good news of redemption.

Redemption speaks of a price paid to bring man back to fellowship with God again. That indeed is good news to man, for there is nothing more glorious to him than to be in communion with His God, in whose image he was first created. But ...

They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:) That he should still live for ever, and not see corruption.⁵

Good news can never arise from man himself. Adam and Eve tried to bring good news with their "fig leaves" to cover up the shame of their sins. Later their firstborn, Cain, tried with his fruits and other produce of the ground, but to no avail. All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. God alone can bring the good news to man, as He alone can create that good news. The protevangel ("mother-promise") is found here:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.⁶

These were words of curse upon the devil pronounced by God in the presence of our fallen parents. As such it was also a promise to them that God will fight for them the fierce battle against the devil and defeat him. This victory (according to this prophecy) will come through the "seed" of the woman, who should bruise the head of the devil and destroy him. In the course of the battle,

the heel of the woman's seed would be bruised. This is the prophecy concerning the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

From the protevangel to the first advent of Christ, there were many more prophecies through the types and shadows of the Old Testament, giving greater details concerning the coming of the Messiah. All these were and still are good news of His work of redemption. They are the gospel, and are still relevant today when carefully and faithfully preached.

Now in the New Testament era, we know that this promised Messiah is none other than the Second Person of the Godhead, who became flesh and dwelt among men in order to save a people whom His Father had given Him to represent legally and spiritually. For them He had paid the penalty of all their sins on the cross of Calvary and fulfilled all righteousness according to the Law of God. His resurrection from the dead was because of their justification. So the good news of Jesus Christ is that He did it all to save a people that is represented by the church today.

The good news of conversion.

The good news (or gospel) goes beyond announcing what God the Father had planned to do, and what God the Son had executed in His work of redemption, into what God the Holy Spirit is presently doing in applying this salvation to mankind.

The good news is that out of all the sons and daughters of Adam, dead and totally helpless in trespasses and sins, God the Holy Spirit would raise to spiritual life a people whom God had chosen in His love to save and for whom Christ had died and rose again. All that is necessary for their salvation is found in the redemptive work of Christ. The Holy Spirit applies these benefits to the chosen of God in time, so that they come to the conscious knowledge of their salvation, and thus live the remaining days of their lives in joy and thankfulness under the lordship of Christ. The good news is incomplete without this promise of the Holy Spirit's work. The *Westminster Larger Catechism* is clear on this:

Q. 59:

Who are made partakers of redemption through Christ?

A. 59:

Redemption is certainly applied, and effectually communicated, to all those for whom Christ hath purchased it; who are in time by the Holy Ghost enabled to believe in Christ according to the gospel.

Notice that the enabling work of the Holy Ghost is something "according to the gospel," and that it is very particular in its effectual communication of redemption. The first sign of life as the Holy Spirit regenerates is conversion. It is good news that God should promise conversion among the children of men.

2. The gospel is the authoritative announcement of this good news.

This good news must be published throughout the whole world.

This good news of the gracious work of the triune God must be published throughout the whole world. That this is the purpose of God was already hinted at in the time of the Old Testament, and also during the earthly ministry of the Lord.

Though not in a big way like the time of the New Testament, there was already an indication that God did gather His children from nations other than the Jewish nation. Before there was the Jewish nation, we read of Melchisedek, the priest of the Most High God and king of Salem, to whom even father Abraham gave tithe. Then we read of the conversion of Ruth of Moab, Rahab of Jericho, and the inhabitants of Nineveh under the preaching of Jonah. During the time of Moses we also read of initiatory rites for non-Jews to join the Passover:

And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof.⁷

In the time of our Lord's earthly ministry, He went to bear witness of the truth to the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4). He also ministered to the Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:25-30). The clearest indication of this purpose of God was in the great commission given to His church at the time of His ascension (Matt. 28:29ff.). The Book of the Acts of the Apostles records such activities of the church. All the New Testament books were the result of these activities.

Our *Canons*, in the Second Head and Article 5, state:

Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel.

The importance of the authoritative announcement of this news.

The gospel must be published with the authority from heaven above. In giving the great commission, Jesus gave the following preamble: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). ἐξουσία (exousia) is used here to refer to "authority." The one with authority in heaven and earth had commissioned this world-evangelism program. Peter's message to Cornelius, a Gentile, is a point in hand:

The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after

the baptism which John preached; How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God *to be* the Judge of quick and dead.⁸

When we hear of important news which would affect our very lives, we immediately and naturally want to know how authentic that news is. The gospel is no trivial news, as it involves our eternity. God never treated its announcement in this world lightly, but with great care has ensured that it is authoritatively announced in this world.

The apostle Paul spoke of this authoritative preaching of the gospel in Romans 10:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!⁹

The word for “preach” in our text is κηρῦσσω (kérussó) which speaks the official activity of a monarch’s herald. Such a herald goes in the name and authority of the king. The king shall not hold the herald guiltless if he should meddle with the message which He wants His citizens to receive with all clarity, confidence, and authority. It is not an overstatement to say that the unity, health, and strength of the nation or people depend on how reliable the heralds are, and how well the citizens receive their words. Where there is no authority there can be no trust, and where there is no trust there can be no good news of salvation.

3. The church alone is called to do that.

It was the church which the Lord Jesus commissioned to preach the gospel to all nations. This is obvious from the fact that the apostles themselves, who received that commission, were not able to live long enough to carry it out to completion. Only the church which continues to this day, to the end of time, is able to do that.

The apostle Paul called the church the “pillar and ground of truth,” as he understood the church to be the place where the truth of God’s Word is set forth and defended in its preaching and living. Without a faithful community, the Word of God cannot be set forth in a living way in this world. The church is not a regular gathering of people of the same interest to encourage one another in

that interest. It is a society of people which may be properly called a “chosen people, a royal priesthood, an holy nation” (I Pet. 2:9). The church has its own life and peculiar character, which can grow and develop as she serves her Lord in this world.

The Lord calls and sends preachers through the church. Besides the apostles, no one receives direct commission from the Lord. This order must be respected to maintain authority in the preaching today. The self-proclaimed preachers today do not have the authority from Christ, and they are bringing confusion to Christianity with their messages unauthenticated and non-illustrated in any community of God’s people. They must be clearly denounced by faithful churches for the sake and interest of the authority of the Word.

The officebearers, whom the Lord does give to the church, should be faithful to uphold the gospel in her preaching, discipline, and encouragement. In this way the gospel will go to the ends of the world for the gathering of the chosen ones of God out of every nation, tongue, and tribe.

B. Wherein Lies the Call of the Gospel?

1. The nature of a call.

A call is a communication of thoughts which demands a direct response.

Not all communications of thoughts constitute a call. Often we communicate just for the sake of passing information. At other times thoughts are communicated just for sheer delight. But when a communication demands a direct response, then such communication is a call.

A call consists of the following three essential elements: the identity of the caller (directly or implied) made known to the called, the identity of the called directly or implied in the call, a set of instructions (however simple) given and expected to be followed.

The different types of calls and their respective implications.

There are many different types of calls, depending on the who and what of the above three essential elements that constitute the call. For example, you can have a call of duty in cases where the caller and called stand in a permanent relationship of supervision. You can also have the call of filial piety, a business call, a social call, et cetera.

Our interest here in this paper is only on the call of the gospel as it is controverted with regards to the call as a well-meant offer. It must be noted here that we are not talking about the internal effectual call, which is the work of the Holy Spirit, whereby only the elect are called to regeneration and spiritual life. Here we are interested in the external, general call, whereby all men are called “promiscuously” (to use the term used in the *Canons*) to God and His fellowship. Heppe made this sharp distinction thus:

This calling is imparted only to the elect; God not only has His word proclaimed to them through man (*vocatio externa*), but also introduces it by the H. Spirit into their hearts and there sets up living communion with Christ (*vocatio interna*).—HEIDEGGER (XXI, 8): “Calling is of those elect and redeemed through Christ. These alone are so called that they are also attracted and created new and begotten. They alone are those for whom God not only strikes their ears by His word preached through men, but also attacks their hearts, opening them, writing His law in them, changing them and inflaming them to love him.”¹⁰

2. What is the call in relation to the gospel?

It is the present, authoritative call of the coming Judge, in saving the world, before the final Day of Judgment.

Jesus is the coming Judge as appointed by God. There will be a day of final judgment in which this present world shall come to an end and all men, both great and small, shall stand before him to be judged according to their works and the grace of God (Rev. 20:11-15).

But before that great and glorious day, Jesus is also the Savior of the world. He, therefore, at present, issues the call of the gospel for the purpose of saving this world. At Mars' hill, to the men of Athens, the apostle Paul reveals as much in his preaching:

And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead.¹¹

The essential elements in this call.

The essential elements in the call of the gospel are set forth in Paul's description of his own ministry:

And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.¹²

(a) It is a call to repentance of sins.

This sets forth the proper relationship between God who calls and men who receive the call. It is a relationship of the Creator and creatures who were created rational and moral. As such, when man falls into sin, the demand to repent is legitimate. It is therefore a call to the proper duty of man. Here it must be emphasized that actual sins must be dealt with to bring about genuine conversion.

This is what Hepppe called “the *vocatio universalis* and *naturalis*,” in contrast with “*vocatio specialis*, *supernaturalis* and *evangelica*.”¹³ The latter is a call addressing the chosen of God, while the former, men in general.

(b) It is a call to faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life; no man can come to fellowship with God except by Him (John 14:6). Coming to Christ is a proper duty of fallen man, whether or not he has a personal interest in Him. Arminius challenged the propriety of calling all men after the Fall to faith in Christ. He wrote:

I say and affirm, asseverate, profess and teach that Adam before his fall had not power to believe in Christ because there was no need of faith in Christ; and therefore that God could not have demanded this faith from him after his fall (to wit, by this right) because Adam had criminally lost that power to believe (“Apology or Defence ... Against Certain Theological Articles,” 19 in *The Writings of James Arminius* [1956], 1:333).¹⁴

Turretin answered Arminius’ question very well that, indeed, Adam had that power to believe in Christ even before the Fall, should God have been pleased then to reveal the coming Fall and redemption plan in Christ to him.¹⁵ The Fall made not only Adam but all his posterity unable to obey God’s commandment as well as to believe in Christ. This inability is no reason for the gospel call not to include calling men to their bounden duty. This controversy in Arminius’ day also demonstrates that the serious call of the gospel is a matter of the command anchored upon original rectitude of man and not a matter of the offer.

In this connection, it is improper, in the external, general call, to call all men to believe that Christ died for all men, head for head. The simple reason why this may not be done is that God would not require people to believe in something which is not true. It is simply not true that Christ died for all men head for head. If that be true, then all men would be saved, given the substitutionary nature of Christ’s Atonement.

Cunningham says:

This revelation [that the gospel be preached to every creature LCK] does not warrant us in telling them that Christ died for all and each

of the human race—a mode of preaching the gospel never adopted by our Lord and His apostles.¹⁶

Turretin rightly says:

Christ is not revealed in the Gospel as having died for me in particular; but only as having died in general for those who believe and repent. Hence I reason from that faith and repentance which I find actually to exist in my heart, that Christ has, indeed, died for me in particular. I know that he died for all who fly to him; hence I can and should infer that he died for me. That the faith commanded in the Gospel is not a direct and immediate belief that Christ died for me, appears from this consideration: that when it is enjoined either by Christ or his apostles, no mention is made of its being applied to this or that man, in particular. It is set forth only in a general relation to duty, or to blessings promised to those who believe; as in Matt.xvi.16. Peter, in his celebrated declaration of faith, professes no more than this: that he believes Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God. John vi.69: “We believe and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” Paul demands no more of those who believe unto salvation, than “to confess with the mouth the Lord Jesus, and to believe with the heart that God raised him from the dead.”—Rom.x.9. Thus, when the saints are commanded to believe in the Son of God, they are bound indeed to believe that Christ is the true Messiah, and to fly to him as the only author of salvation, to those who, through faith and repentance, betake themselves to him; and these acts must take place before they are bound to believe that Christ died for them.¹⁷

John Murray said the same thing concerning faith:

The faith of which we are now speaking is not the belief that we have been saved but trust in Christ in order that we may be saved. And it is of paramount concern to know that Christ is presented to all without distinction to the end that they may entrust themselves to him for salvation. The gospel offer is not restricted to the elect or even to those for whom Christ died. And the warrant of faith is not the conviction that we are elect or that we are among those for whom, strictly speaking, Christ died, but the fact that Christ, in the glory of his person, in the perfection of his finished work, and in the efficacy of his exalted activity as King and Saviour, is presented to us in the full, free, and unrestricted overture of the gospel. It is not as persons convinced of our election nor as persons convinced that we are the special objects of God’s love that we commit ourselves to him but as lost sinners. We entrust ourselves to him not because we believe we have been saved but as lost sinners in order that we may be saved.¹⁸

While it is improper to call all men to believe that Christ died for all of them, it is certainly proper to call all men to believe that salvation of mankind is totally the work of God through Christ alone, and He saves whom He will. Everyone is under obligation to believe that, whether or not he or she has an interest in Christ. Having an obligation does not mean that one has the ability to do so. In fact, none has the ability to do that without the grace of God. Faith here is the gift of God. This faith necessarily manifested in this way at this stage of its development will blossom into a confession that Christ died for one personally in time.

This call has no objective indication of God's grace and desire to save all to whom the call comes.

Jesus said that many are called but few are chosen (Matt. 20:16). It is only the few chosen ones who are effectually called by the Holy Spirit in their hearts to salvation (Rom. 8:30). The many who are called are called by the general call of the gospel.

In the general call of the gospel, men are called to seek salvation from God. This is their proper duty to do as creatures created by God after His image and likeness and who had grievously fallen into sin and miseries. This call is not without the setting forth of the gospel as we have earlier described in this paper—a gospel of salvation by the triune God according to His own sovereign, particular grace.

As to whether God would save everyone who hears this gospel call, there is no indication. However, there is the particular, unconditional promise of the gospel, whereby God promised to save all those who truly repent and trust in His Son Jesus Christ, which must accompany the preaching of the gospel as well. This promise is peculiarly designed for those who have shown signs of God's grace in their lives.

Chapter 2

What is the Well-Meant Offer of Salvation?

As we enter into this chapter to consider the teaching of the “well-meant offer of salvation,” we must immediately take note that many Reformed writers of the past did use the term “offer” but in a different sense than the word is commonly used today. Prof. Engelsma noted:

In the past, the word “offer” from the Latin word “*offero*” was used by Reformed men to describe God’s activity in the preaching of the gospel because the word has originally the meaning “bring to (someone),” “present (something or someone to somebody).” All Reformed men hold that Christ is presented in the preaching to everyone who hears the preaching. In this sense He is “offered” in the gospel.¹

For the purpose of our paper we shall understand the well-meant offer to be as given by Prof. B. Gritters thus:

The “free offer of the gospel” is the teaching that God offers salvation to all men when the gospel is preached promiscuously to all. The free offer teaches that God graciously and sincerely offers salvation to all who hear the preaching, and honestly and sincerely desires to save all of them.²

That the dispute is over the matter of God desiring the salvation of all men in the preaching of the gospel to all, John Murray also acknowledged in his booklet *The Free Offer of the Gospel*:

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 reprobate” ...³

A. The Arminian Idea of the Well-Meant Offer

To begin with, we must note that the Arminians do not believe that the will in the fallen state can will any saving good before calling. In “The Opinions of the Remonstrants” submitted to the Synod of Dordt, the Arminians state in C, 4:

4. The will in the fallen state, before calling, does not have the power and the freedom to will any saving good. And therefore we deny that the freedom to will saving good as well as evil is present to the will in every state.⁴

To surprise us further how the Arminians could sound most orthodox like many today, let me quote the Third Article of the Remonstrance of 1610:

3. that man does not have saving faith of himself nor by the power of his own free will, since he in the state of apostasy and sin cannot of and through himself think, will or do any good which is truly good (such as is especially saving faith); but that it is necessary that he be regenerated by God, in Christ, through his Holy Spirit, and renewed in understanding, affections or will, and all powers, in order that he may rightly understand, meditate upon, will, and perform that which is truly good, according to the word of Christ, John 15:5, “Without me ye can do nothing.”⁵

Reading the above articles of the Arminians all by themselves, one may not realize their error in the third point about “total depravity.” However, when one combines this third article with their fourth on the conversion of man, one begins to realize that their idea of the will of man is such that it is ultimately the final arbiter of its own salvation. Without the intervening of God’s sufficient grace, man is doomed, but with it in the hearing of the gospel, man can still resist the grace of God to his own condemnation. We read in their Opinion C, 6 thus:

6. Although according to the most free will of God the disparity of divine grace is very great, nevertheless the Holy Spirit confers, or is ready to confer, as much grace to all men and to each man to whom the Word of God is preached as is sufficient for promoting the conversion of men in its steps. Therefore sufficient grace for faith and conversion falls to the lot not only of those whom God is said to will to save according to the decree of absolute election, but also of those who are not actually converted.⁶

In the mind of the Arminians, whatever God may do in His grace, man’s will still stands sovereign and able to reject that grace if he chooses (Opinion C, 8). Even the so-called efficacious grace of God is not irresistible (Opinion C, 5). As this error can be clearly seen only when the doctrine of the Fall of man is compared to that of the conversion of man, the Synod of Dordt dealt with it in the Third and Fourth Heads of doctrine together. It is good to read Rejection VI of these Heads to have a better idea of this error:

That in the true conversion of man no new qualities, powers, or gifts can be infused by God into the will, and that therefore faith through which we are first converted and because of which we are called believers, is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of

man, and that it cannot be said to be a gift, except in respect of the power to attain to this faith.

Man's will needs God's in order to be saved, but God's will also needs man's before He can save a man. Thus we have Opinion C, 8 and 9 of the Arminians:

8. Whomever God calls to salvation, he calls seriously, that is, with a sincere and completely unhyprocritical intention and will to save; nor do we assent to the opinion of those who hold that God calls certain ones externally whom He does not will to call internally, that is, as truly converted, even before the grace of calling has been rejected.

9. There is not in God a secret will which so contradicts the will of the same revealed in the Word that according to it (that is, the secret will) He does not will the conversion and salvation of the greatest part of those whom He seriously calls and invites by the Word of the Gospel and by His revealed will; and we do not here, as some say, acknowledge in God a holy simulation, or a double person.⁷

The Arminians were very clear about what they believed. God indeed does offer salvation to all men. In fact, even by His sufficient grace in the offer, He empowers the will of all who hear the gospel so that they are now able not only to accept, but also to reject the offered salvation. God's decree of election is based on His foreknowledge of what man would do with this offer. If a man choose to believe then, God elects him to be saved; if not, then he is reprobated. A. C. De Jong said as much:

He is a reprobate because he does not want to believe, because he wills to live without God, and because he resists the redemptive will of God revealed in the gospel call. His unbelief, his rejection, his resistance bears an indirect relation to the will of God's decree similar to God's "permissive will" in relation to sin.⁸

It must also be noted here that, as far as the content of the gospel is concerned, the Arminians also believe that Christ died for all men head for head to make the atonement available for all men. Christ by His atonement only made salvation *possible*. The salvation benefits for all men are there, and they are applied only to those who accept the offer by their own free will. The *Canons* reject the following error:

Synod rejects the errors of those who use the difference between meriting and appropriating, to the end that they may instill into the minds of the imprudent and inexperienced this teaching, that God, as far as He is concerned, has been minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ; but that, while some obtain the pardon of sin and eternal life and others do not, this difference depends on their own free will, which joins itself to the grace that is offered without exception, and that it is not dependent on the special

gift of mercy, which powerfully works in them, that they rather than others should appropriate unto themselves this grace.⁹

Notice the Arminian tendency to make man the final arbiter of his own salvation and God someone "... minded of applying to all equally the benefits gained by the death of Christ." Arminians are not fully convinced that all men are truly hell-deserving and that salvation is fully of the Lord, who saves effectually whom He wills.

But now we must turn to the Reformed "offer," which is essentially the same as the Arminian's, except that they still claim that they believe in the Five Points of Calvinism, and that any apparent discrepancy is due to the mystery and paradox of God, which the truly humble and pious should not dare to challenge.

B. The So-Called Reformed Offer

1. Using the same term "offer" led to confusion in the Reformed camp.

As has been noted earlier, there were Reformed writers who used the term "offer." Even in the Reformed confessions we find this term being used. For examples:

Article 9 of the III/IV Heads of Doctrine of the *Canons of Dordt* reads:

It is not the fault of the gospel, nor of Christ offered therein, nor of God, who calls men by the gospel and confers upon them various gifts, that those who are called by the ministry of the Word refuse to come and be converted.

Article 14 of the III/IV Heads of Doctrine of the *Canons of Dordt* reads:

Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure, but because it is in reality conferred upon him, breathed and infused into him; nor even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will consent to the terms of salvation and actually believe in Christ, but because He who works in man both to will and to work, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.

The *French Confession*, Article XIII:

XIII. We believe that all that is necessary for our salvation was offered and communicated to us in Jesus Christ. He is given to us for our salvation, and 'is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and

sanctification, and redemption:’ so that if we refuse him, we renounce the mercy of the Father, in which alone we can find a refuge.

Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 67: What is effectual calling?

A. 67: Effectual calling is the work of God’s almighty power and grace, whereby (out of his free and special love to his elect, and from nothing in them moving him thereunto) he doth, in his accepted time, invite and draw them to Jesus Christ, by his word and Spirit; savingly enlightening their minds, renewing and powerfully determining their wills, so as they (although in themselves dead in sin) are hereby made willing and able freely to answer his call, and to accept and embrace the grace offered and conveyed therein.

Heppe quoting Olevian also used this term:

For the elect on the other hand, who in view of the law and the covenant of works see themselves in the first instance in the same situation as the rejected, they are a preparation for faith, since by His prevenient grace God leads the elect out of darkness into light by causing a serious longing for redemption to proceed from these terrors of conscience, and then holding before them the promise of grace in the Gospel and causing what is offered them from without to be brought into their hearts by the H. Spirit (OLEVIAN, p. 252).¹⁰

From Article 14 of the III/IV Heads of Doctrine, it is apparent that the divines at Dordt were aware of the Arminian usage of this term as it rejects the idea of offering to be accepted or rejected at one’s pleasure. It is also clear from Article 9 of the same Heads, that the phrase “Christ offered therein” refers to the Christ set forth in the gospel.

In the *French Confession*, the phrase “was offered and communicated” also conveys the idea of setting forth to be communicated rather than to be accepted or rejected.

In the *Westminster Larger Catechism*, grace is said to be offered and conveyed in the call of the gospel. The phrase “and conveyed” is to be taken as an immediate explanation that the word “offered” must not be misconstrued as an offer in the Arminian sense, but rather has the idea of “conveyed.” That this should be the case should not surprise us, as the Westminster divines were men who knew and spoke highly of the *Canons of Dordt*. Dordt had said that faith was not offered, and how could Westminster say that grace was offered without any qualification?

In the above quotation from Heppe, he did not mean by “offered” the Arminian understanding, which involves the choice of man, because in the same section he quoted from HEIDEGGER (XXI, 12) thus:

Quite otherwise than the reprobate the elect are called to salvation in such a way that when called they are also affected, drawn and led, and that according to the eternal purpose and testament; and absolutely, although not without means, which however as regards the called are not conditions within their sphere of choice, but God's free benefits.¹¹

Surely Heppe did not have the idea of offer in the sense of people being given a choice, but offer in the sense of setting forth "to be brought into their hearts by the H. Spirit."

In any case, it can be observed down through the history of the Presbyterian churches, that this term "offer," as found in their *Confession*, has provided a hiding place for those with Arminian tendency within the camp. A. A. Hodge, in answering the objection that his truly Reformed view of the design of the atonement was inconsistent with the doctrine of the general offer of the gospel, failed to point out the proper understanding of the term "offer," but instead went on, by various means, to show that these two concepts (one Reformed and the other Arminian) are not contradictory, but can be harmonized.¹²

The Dutch Reformed churches are also not spared of this error. In 1924 the Christian Reformed Church adopted the "Three Points" of common grace. In the first point, which speaks of God having a certain non-saving, favorable attitude towards all men, synod finds support for this in articles from the *Canons*, which she claimed to set forth "the general offer of the gospel."¹³

Though many in Reformed and Presbyterian churches today do hold to this erroneous idea, we must take note of what Prof. Hanko, a professor in Church History, has to say:

Quite consistently the doctrine of the free offer has been held by heretics who were condemned by the church. Quite consistently the church has refused to adopt any such doctrine. The weight of history is surely behind those who deny that the free offer is the teaching of Scripture.¹⁴

2. Essentially the Reformed "offer" is similar to the Arminian idea of the offer.

That the Reformed "offer" is similar to that of the Arminians is proudly acknowledged by one of their advocates. Hoekema put words into the mouths of the divines of Dordt as addressing the Arminians thus:

"We quite agree with you that God seriously, earnestly, unhypocritically, and most genuinely calls to salvation all to whom the gospel comes. In stating this, we even use the very same words you used in your document: *serio vocantur* ('are seriously called'). But we insist that we can hold to this well-meant gospel call while at the same time maintaining the doctrines of election and limited or

definite atonement. We do not feel the need for rejecting the doctrine of election and repudiating the teaching of definite atonement in order to affirm the well-meant gospel call."¹⁵

This also means that the Reformed "offer" constantly runs into conflict with the other Reformed doctrines, especially those set down by the *Canons of Dordt*. This difficulty is expected, as the whole *Canons* was formulated against the Arminians' idea of the freedom and power of the human will. The doctrine of the well-meant offer is exactly built upon this doctrine of man's free will to save himself.

In the offer, God shows grace to all to whom the gospel comes.

Here they believe that God shows grace to anyone who hears the gospel to begin with. They could have gathered this belief from the *Canons* where we read, "to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel."¹⁶

Their idea is that God must have shown these people favor since He gives them a chance to be saved, while to many others the gospel has never even come once in all their lifetime.

This is a mistaken notion, as the good pleasure of God does not necessarily speak of His grace. For example, we may say that it is God's good pleasure to cast the wicked unbelievers to hell in His just judgment. There is no show of grace in such good pleasure of God.

God has His own purpose in sending the gospel to some and not to others. There is no indication of grace in this activity of God, just as there is no indication of grace when God sends rain or sunshine upon the wicked. The grace of God is not in things.

This is much like the Arminians, who spoke of the common sufficient grace which enables men to make a decision for Christ.

The *Canons* say:

But that others who are called by the gospel obey the call and are converted is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will, whereby one distinguishes himself above others equally furnished with grace sufficient for faith and conversion, as the proud heresy of Pelagius maintains; but it must be wholly ascribed to God, who as He has chosen His own from eternity in Christ, so he confers upon them faith and repentance, rescues them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His own Son, that they may show forth the praises of Him who hath called them out of darkness into His marvelous light; and may glory, not in themselves, but in the Lord, according to the testimony of the apostles in various places.¹⁷

In the offer, God expresses His desire to save all to whom the gospel comes.

The Reformed “offer” also taught that in the offer of salvation and grace, God shows a desire to save all who receive the offer.

In his review of John Murray’s booklet entitled *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, Matthew Winzer states:

It appears that a dispute had arisen with regard to a previous report on the subject which had predicated “that God *desires* the salvation of all men.” Prof. Murray was confident that such a desire could be predicated of God, and set about to establish a Biblical case for the position.¹⁸

Mr. Winzer did a very thorough work in this review and convincingly showed that John Murray had failed to show that God desires the salvation of all men in the preaching of the gospel. Readers are highly recommended to read this review.

3. An important difference between the Arminian and Reformed “offer” is the latter’s belief in antinomy.

What is the belief in antinomy?

As the name implies, antinomy is a belief that certain things are beyond the realm of logical law (νομος—nomos), so that they cannot and need not be harmonized by existing laws of logic. To people who believe in such things, others are rationalists when they try to harmonize things which the former classified as antinomous.

In this world of increasing superficiality, there are more antinomists around than before. Winzer exposed one in R. Scott Clark in his review and also charged him for unjustly making John Murray an antinomist.¹⁹

The two tracks of antinomy in this Reformed “offer.”

As has been hinted earlier, the Reformed “offer” is so disharmonious with the doctrines of grace that there can be quite a few sets of antinomies which can be established, if one wishes to do so. For example, the Amyraldian controversy could have been settled simply by invoking the antinomian categories. In fact, all disputes, great and small, may be similarly settled. Another disharmony was expressed by Mr. Tom Wells thus:

The difficulty over the free offer may be put like this: since God has chosen to save some and to pass others by, how can it be said that *he offers salvation to those he has decided not to save? Doesn’t this make God of two minds, wanting all to be saved on one hand, and*

*desiring only his elect to be saved on the other? Anyone who cannot see that there is some difficulty here must have done very little thinking about theology.*²⁰

Antinomists tend to despise the logic of others, while promoting their own. De Jong wrote of Hoeksema thus:

Hoeksema's view may possess logical symmetry but it is not Scripturally informed. It unsettles the gospel truth that God wills that his call to salvation be accepted in the way of faith. It renders God's gospel call questionable.²¹

4. Arminianism within the covenant.

One of the hallmarks of the Reformed faith is its teaching on covenant theology. God establishes His friendship with His people in the line of generations. So it is true that God calls His children out of our children and also out of those in heathen darkness of this world. This is exactly what is meant that He is the Savior of the world. From here, does it follow that gospel presentation to those within the church is different from that to the heathen nations?

Yet, there is among some Reformed people the idea that, as far as the gospel preached to people outside of the covenant is concerned, the use of the concept "offer" is un-Reformed and Arminian, but when the same thing is done within the covenant, it is permissible. In other words, to children born in the covenant, we may and must say to them, God offers to save you from sin and hell on condition that you repent of your sins and believe in Christ. This way of presenting the gospel of salvation certainly makes one's repentance and faith *outside* of God's grace of salvation. In fact, it makes all of salvation *dependent upon* man's repentance and faith. This is a typical Arminian way of presenting the gospel as shown above.

This conditional theology is another form of Reformed "offer" which we have to expose here. But there are other so-called Reformed men, like A. C. De Jong, who openly advocate the well-meant offer of salvation whether within or without the covenant.

The calling God seriously and unfeignedly offers salvation in Jesus Christ upon the condition of repentance and faith to all the elect and non-elect sinners to whom he mercifully sends his gospel preachers.²²

Chapter 3

Is the Well-Meant Offer of Salvation a Serious Call?

A. The Nature of an Offer

As it is evident that there has been a change in the use of the term “offer” in the development of theology, or should we say a failure to make sharp distinction of the various usages of this term, it is necessary here to consider how this term is commonly understood and used today, before considering the legitimacy of its usage for the serious call of the gospel.

1. The constituent elements of a well-meant offer.

We are using the “well-meant offer” to indicate the present day usage of this term “offer.” The well-meant offer has the following essential elements:

a. The availability of the thing offered.

Now if a man come to us and offer us something either for sale or for an exchange for something else which we might have, our natural understanding would be that he has the thing for us should we decide to accept his offer. So if God offers salvation to anyone on the basis of that man’s fulfilling a certain condition, then He must have that salvation ready for that man should the man decide to accept that offer and fulfil that condition.

b. The willingness of the owner to part with it.

An offer also suggests that the owner is willing to part with what he offers to another should that condition be fulfilled. If ever there is a fall-through in this transaction, it would not be because the owner was not willing, but because the one to whom he made the offer, for some reason, is either unwilling or unable to fulfil the condition of the offer. In other words, the owner is all ready to close the deal, but the ball is now fully in the court of the one offered.

c. The favor shown by the owner to those receiving the offer.

When something good is offered to one person rather than to others, it is only natural to consider that some favor is shown, here, to those offered over against others who are not offered. It is evident that the “gospel offer” is not shown to all men that ever live. Is it fair to these neglected ones if salvation is a matter of the offer?

d. The desire of the owner that those receiving the offer may accept it.

Since this is a well-meant offer, the owner must have the desire that the transaction be closed. If an offer is not closed, it is only because the owner has no power over the free-will of the one offered.

e. An option given to one receiving the offer.

An offer is not something which carries with it an obligation to accept. In other words, rejecting an offer is not a morally wrong act in itself. One has the option to accept or not to accept.

f. Condition of prerequisite implied in the well-meant offer.

In a well-meant offer, the realization of the things offered is conditioned upon the acceptance of the offer and the fulfilment of the condition stipulated in the offer. This condition is a condition of prerequisite. If the acceptance of an offer is absent, there is no carrying out of what is offered. An unconditional undertaking is not called an offer, but an unconditional promise.

2. The well-meant offer is a kind of call in the sense that it is a communication of thoughts that expects a response from its recipients.

That there is a call in the gospel proclamation, no one should doubt. It would be a fatal error if all the church could do is simply set forth the truth without the call to believe and submit to it. This would be a church without discipline of its own members, and thus a false church. And when the gospel is brought to those who have never heard it before, should there not also be a call? A call is important.

The well-meant offer is also a type of calling. One need only go to an open market to understand what is the call of a sale-offer. One is sometimes, literally, called into a business talk with another. Then one feels the pressure to respond in some way—"yes" or "no." The well-meant offer of the gospel and of salvation is a kind of call. Just because it is a call, and the Bible also reveals that the gospel proclamation includes a call, does not mean that the well-meant offer is a legitimate call as prescribed in Scripture.

B. Wherein the Well-Meant Offer is Not a Serious Call of the Gospel.

We must now compare the well-meant offer with what we've already written about the true call of the gospel, to see if the former is indeed a serious call of the gospel.

1. The call of God must be sincere, but in the well-meant offer there is no sincerity.

Now, we are not talking here about the insincerity of Christian believers who preach the gospel using the well-meant offer method. It is possible to do a thing wrongly and ignorantly and yet with sincerity. We are talking about the sincerity of *God*, if *He* should issue the well-meant offer of salvation to all.

a. Grace (God's unmerited favor) is said to be shown to all who hear the gospel, yet the merit of repentance and faith is required for salvation.

Some may object that by the grace shown in the hearing of the gospel they do not mean the saving grace of God, but the common grace of God, which is non-saving. This distinction is the invention of men not found in Scripture, and it confuses God's people, so that the unmerited character of grace is removed. There is no comfort of grace if there is a grace of God that does not save. It is by grace that we are saved.

When repentance and faith are demanded as prerequisites for salvation, they become something *outside* of the pale of salvation and must be met by a man first *before* God's salvation will start operating in his life. What is demanded becomes meritorious for salvation.

There are those who argue that this faith and repentance are the gifts of God and are part of the salvation benefits that God has purchased for His elect people, as the *Canons of Dordt* teach. Therefore, they are not the merit attained by those who are saved, but they are earned by Christ Himself on the cross. Indeed, the *Canons of Dordt* teach that repentance and faith are gifts of God's grace purchased at the cross and flow from the election of God. It is exactly for that reason that the *Canons* deny that they are conditions as prerequisites for election and salvation.

This election was not founded upon foreseen faith, and the obedience of faith, holiness, or any other good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which it depended: but men are chosen *to* faith and *to* the obedience of faith, holiness, etc. Therefore election is the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself, as its fruits and effects, according to that of the apostle: "He hath chosen us (not because we were, but) that we should be holy and without blame before him in love" (Eph. 1:4).¹

The will of God to save is never conditioned upon what men would do. God is the sovereign Lord who saves whom He wills by the means which He has appointed. Ours is to seek His mercy and discover His grace, never to put Him in subjection to our will and fancy.

b. God has no intention to save all to whom the gospel comes, as the well-meant offer suggests.

Now, we are not saying that the serious call of the gospel does not call all to whom the gospel comes, to seek salvation in Christ by way of their repentance and faith. That has always been man's obligation to do since the Fall in Eden. The gospel makes clear to everyone his calling as a fallen creature. But the well-meant offer speaks of God's *intention* to save all, provided they all believe. God promised to save all who believe, but He does not offer to save all who would believe. The former exalt God as sovereign, while the latter subject God's will to man's will.

Hepple clearly shows that it is the Reformed faith not to make the outward calling in such a fashion that there is a possibility of the "counsel of God being perhaps rendered futile by man," which evidently the well-meant offer does upon close examination.

Moreover outward Church calling is not imparted to the non-elect in such a wise that God wished to present them with faith, should they refrain from resisting the activity of the H. Spirit. Otherwise the possibility would arise of a counsel of God being perhaps rendered futile by man. Besides it is to be noted that man can only resist the H. Spirit.—HEIDEGGER (XXI, 10): "Nor does God altogether call particular reprobate in such wise that he has decreed and wills to give them faith and repentance just like the elect, provided only they do not resist the H. Spirit's call, as is the leptologia (frivolity) of some. There are no decrees of God which men or any creature can frustrate. They are altogether effectual and have a most definite outcome. If He has decreed to give to some faith and repentance, He bestows them in time through the Word and the H. Spirit. In that case all men of themselves and by their nature resist the H. Spirit: Rom. 8:7 (the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be).²

Since salvation is the work of God alone, an offer of salvation is an offer of what God Himself would do. If God sincerely offers to save someone, why would he at the same time want to harden his heart? A. C. De Jong wrote that this change in God's attitude is not towards all men, but only towards those who have persistently rejected the offer. In fact, God even withdraws His offer and makes His Word to them become "the instrument of his wrath" hardening their hearts in its process. Thus the well-meant-offer men make the attitude of God change according to man's fancy.

Others disbelieve, they reject the call to salvation. God passes them by with the saving operations of his insuperable grace. But God continues to call them back to salvation. Sometimes this offer is withdrawn, and God's word becomes the instrument of his wrath and he hardens the impenitent sinner. This hardening action is the present actualization of the final judgment. Preaching, gospel preaching, is such a serious matter that it forms a prelude of the end.

The present hardening activities of God constitute the eschatological prelude of the end. They are to be viewed as anticipatory events of the Messianic judgment. Rather than disproving the existence of a well-meant offer of salvation the “hardening” passages prove precisely the opposite. God so seriously and genuinely wills that his call to salvation be heeded that he hardens those who reject his offer. It is the Lord’s redemptive earnestness which occasions these eschatological preludes of the Messianic judgment.³

c. God is said to desire the salvation of all who hear the gospel, yet He gives the necessary faith only to some and not to all. Can God be sincere about His desire?

This controversy is not about whether the gospel should be preached to all men and that all should be called to repentance and faith and that the promise of the gospel should be made known to all. All agree to the above, but the debate is over the will and desire of God in the call of the gospel. Tom Wells, having studied the controversy, said:

Those who have not studied the matter will be surprised that relatively few texts speak to the subject directly. The reason is this: the question is not about whether God calls all men to faith and repentance or whether the gospel is preached. The question is rather: does God *in any sense* will or desire the salvation of the non-elect who hear the gospel?⁴

Repentance and faith are so integrally connected with salvation that the desire for the latter cannot be conceived of without the desire for the former. If God desires to save a person, He will also give him repentance and faith. Repentance and faith are part of salvation and not conditions of salvation.

Evangelical repentance is the gift of free grace; faith is the gift of God. What is God’s, as a gift to bestow, cannot be man’s duty to perform as a condition of salvation. Those who are invited to look to Christ, to come to Him for salvation, are very minutely described: they are the weary and heavy laden with sin, the penitent, the hungry and thirsty soul, etc. These are the characters invited to come and believe in Christ, and not all men (Matt. 11:28; Isa. 55:1; Mark 2:17).⁵

To those who still insist that the idea of the well-meant offer is all right so long as we maintain that repentance and faith are the gifts of God, William Cunningham has this to say:

Evangelical Arminians profess to ascribe to the agency of the Spirit the production of faith and regeneration in men individually; and seem to exclude, as Calvinists do, the co-operation of man in the exercise of his natural powers in the origin or commencement of the great spiritual change which is indispensable to salvation. But

whatever they may hold, or think they hold, upon this point, they cannot consistently—without renouncing their Arminianism, and admitting the peculiar principles of Calvinism—make the agency of the Spirit the real, determining, efficacious cause of the introduction of spiritual life into the soul; and must ascribe, in some way or other,—palpably or obscurely,—some co-operation to man himself, even in the commencement of this work. And if the commencement of the work be God's, in such a sense that His agency is the determining and certainly efficacious cause of its being effected in every instance, then this necessarily implies the exercise of His sovereignty in the matter in a much higher and more definite sense than any in which Arminians can ever ascribe it to Him. It is not disputed that, whatever God does in time He decreed or resolved to do from eternity: and, therefore, men, in consistency, must either deny that God does this,—that the agency of His Spirit is the cause of the implantation of spiritual life.—of the commencement of the process which leads to the production of faith and regeneration in any other sense than as a mere partial concurring cause co-operating with man—or else they must admit all the peculiar doctrines of Calvinism in regard to grace and predestination.”⁶

Making repentance and faith the gifts of God is no guarantee that one is soundly Reformed. One is still an Arminian if he advocates co-operation between God and man for the commencement of the spiritual life in one sense or another. And that is what the well-meant offer suggests.

2. God's call comes from on high, but in the well-meant offer there is no authority.

As observed above, the gospel call is the creative call of God in the new creation. Converts are said to be new creations of God in Scripture (II Cor. 5:17). Then they are also called those who are born again (John 3:3, 5). Salvation is compared in Scripture with nothing less than the great wonder of creation! What power brings such things into being? He commanded and they were so. He called everything into being out of nothing. There is power and authority in the call of God. “... God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17).

The well-meant offer as a gospel call lacks the power and character to call into being what is not. Hear what Christopher Ness wrote:

If fallen man must be drawn to goodness, then hath he no free-will to good ... That moral persuasion will not bring a soul to Christ: that man cannot come himself, but must be drawn, is proved from John 6:44: “No man can come to Me. except the Father which hath sent Me draw him.” Drawing is a bringing of anything out of its course and channel by an influence from without, and not from an innate power

or principle from within. In Sol. Song 1:4, it is not said “lead,” but “draw:” in drawing there is less will and more power than in leading: and though God draws us strongly, yet He doth it sweetly. As we are drawn, we have not a free-will to good, else man fell in his understanding only, and not in his will; yet are we volunteers (Psa. 110:3), a willing people; not that Christ finds us so, but makes us so “in the day of His power,” and when He speaks to us with a strong hand (Isa. 8:11). We are naturally haters of God, and at enmity with Him (Rom. 1:30: 8:7), but the Spirit gives a new power to the soul, and then acts and influences that power to good: so draws God-haters to love Him. This is more than a bare persuasion to a stone to be *warm*, for God takes away the “heart of stone,” and gives a “heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:26). God the Spirit gives the inclination to come, and the very power of coming to Christ; and Christ finds nothing that is good in us (Rom. 7:18).⁷

R. C. Sproul spoke of a debate he once had at an Arminian seminary on the issue of predestination. At one juncture he pointed out the fact that the Greek word, ἑλκύση (helkysē), as found in John 6:44, has the idea of “drag,” suggesting that the Father compels men to come to Christ. The opponent then quoted its usage by a Greek poet, where water was said to be “drawn” from the well, suggesting that it is ridiculous to say that water was dragged from the well. Sproul then responded that it was more ridiculous to suggest that the water in the well was “wooed” to come forth, as the Arminians would like to suggest that the gospel call does just that—to bring faith out of a person.⁸ The serious call of the gospel has power to draw, which the well-meant offer lacks.

Chapter 4

Conclusion

In conclusion, may I begin by quoting Dr. John Gerstner again, who wrote that the well-meant offer of salvation, as supported and promoted by Murray and Stonehouse and the churches they represent, “does incalculable damage to the cause of Jesus Christ and the proclamation of His gospel.”

So what can we do now?

A. Preach the Gospel Zealously and Issue the Serious Call Faithfully

The darkness of the false gospel is best dispelled by the light of the true. Churches must be well versed in the doctrines of grace and be unashamed to promote them by all means, especially in the preaching at worship services. Believers should stop worrying about offending people when they are exalting their God in what they testify.

Preaching must always come with the call to repentance of sins and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ. It does not matter whether the hearers are within or outside of the covenant. This call is natural and universal. In this way, as Christ is also pointed out, there is proclaimed the particular promise of God of His grace towards those who believe.

As the way of the cross is not without trials and temptation, we must guard against discouragement and unfaithfulness in the course of our labor. We must also learn how to encourage one another in the cause of Christ.

B. Expose the Evil Tendency of the Well-Meant Offer

The well-meant offer is man-centered in approach, in that it seeks to get man to make a decision—to accept the offer. As such there is a tendency to water down the content of the gospel or to sweeten it and make it more acceptable to the hearers. It is God’s truth that saves. It kills and makes alive. The truth about man must be told. The truth about the end of the world and the coming of Christ in judgment must be proclaimed courageously.

God’s people must be warned against the serious error of maintaining that God has two irreconcilable, conflicting wills. The advocates of the well-meant offer rush in where even the Arminians fear to tread. The Arminians were at pain to point in one of their Opinions that “... we do not here, as some say, acknowledge in God a holy simulation, or a double person.”¹ Today the

supporters of the well-meant offer, with false piety and humility, claim that their minds are too puny to understand the conflicting mind of God, thus in effect making God “a double person.” Suggesting two conflicting wills in God would ultimately rob God’s people of their assurance of salvation.

Finally, about their belief in antinomy and its result in the careless handling of God’s Word, we should listen to Robert Reymond:

... the proffered definition of “paradox” (or antinomy) as two truths which are both unmistakably taught in the Word of God but which also cannot possibly be reconciled before the bar of human reason is itself inherently problematical, for the one who so defines the term is suggesting by implication that either he knows by means of an omniscience that is not normally in human possession that no one is capable of reconciling the truths in question or he has somehow universally polled everyone who has ever lived, is living now, and will live in the future and has discovered that not one has been able, is able, or will be able to reconcile the truths. But it goes without saying that neither of these conditions is or can be true. Therefore, the very assertion that there are paradoxes, so defined, in Scripture is seriously flawed by the terms of the definition itself. There is no way to know if such a phenomenon is present in Scripture. Merely because any number of scholars have failed to reconcile to their satisfaction two given truths of Scripture is no proof that the truths cannot be harmonized. And if just one scholar claims to have reconciled the truths to his or her own satisfaction, this *ipso facto* renders the definition both gratuitous and suspect.²

C. Point Out the Good Effect of the Serious Gospel Call upon Christian Life and Worship

The serious gospel call addresses the conscience of fallen man, which is how the Law brings one to Christ. When our Lord was on earth He spoke as one with authority, unlike the Pharisees and Scribes. Today in that pervasive well-meant offer the preaching is robbed of its essential authority. God’s people need to be assured by the commands of God, not an offer.

When our salvation is fully in the hands of God, would we not be humble before Him and find our complete trust and reliance upon Him? To whom shall we go? He has the words of life. The serious call of the gospel promotes the healthy sense of complete and utter reliance upon God alone for salvation.

Knowing that the immutable God saves in the way of our repentance of sins and faith in His Son. Jesus Christ, helps us to be more focused in our lives. We must deal with sins in our lives. And

dealing with sins we must come humbly to the cross. Knowing our infinite debt we seek to live our thankful life.

Having a constant sense of God's greatness and of our total dependence upon Him sets for us the proper atmosphere for true worship. The proper serious gospel call calls us to the true and joyful worship of the God of our salvation. Amen.

Notes

Introduction & Chapter One

1. R. C. Sproul, *Chosen By God* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1986), pp. 208-212.
2. David J. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism & the Call of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1994), pp. viii-ix.
3. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, Ruskin House, Museum Street, 1950), p. 515.
4. *Belgic Confession*, Art. 14.
5. Psalm 49:6-9.
6. Genesis 3:15.
7. Exodus 12:48.
8. Acts 10:36-42.
9. Romans 10:13-15.
10. Heinrich Heppe. *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 512.
11. Acts 17:30-31.
12. Acts 20:20-21.
13. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 510.
14. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol. 1, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 1992), p. 571.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 571-573.
16. William Cunningham, *Historical Theology: A Review of the Principal Doctrinal Discussions in the Christian Church Since the Apostolic Age*, vol. II (Banner of Truth Trust, 1969), p. 345.
17. Francis Turretin, *The Atonement of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), pp. 179-181.

18. John Murray, *Redemption: Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955), pp. 134-135. It is interesting to note that Murray used both the terms “gospel offer” and “presented” here.

Chapter Two

1. Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism and the Call of the Gospel*, p. 48.
2. Barrett L. Gritters, *Grace Uncommon: A Protestant Reformed Look at Common Grace* (Byron Center, MI: The Evangelism Society of the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, n.d.), p. 13.
3. John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Free Offer of the Gospel* (New Jersey: Lewis J. Grotenhuis, Belvidere Road), p. 3.
4. Peter Y. De Jong, (ed.), *Crisis in the Reformed Churches: Essays in Commemoration of the Great Synod of Dort, 1618-1619*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Fellowship, Inc.), p. 226.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 208.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 226.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 227.
8. A. C. De Jong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer: The Views of H. Hoeksema and K. Schilder* (Franeker, Netherlands: T. Wever, 1954), p. 130.
9. *Canons of Dordt*, Head II, Art. 6.
10. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 513-514.
11. *Ibid.*, 514.
12. Archibald A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (Edinburgh, New York: T. Nelson And Sons, Paternoster Row), pp. 385-390.
13. Herman Hanko, *The History of the Free Offer* (Grandville, MI: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches), p. 183.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
15. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved By Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), p. 78. Note: No one reading Art. 8 of Head III/IV and the rest of the *Canons* can imagine the divines of Dordt making such a statement.

16. *Canons*, Head II, Art. 5.

17. *Canons*, Heads III/IV, Art. 10.

18. Matthew Winzer, "Murray on the Free Offer: A Review," in *The Blue Banner*, vol. 9, issue 10-12, (Oct/Dec. 2000), p. 3.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 3. Note: Robert L. Reymond had a nice section in his recent *Systematic Theology* dealing with the ways of the antinomist and the ways of mysteries and paradoxes, pp. 103-110.

20. Tom Wells, *Notes on the Free Offer Controversy*, (West Chester, OH: Tom Wells, 7686 Grandby Way), p. 5.

21. A. C. De Jong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer*, p. 130. Note: Having read Hoeksema myself, I do not find De Jong's remarks on him fair.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 132.

Chapter Three

1. *Canons*, Head I, Art. 9.

2. Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 513.

3. A. C. De Jong, *The Well-Meant Gospel Offer*, p. 12.

4. Tom Wells, *Notes on the Free Offer Controversy*, p. 6.

5. Christopher Ness, *An Antidote Against Arminianism* (Huntington, West Virginia: Publishers of Baptist Literature, 1982), pp. 72-73.

6. William Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, vol. II, p. 512.

7. Christopher Ness, *An Antidote Against Arminianism*, pp. 93-94.

8. R. C. Sproul, *Chosen By God*, pp. 70-71.

Chapter Four

1. Peter Y. De Jong, *Crisis in the Reformed Churches*, p. 227.

2. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers), p. 105.

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