

# Problems with Arminian Universal Redemption

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The Arminian view is by far the most popular of the four views of the atonement in the Christian church today. However, serious objections must be lodged against Arminian universal redemption, among which are these:



## **IT SLANDERS GOD'S ATTRIBUTES**

It slanders God's attributes, such as his love. Arminianism presents a love that actually doesn't save. It is a love that loves and then, if refused, turns to hatred and anger. It is not unchangeable love that endures from everlasting to everlasting. It provides atonement for all, but then withholds the means of grace that would make that salvation effectual in all lives. Are we to believe that Christ died for everyone in the deepest jungle and the darkest city, but his love doesn't provide the missionaries, preachers, or sermons that would make his death effectual?

## **IT SLANDERS GOD'S WISDOM**

Why would God make a plan to save everyone, then not carry it out? Would he be so foolish as to have his Son pay for the salvation of all if he knew that Christ would not be able to obtain what he paid for? Some say he didn't realise the consequences; he saw far enough to provide atonement, but couldn't see that some wouldn't take it. Does not that assertion slander the wisdom of God? Could God plan and provide atonement, but not realise that his atonement would not be accepted?

I would feel foolish if I went into a store and bought something, then walked out without it. Yet Arminianism asks us to believe that this is true of salvation – that there was a purchase made, a redemption, and yet the Lord walked away without those whom he had redeemed. That view slanders the wisdom of God.

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## IT SLANDERS GOD'S POWER

Arminian universalism obliges us to believe that God was able to accomplish the meriting aspect of salvation, but that the applying aspect is dependent on man and his free will. It asks us to believe that God has worked out everyone's salvation up to a point, but no further for anyone. The implication is that God has built the bridge of salvation between him and us, and we have only to walk over it by accepting his terms of salvation through a free act of the will. 'God does his part,' Arminians say, 'and now we must do our part.'

Calvinists respond by saying that this makes salvation dependent on the will of humanity, thereby reducing God and his power. Instead of our coming to God with our withered hands and saying, 'If Thou wilt, Thou canst make us whole,' this view has God coming to us with a withered hand, a hand that is not strong enough to save anyone, and saying, 'If thou wilt, thou canst complete this salvation; thou canst make me whole.' In essence, modern evangelistic sermons often take such an approach: 'God has done much, but he needs you to complete the job.' Does that way of thinking not slander the all-sufficient power of God? It makes God dependent on the will of man.

## IT SLANDERS GOD'S JUSTICE

Did Christ satisfy God's justice for everyone? Did Christ take the punishment due to everybody? If he did, how can God punish anyone? Is it justice to punish one person for the sins of another and later to punish the initial offender again? As Augustus Toplady said,

Payment God cannot twice demand;  
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,  
And then again at mine.

God can't and won't demand payment twice. Double punishment is injustice.

## IT DISABLES THE DEITY OF CHRIST

A defeated Saviour is not God. This error teaches that Christ tried to save everyone but didn't succeed. It denies the power and efficacy of Christ's blood, since not all for whom he died are saved. Hence, Christ's blood was wasted on Judas and Esau. Much of his labour, tears, and blood was poured out in vain. In other words, he will not see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied (Isa. 53:11) on behalf of many for whom he died. There will be many miscarriages – those with whom he travailed in soul yet who will not

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ultimately be saved. Does such defeat not make Christ less than God? No wonder Charles H. Spurgeon called this a 'monstrous' doctrine.<sup>1</sup>

## IT UNDERMINES THE UNITY OF THE TRINITY

Just as parents must work together to run a family effectively, so the triune God co-labours in each of his persons with identical purposes and goals. One person cannot possibly have in mind to save some that another person has not determined to save, but Arminian universalism implicitly teaches just that. It denies the Father's sovereign election, since Christ would have died for more than God decreed to save, thereby making Christ seem to have a different agenda from that of the Father. That would have been anathema to Jesus, who asserted that his entire redemptive ministry was consciously designed to carry out a divinely arranged plan (John 6:38-39). T. J. Crawford writes,

The atonement originated in the love of God. It is the consequence and not the cause of God's willingness to save sinners. In this light the Savior Himself is careful to present it. Instead of ascribing to His Father all the sternness and severity, and claiming as His own all the tenderness and compassion, He takes special pains to impress us with the assurance that the purpose of His mission was to proclaim the loving message and to execute the loving will of His Father who is in heaven.<sup>2</sup>

In the atonement, we are not running from the Father, who as a stern Judge is ready to condemn us, to the Son, who is more gracious than the Father. Rather, in the atonement we have a way to run to the Father and rest in him, for Christ's sake, the way a child runs to and rests in the lap of his or her father.

Then, too, Arminian redemption divides Christ from Christ, as it were. Calvinism insists that Christ's entire priestly work must be viewed as a harmonious whole. His expiation by atoning death and his priestly intercession are co-extensive. What an oxymoron it is to maintain that Christ died for everyone but intercedes only for some (John 17:2, 4, 6, 9, 12, 20, 24).

Finally, Arminian redemption disavows the saving ministry of the Holy Spirit, since it claims that Christ's blood has a wider application than does the Spirit's saving work. Any presentation of salvation that makes the Father's or the Spirit's work in salvation lag behind Christ's work contradicts the inherent unity of the Trinity. The Father and the Son

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<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography, Volume 1: The Early Years* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1962), p. 172. This chapter from *The Early Years* is also available in booklet form from the Trust, [A Defence of Calvinism](#).

<sup>2</sup> *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), p. 192. My heartfelt thanks to David Murray for several thoughts contained in this article.

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are one. The Spirit and the Son are one. Christ cannot possibly have died for those whom the Father did not decree to save and in whom the Spirit does not savingly work. God cannot be at odds with himself. Arminianism is inconsistent universalism.

## **IT REJECTS ALL OF THE OTHER POINTS OF CALVINISM**

The Arminian view of the atonement rejects the doctrine of man's total depravity, teaching that man has the ability within himself to receive and accept Christ. It rejects unconditional election, teaching that God elects on the basis of foreseen faith. It rejects irresistible grace, teaching that man's will is stronger than God's. It rejects perseverance of the saints, teaching that man can apostatize from the faith. J. I. Packer says,

It cannot be over-emphasized that we have not seen the full meaning of the cross till we have seen it as the centre of the gospel, flanked on the one hand by total inability and unconditional election and on the other by irresistible grace and final preservation.<sup>3</sup>

## **IT DETRACTS FROM THE GLORY OF GOD**

If God does everything in salvation, he gets all the glory. But if God can only do so much and not everything, then the person who completes the bridge gets at least some glory. That is why there is so much emphasis in mass evangelism on the free will of man. The glory of God is not exalted, and neither is the glory of Christ lifted up for providing a perfect and complete salvation. We are told of the free will of man, without which salvation cannot be put into effect. We are told to exercise our free will without being told that this will is in bondage due to our depraved nature. We cannot freely choose God and salvation on our own. We cannot complete the bridge. God completes the bridge, as we are told in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, so that 'no flesh should glory in his presence.' Universal atonement exalts the will of man and debases the glory of God.

## **IT UNDERMINES THANKFULNESS AND ASSURANCE**

Why should I thank God for something that I achieved? If the Lord Jesus did no more for me than he did for Judas and the inhabitants of Sodom, why should I thank him rather than myself? And if there are some for whom Christ died who are in hell today, how can I be sure the atonement will atone for me?

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), p. 35; cf. Ronald Cammenga and Ronald Hanks, *Saved by Grace: A Study of the Five Points of Calvinism* 2nd ed. (Grandville, Mich.: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2002), pp. 122-123.

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## IT PERVERTS EVANGELISM

We repeatedly hear today in evangelistic messages: ‘Christ died for you. What will you do for him?’ But do we ever find in the Bible that someone is told personally, ‘Christ died for you’? Rather, we find the work of Christ explained, followed by a call to everyone: ‘Repent and believe the gospel.’ The message is not ‘Believe that Christ died for you’ or ‘Believe that you are one of the elect.’ It is ‘Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.’

## IT DISPARAGES THE INTRINSIC EFFICACY OF THE ATONEMENT ITSELF

Arminians teach that Christ’s work induces the Father to accept graciously what Jesus accomplished in the place of a full satisfaction of his justice. It is as if Jesus persuaded his Father to accept something less than justice demanded. That is why Arminius claimed that when God saved sinners, he moved from his throne of justice to his throne of grace. But God does not have two thrones; his throne of justice is his throne of grace (Psa. 85:10). Arminianism forgets that the atonement does not win God’s love but is the provision of his love. In that provision, Christ paid the full price of justice. He did not make a down payment on the debt owed; he paid the full price of sin so that the Father as Judge could justly cancel the debt (Heb. 10:14-18).

Arminianism, then, is ultimately inconsistent universalism, as John Owen showed powerfully in his *A Display of Arminianism*. Owen explains the fallacy of the Arminian view of the divine design of the atonement as follows:

God imposed his wrath due unto, and Christ underwent the pains of hell, for, either all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some sins of all men. If the last, some sins of all men, then have all men some sins to answer for, and so shall no man be saved. If the second, that is it which we affirm, that Christ in their stead and room suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the world. If the first, why, then, are not all freed from the punishment of all their sins? You will say, ‘Because of their unbelief; they will not believe.’ But this unbelief, is it a sin, or not? If not, why should they be punished for it? If it be, then Christ underwent the punishment due to it, or not. If so, then why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died from partaking of the fruit of his death? If he did not, then did he not die for all their sins.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *The Works of John Owen*, Volume 10 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967), pp. 173-174.

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