

Biblical Theology by Dr. Chuck Baynard

Lesson 23 (HCLD 15)¹

Preparation: Begin and end each study time with prayer. Pay particular attention to the background reading and pray over each passage asking God to reveal Himself to you.

Background Reading: Read all the Scripture verses in footnote # 1 & 2.

Vocabulary:

Question: What is justification and how is justification an act of God's free grace?

Answer: Q70: Justification is an act of God's free grace to sinners, ^a in which he pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in his sight; ^b not for any thing done in them, or done by them, ^c but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, ^d and received by faith alone. ^e Although Christ, by his obedience and death, did make a proper, real, and full satisfaction to God's justice in the behalf of them that are justified ^f yet inasmuch as God accepts the satisfaction from a surety, which he might have demanded of them, and did provide this surety, his own only Son, ^g imputing his righteousness to them, ^h and requiring nothing of them for their justification but faith, ⁱ which also is his gift, ^j their justification is to them of free grace. ^{k 2}

¹ Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 15

Q37: What do you understand by the word "suffered"?

A37: That all the time He lived on earth, but especially at the end of His life, He bore, in body and soul, the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race;[1] in order that by His suffering, as the only atoning sacrifice,[2] He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and obtain for us the grace of God, righteousness and eternal life.

1. I Peter 2:24; Isa. 53:12
2. I John 2:2; 4:10; Rom. 3:25-26; 5:6; Psa. 22:14-16; Matt. 26:38

Q38: Why did He suffer "under Pontius Pilate" as judge?

A38: That He, being innocent, might be condemned by the temporal judge,[1] and thereby deliver us from the severe judgment of God, to which we were exposed.[2]

1. Acts 4:27-28; Luke 23:13-15; John 19:4
2. Psa. 69:4; II Cor. 5:21; Matt. 27:24

Q39: Is there anything more in His having been "crucified" than if He had suffered some other death?

A39: Yes, for thereby I am assured that He took upon Himself the curse which lay upon me,[1] because the death of the cross was accursed of God.[2]

1. Gal. 3:13-14
2. Deut. 21:22-23; Phil. 2:8

² a. Rom. 3:22, 24-25; 4:5

b. II Cor. 5:19, 21; Rom. 3:22-25, 27-28

c. Titus 3:5, 7; Eph. 1:7

d. Rom. 4:6-8; 5:17-19

e. Acts 10:43; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9

f. Rom. 5:8-10, 19

g. II Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 7:22; 10:10; Matt. 20:28; Dan. 9:24, 26; Isa. 53:4-6, 10-12; Rom. 8:32; I Peter 1:18-19

h. II Cor. 5:21

i. Rom. 3:24-25

j. Eph. 2:8

k. Eph. 1:7

Every so often an old heresy is renamed and ran up the flagpole again to see who will salute it. In dealing with JUSTIFICATION we find that this is true in the Reformed churches today on at least two fronts. One movement is named, Open Theism. The other continues to masquerade as questions to historic and traditional concerning justification. So-called scholars in our schools who on their credentials, tenure, and ego dare raise issues with no proverbial fig leaf for a man made covering embrace the first movement. The latter though not properly a movement is part of the church taken in by the open theism movement, at least to the degree they find their faith wavering as they consider this strange gospel.

In the statement given as the answer above I have often wondered why educated men with keen theological minds used the redundant phrase "free grace" instead of the word grace by itself. I now understand that the debate of Pelagius and Augustine did not end in the early church and the necessity of placing the emphasis on grace by adding free as an adjective. It is indeed full blown Pelagianism and not its later sibling semi-Pelagianism we are dealing with in the present attack on orthodox theology concerning justification.

Paul writing in Romans 5:1 states that we are justified by faith. Paul in Ephesians 2:8 sets an order or sequence to the events surrounding salvation when he writes that we are saved by grace through faith. When we put these two passages into a sequence that the context of the Scripture verses demand we have a sequence of grace, faith, and justification. Change this sequence in anyway whatsoever and you open the door to the free will of man and make salvation at least a cooperative effort between God and man and not by grace alone. This gives merit to the arguments of Arminius and voids the whole Synod of Dort. It allows radical Arminianism to hold the place of orthodoxy in the church.

R. C. Sproul in his book entitled, *Willing to Believe*³ writes, "How we understand the will of man, then, touches heavily on our view of our humanity and God's character. The age-old debate between Pelagianism and Augustinianism is played out in the arena of these issues. Any view of human will that destroys the biblical view of human responsibility is seriously defective. Any view of the human will that destroys the biblical view of God's character is even worse. The debate will affect our understanding of God's Righteousness, sovereignty, and grace. All of these are vital to Christian Theology. If we ignore these issues or regard them as trivial, we greatly demean the full character of God as revealed in Scripture." Dr. Sproul understates the seriousness of this attack on a classical Christian Theology and thus Biblical Theology, though he was not addressing Open Theism in this book, the subject is the same.

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church in a pastoral letter from their General Assembly⁴ to all her churches states this concerning Open Theism, "Informed by the philosophical movement of process theology, open theists emphasize God's self-limitation in dealing with humans and an open future. His knowledge is not eternally settled, His foreknowledge is not exhaustive, His providential dealing with the world is not meticulous, and the future is not wholly secure. Some things are fixed, others are not. As evidence of this, open theists point to Scripture language in which God repents, expresses regret and speaks in conditional terms to people. This, they say is not simply phenomenological or anthropomorphic language, but literal. Sometimes in dealing with people, God makes mistakes and has to repent of His actions. A central assumption of open theism is that were God to be fully sovereign, or even (merely) to possess exhaustive foreknowledge, this **would** eliminate human freedom and the authenticity of our choices. Thus, in the open theist scheme, securing (libertarian) human freedom becomes ultimate in importance, so that both God's exhaustive knowledge of the future and His sovereign control must be denied."

The EPC sees some good coming from the attack in that it forces the churches to revisit this area of our theology that all might come to a better understanding of why we believe what we do concerning the Bible and especially our salvation in Christ alone. While we all should be ready at all times to give the reason for the hope in the believer, this will not justify the churches in the postmortem for the failure to not only recognize the heresy involved, but to name it as such along with publicly identifying the proponents of this attack on God and demand repentance from this sin.

Perhaps the open theist as Pelagius began in a sincere effort to reveal the truth. Just perhaps, both promote the free will of man above the sovereignty of God. I submit that Open Theism is full-blown Pelagianism and not even its later and lesser stepchild semi-Pelagianism. Because some scholars of note have embraced this heresy today should not

³ Sproul, R. C. *Willing to Believe – The Controversy Over Free Will*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997

⁴ General Assembly of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. *Pastoral Letter on Open Theism*. Livonia, MI: 2002 (22nd Assembly, Memphis, TN June 2002)

lessen the haste to condemn or the severity of censure of the church toward those that try to propagate this lie from hell on the church today. This heresy attacks the very foundation of Biblical Christianity, the sovereignty of God.

The debate in the end is all about the free will and the autonomy of man. That is apart from God, man is essentially good and can save himself. Man can choose to believe God and effect his salvation apart from any action of God. The problem lies in a faulty order of salvation as revealed in Scripture. To move faith before regeneration or to set faith beside regeneration removes grace from the equation and destroys "Grace Alone" and removes it from the table altogether of the great "solus" of the Christian faith. To impugn the character of God or lessen any of God's perfections in any way and God is no longer God. Thus, this is no mere error to be tolerated and lightly handled by the church.

The church as a whole would do well to remember her heritage and revisit the great battles of her martyred defenders of the truth over these very issues. You can clean a pig up and call it by a different name, but the pig will return to the same slime pit you retrieved it from at the first opportunity. A new name for an old heresy should not so easily pass under the defense system of the church because of the so-called scholarship of its proponents.

It is far past the time for the Reformed churches to remove the philosophical fluff from her churches and teach the Bible as understood in our classical creeds and practiced by our forefathers. While almost all denominations outside the Reformed churches tolerate at least some elements of semi-Pelagianism, the taint of this ancient heresy should be known and understood by all in the Reformed churches, not just her clergy.

Satan has sounded the attack, once more from within the walls of the church. Arise watchmen, and sound the alarm. Arise faithful soldier of the cross and cast out this foul cancer in our midst. Let "Ye are saved by grace, through faith, and that the gift of God." be our battle cry.

I do not usually point to other works in this series of lessons, but use the Bible and the creeds of the church alone as both text and illustration. However because of the gravity of this heresy and its prevalence in our society whether named or not I include the following short bibliography extracted from the EPC Pastoral Letter referenced above. To this list I would most heartily recommend the book by Dr. R.C. Sproul referenced above be added. Dr. Sproul's book is an extremely well written presentation of Pelagianism from Augustine forward to today. I once more then assert that Open Theism is nothing more than a renaming of this ancient heresy.

Bibliography

Bray, Gerald. *The Personal God: Is the Classical Understanding of God Tenable?* Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998.

Frame, John M. *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism.* Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 2001.

Ware, Bruce A. *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000.

Suggested Sermon Outline

Suffering

Isaiah 53

What do you understand by the word suffered?

That throughout His life on earth, but especially at the end of it, He bore in body and soul the wrath of God against the sin of the whole human race, so that by His suffering, as the only expiatory sacrifice, He might redeem our body and soul from everlasting damnation, and might obtain for us God's grace, righteousness, and eternal life.

Why did He suffer under Pontius Pilate as His judge?

That He, being innocent, might be condemned by an earthly judge, and thereby set us free from the judgment of God which, in all its severity, ought to fall upon us.

Is there something more in His having been crucified than if He had died some other death?

Yes, for by this I am assured that He took upon Himself the curse which lay upon me, because the death of the cross was cursed by God.

I. God Understands Human Suffering Personally

A. Christ entered the human situation with all its complications, challenges, and dangers. For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: ***he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.*** (Isaiah 53:2)

B. The burdens of redemption fell on Him actively and passively. He is ***despised and rejected*** of men; ***a man of sorrows***, and ***acquainted with grief***: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely ***he hath borne our griefs***, and ***carried our sorrows***: yet we did esteem him stricken, ***smitten of God, and afflicted.*** (Isaiah 53:3-4)

C. The substitutionary atonement became possible through Christ's suffering. Therefore will I divide him *a portion* with the great and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because ***he hath poured out his soul unto death***: and ***he was numbered with the transgressors***; and ***he bare the sin of many***, and made intercession for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)

D. Peter summarized the atonement. Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: ***by whose stripes ye were healed.*** (I Peter 2:24)

E. Paul focused the expiatory character of the atonement through the suffering Savior. Being ***justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus***: Whom ***God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood***, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past through the forbearance of God; (Romans 3:24-25)

II. Christ Suffered in History for His People

A. The Bible records that at a particular time in history the innocent Jesus was convicted in an earthly court. When ***Pilate*** therefore heard that saying, ***he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat*** in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha. And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and ***he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King!*** But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, ***Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests***

answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away. (John 19:13-16)

B. Human courts condemned the innocent, demonstrating the poverty of their hearts and the corruption of their courts. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both **Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.** (Acts 4:27-28)

C. The trial and conviction were essential parts of the substitutionary atonement accomplished on the cross. For when we were yet without strength, in due time **Christ died for the ungodly.** (Romans 5:6)

D. In the condemnation and suffering of Jesus, our accounts have been settled. For **he hath made him to be sin for us,** who knew no sin; **that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.** (2 Corinthians 5:21)

M. Suffering on the Cross Was Necessary

A. Only the suffering and death of Jesus could satisfy the eternal righteousness and truth of God. But we see **Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death,** crowned with glory and honour; **that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.** (Hebrews 2:9)

B. No alternative would satisfy the full measure of justice without compromising eternal principles of righteousness. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, **God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us,** who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. (Romans 8:3-4)

C. That Christ endured our trials leads believers to hope. *He that spared not his own Son*, but delivered him up for us all, *how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* (Romans 8:32)

D. In the suffering of Jesus believers find the fulfillment of the patterns first seen in the wilderness. And *as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish*, but have eternal life. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.* (John 3:14-17)

Heidelberg Catechism
Lord's Day 015
Questions 37, 38, 39
Dr. Edwin P. Elliott, Jr.