

The Biblical Doctrine of Salvation

Maintaining Truth and Unity

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Electronic copy of these materials is available at <http://fbcaa.org/ucb/>

Workshop #1

Salvation: Labels and Positions

Introduction

My name is Matt Postiff. I have been a pastor in Ann Arbor, Michigan for over 10 years and I have been involved in active Christian ministry for almost 20 years. I have been married since 2003 to Naomi, and have three sons named David, John, and Daniel (ages 11, 10, and 7). Prior to becoming a pastor full-time, I studied and worked in the area of computer engineering. I received a doctorate (Ph.D.) in computer engineering in 2001 and did consulting work with a multi-national company headquartered in Silicon Valley in the state of California. As a result of having this training, I also have interests in technology ministry through websites and Bible translation software.

I have been preparing for this conference since May, and I have been joined in prayer by members of the GMSA (MESA) leadership, missionaries, and friends, asking that God would use this time to inform, encourage, and strengthen you and your churches throughout Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay. In these days of apostasy, it is important to apply ourselves diligently to all the doctrines of Scripture. I hope our time together will be a blessing to you.

The topic of that we will consider in these sessions is the doctrine of salvation or *soteriology*. We want to examine what the Bible teaches about God's way of salvation. We want to understand different beliefs in this area of theology and be able to evaluate them through the lens of the Bible. In order to do this, I have been asked to do at least four workshops in which I speak on the various labels and positions, the Biblical tensions regarding the intention of the atonement, how to handle differences among ourselves, and how to emphasize evangelism in our churches and personal lives. I hope that these topics will best meet the current needs of you as pastors and of the church association. We have been praying to that end.

To put this into context for the missionaries, you may remember that almost 3 years ago in Paysandu I taught one workshop on the definition of Reformed Theology. There we said that reformed theology consists of historic orthodoxy, reformation doctrines, the fundamentals of the faith, covenant theology, and Calvinism. It is on this last issue—Calvinism—and its main alternative system—Arminianism, that we will spend a lot of time thinking about in the first couple of workshops.

The issues we will speak about are very sensitive because they touch on the very core of the atonement. I also want to say that I did not come to the conference to make trouble or stir up hard feelings about theology. I came to be a help and blessing, and have prayed that God will use these sessions to be a help to us.

My position is 4-point Calvinist, and I strongly believe in the need and practice of evangelism. But I am not here primarily to convince you to believe my position. I do not preach Calvinism or Arminianism in my church. I don't often use these labels. I don't spend tons of time preaching on election or inability. I preach the Bible verse by verse, paragraph by paragraph, through entire books of the Bible. I am first and foremost a Bible man. Our church is a Bible church. We believe in the sole authority and sufficiency of the Bible. Systems of theology are necessary and natural because we as humans are organizers and systematizers. But they must not become our source of authority. Scripture is that. Furthermore, our people are not fed properly unless they receive a steady diet of Bible. It is Bible for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Bible for meat and potatoes. Bible for dessert, and bedtime snack too! Therefore, I hope to help you evaluate your own theology of salvation by the Bible and be sure you are following Scripture; but also that when you run into someone who holds some different views, you know the best way to manage that.

I hope that after we are done, we will be better equipped to maintain the truth that has been delivered to us, and to keep the unity of the Spirit that Jesus desires us to have. We will have accomplished our goal if we are more Biblically informed and can handle differences in our fellowship with Christ-like love and humility.

In this first session, our goal will be to better understand the major positions concerning the doctrine of salvation so that we will not misuse the various labels.

UCB Doctrine of Salvation

We begin with what we believe and share in common. The following is copied from the Reglamentos Internos Iglesia Evangelical Unión de Centros Biblicos Chile (Versión 3, Julio 2015).¹

5.- El Hombre

Creemos que el ser humano fue creado a imagen de Dios por un acto directo y sobrenatural de El. Por el pecado del primer hombre, Adán, la humanidad incurrió en el castigo de la muerte física y espiritual, quedando de esta manera separada de Dios. En consecuencia, todos los seres humanos nacen con una naturaleza pecaminosa y son responsables de sus pensamientos, palabras y actos. El hombre necesita la salvación y no puede obtenerla por propios recursos, capacidades o actos de cualquier tipo. Gen. 1:27; Ro. 3:23; 5:12; 6:23; Gá. 5:17ss; Ef. 2:1ss.; Ro. 3:23

6.- La Obra de Cristo

Creemos que la muerte de Cristo en a cruz fue un sacrificio vicario y expiatorio. Con base en el

¹ This is the latest edition that I have in my possession. I would welcome someone to send me the latest version, if there is one. I do not have similar statements for UCB in Argentina or UCB in Uruguay.

derramamiento de Su sangre, Su resurrección corporal y su ascensión a la diestra del Padre, El provee salvación completa para todos y es el Salvador de todos que creen. Él está ahora en el cielo como intercesor y abogado a favor de los creyentes. 1ª Tim.2:6; 1ª Ped. 3:16; 1ª Co. 15:1ss; 1ª Jn. 2:1; He. 7:25.

7.- Justificación y Nuevo Nacimiento

Creemos que cada persona que recibe a Jesucristo como su único Salvador y Señor por medio de la fe solamente, aparte de cualquier obra humana, es declarada justa ante Dios en virtud de justicia y la obra salvadora de Cristo. Es nacido de lo alto y llega a ser un hijo de Dios creado en Cristo Jesús para buenas obras sirviendo al Señor. Todos los redimidos son guardados eternamente por el poder de Dios. Jn. 1:12-13; Ro. 3:21ss; 8:1, 29ss; 2ª Co. 5:17; Ef. 2:8-10; 1ª Jn. 5:11-12; Jn. 10:28-29.

8.- Santificación

Creemos que cada persona que está en Cristo ya es santificada, o sea, apartada para Dios, en cuanto a su posición ante Él. Dios ha hecho provisión mediante la obra de Cristo y el ministerio del Espíritu Santo para que el creyente pueda vencer el pecado y crecer en santidad, vivir una vida llena del Espíritu y consagrada a Dios. La santificación del creyente no será completa en su vida terrenal hasta el día de la redención final en los cielos. 1ª. Cor.1:2; Rom. 6:6, 11-13; Gál. 5:16; Ef. 1:7; 4:30; 5:17ss; 2ª. Ped. 3:18; 1ª Tes. 5:23; 1ª Jn. 3:2.

As best I can understand this statement of belief, it agrees very well with the views still held by the missionaries of Gospel Mission of South America (MESA). I am in agreement with it, as far as it goes.

The Major Theological Positions on Salvation

Pelagianism

This heretical doctrine teaches that man's nature is basically good, and "that original sin did not taint human nature and that the mortal will is capable of choosing good or evil without special divine aid."² Man has a free will and his nature is basically good. Each man is born today like Adam was created in the past, pure and upright. Most non Christians embrace this kind of view of mankind. We hear it from the highest levels of society and from the man on the street.

Origin: Pelagius Morgan, British teacher in Rome, 5th century AD.³

Short statement: Man is good.

Rebuttal: Biblical texts like Psalm 51:5, Romans 3:9-12, Romans 5:12-19, Ephesians 2:1-3.

Diagram of Romans 3:9b-12

This text shows that the Pelagian assertion that original sin did not damage or stain human nature is false. Here is the text in Greek:

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelagianism>

³ <https://carm.org/pelagianism>

^{9b} προητιασάμεθα γὰρ

Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἑλληνας πάντας

ὑφ' ἀμαρτίαν

εἶναι,

¹⁰ καθὼς γέγραπται ὅτι

οὐκ ἔστιν

δίκαιος

οὐδὲ εἷς,

¹¹ οὐκ ἔστιν

ὁ συνίων,

οὐκ ἔστιν

ὁ ἐκζητῶν τὸν θεόν.

¹² πάντες

ἐξέκλιναν

ἅμα

ἠχρεώθησαν.

οὐκ ἔστιν

ὁ ποιῶν χρηστότητα,

[οὐκ ἔστιν] ἕως ένός.

Paul writes so that we are certain that all humanity: every person who has ever lived, ever will live, or is now living, is described by the passage. The repetition of “no one” and “none” and “all” makes this very clear. Here it is in Spanish:

^{9b} pues ya hemos acusado

a judíos y a gentiles, que todos están bajo pecado.

¹⁰ Como está escrito:

No hay

justo,

ni aun uno;

¹¹ No hay quien

entienda.

No hay quien

busque a Dios.

¹² Todos

se desviaron,

a una

se hicieron inútiles;

No hay quien haga lo bueno,
no hay ni siquiera **uno**.

Semi-Pelagianism

This heretical doctrine is a “weaker” form of Pelagianism that admits sin has affected mankind, but that man can cooperate with God and in fact start a movement toward God using his free will. Man initiates, and God responds. “The heresy...that sinners are capable of exercising a good will toward God unassisted by God’s grace.”⁴

The Roman Catholic Church, according to Wikipedia, “condemns Semipelagianism but affirms that the beginning of faith involves an act of free will. It teaches that the initiative comes from God, but requires free synergy (collaboration) on the part of man.”⁵

Origin: Cassian at Marseilles, 5th Century.⁶

Short statement: Man is sick but can come to God on his own.

Rebuttal: Since man basically has to initiate the relationship, Semi-Pelagianism is a form of works salvation. God’s salvation in this system is not based on grace, but on works. Biblical texts like Romans 4:1-8 and Ephesians 2:8-10 are helpful to correct a semi-Pelagian view. The reality is this: Man is neither good nor sick. Man is *dead* (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Diagram of John 6:44

The exegesis of this verse is fairly simple. The opening words explicitly say that no one is able to come to Christ. The only way around this inability is if God the Father draws the person toward Himself.

⁴⁴ οὐδεις	δύναται ἐλθεῖν	πρός με	
ἐὰν μὴ ὁ πατήρ		ὁ πέμψας με	
ἐλκύσῃ αὐτόν,			(draw; attract; pull; move from one area to another)

⁴⁴ Ninguno	puede venir	a mí,
si el Padre		que me envió
no le trajere;		

Arminianism⁷

Origin: Jacobus (= James) Arminius, (1560-1609)

Acronym: FACTS

4 <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2014/07/arminianism-faq-1-everything-you-always-wanted-to-know>
5 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semipelagianism>
6 <https://carm.org/semi-pelagianism>
7 <http://evangelicalarminians.org/an-outline-of-the-facts-of-arminianism-vs-the-tulip-of-calvinism/>

Freed by God's grace to believe. Prevenient grace overcomes total depravity and makes every man who hears the gospel able to believe. This grace is resistible, so that the person can believe or not, however he wishes. The grace is either given to all men because of the cross of Christ, or through the convicting work of the Spirit when the gospel is preached.

Atonement for all. Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, that is, all people without exception. Thus the atonement is sufficient for all people to be forgiven and saved. However, only those who believe are saved. Arminianism is not universalism.

Conditional election. God chooses those who believe to be saved. Arminians see this election as either individual or corporate. If individual, God foresees the faith of each individual who will believe and elects them on that basis. If corporate, God has elected the Church which is in Christ. The way to get "in Christ" is to believe, and thus one "becomes elect." Election is based on faith in this view.

Total Depravity. Mankind is totally infected by sin so that their minds, hearts, and wills are unable to do good. Humans are unable to merit favor from God. God must make the first move for someone to be saved.

Security in Christ. The traditional view held by most Arminians is that the loss of salvation is possible. Thus, the believer is secure as long as he continues to believe; security is based upon his faith and protects him from *outside* forces snatching him away from God and Christ. However, an *internal* force can remove the believer from salvation, namely if he himself forsakes his faith.

Key texts used in support of Arminianism: John 6:45, 16:8; Acts 16:14; Luke 24:45; John 6:44, 12:32; Romans 11:32; Titus 2:11.

Explanation

The key theological concept of Arminianism is the idea of **prevenient grace**.⁸ Simply stated, this is a divine grace that enables people to believe if they so desire. There are variations of the concept within Arminian theology. (1) This grace may be given by God when the gospel is presented to a lost person. (2) Or, a partial prevenient grace may be given to all people, and a special measure of that grace added when the gospel is presented. (3) Some believe that a full form of prevenient grace has been given to all mankind (Wesleyan Arminianism).

Another important concept in Arminianism is that of **free will**. On this view, a person is free to choose for or against whatever options are before him, or not to choose at all. If we have time later, we can discuss more about free will. This may be the most important philosophical support of Arminianism.

A third important concept in Arminianism is **synergism**. Syn = with, erg = work. By this is meant that God and man work together, in conjunction, in order to bring about salvation. By saying this, I do not charge that Arminianism teaches salvation by works. But it does teach that both parties have to do their

⁸ <http://www.gotquestions.org/prevenient-grace.html>

part, and that man can do or resist to do his part in salvation.

Arminianism recognizes that apart from God, man is dead in sin. In this, it is distinct from Semi-Pelagianism.⁹ But this deadness may seem to be limited to the theoretical realm, because God's prevenient grace is supplied to either everyone or to those who hear the gospel, and it reduces the depravity of sin such that the unbeliever's will is able to decide for or against God.

Arminianism is a middle ground between Calvinism and Semi-Pelagianism.

UCB Doctrine Opposed to Arminian (In)Security

The UCB doctrinal statement does not allow for the traditional Arminian view of security, as we see in section 7: *Todos los redimidos son guardados eternamente por el poder de Dios*. This statement says that it is the power of God that preserves the believer, and does so *eternally*. If a UCB pastor or church adopts an Arminian theology, it would have to be a modified Arminian theology.

Romans 11:29 reminds us that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.

Study of Romans 8:28-30

Let us examine Romans 8:28-30 and see that it clearly affirms eternal security.

Y sabemos que

a los que aman a Dios, ...

a los que conforme a su propósito son llamados.

Porque **a los que** antes conoció,

también los predestinó para que fuesen hechos conformes a la imagen de su Hijo,
para que él sea el primogénito entre muchos hermanos.

Y **a los que** predestinó,

a éstos también predestinó;

y **a los que** llamó,

a éstos también justificó;

y **a los que** justificó,

a éstos también glorificó.

Notice that the "a los que" refers to a group of people, all of whom receive all of the benefits listed. All who are antes conoció are also predestinó and they are also llamó and justificó and glorificó. No person

9 Edwin H. Palmer in his book *The Five Points of Calvinism*, p. 59, incorrectly equates Arminianism and Semi-Pelagianism.

is ever lost in this sequence or “golden chain” as it is called. God’s purpose will be accomplished without doubt because of His omnipotent power (Daniel 4:35). A person who is called is certainly assured of glorification because of the purpose and power of God.

Notice also that the blessings mentioned by Paul are the works of God, not of man. Finally, notice that glorificó translates a past-tense verb in Greek (ἐδόξασεν). It is as good as done from God’s perspective. We just have to patiently wait for its fulfillment.

Study of Romans 9:11-12

The idea of election based on something in the person that has not happened at the time of the election (in eternity past) is sophisticated, but the question is this: is it Biblical? The problem with conditional election that must be addressed by the Arminian is how that kind of election is not an election based on works or merit (foreseen works or merit). A key text that calls this view of election into question is Romans 9:11-12, which says:

¹¹ (for *the children* not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), ¹² it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger."

¹¹ (pues no habían aún nacido, ni habían hecho aún ni bien ni mal, para que el propósito de Dios conforme a la elección permaneciese, no por las obras sino por el que llama), ¹² se le dijo: El mayor servirá al menor.

We see here that the children Jacob and Esau were not yet born and they had not yet done any good or evil act. Still, God's purpose in election was demonstrated in what God said to their mother, that the older would serve the younger. In other words, God had chosen the younger child to receive blessings over the older child. This purpose did not derive from works of the infants, but it derives from the God who does the calling.

I understand that this principle applies to the election of all persons to salvation. The cause of election is squarely in God, and not in the subject being chosen. This ensures that election is not of works or merit in the person.

No matter what view of election that you take, no person knows in advance who is elect or who is not, because no Scripture reveals that information nor does the Bible even suggest that God reveals the elect to any person. Therefore, evangelism cannot be based on election. Evangelism is based on the universal need of salvation (Romans 3:9, 3:23, 6:23) and the comprehensive command of God to preach the gospel to the lost (Luke 24:47).

Molinism or Middle Knowledge

Origin: Luis de Molina, a Spanish Jesuit (1535-1600). A well-known modern advocate is William Lane Craig through his writings, debates, videos, and organization called *Reasonable Faith*.

Acronym: ROSES, in *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* by Kenneth Keathley (B&H 2010).

Radical depravity. The term is designed to carry the meaning of total depravity, without the idea that fallen humanity is always as bad as possible. Neither Arminianism or Calvinism teach depravity to mean that every person is as bad as possible, but the change to “radical” is supposed to help eliminate that baggage.

Overcoming grace. Similar to Calvinism’s irresistible grace, but avoids the suggestion that God saves a person against his will. Rather, God draws in such a way as to overcome our evil.

Sovereign election. God desires the salvation of every person but only chooses some. The unbeliever does not die for lack of God desiring them to be saved.

Eternal life. The believer is given a new, transformed life, a faith that will always remain, and is preserved in that state forever.

Singular redemption. Christ died sufficiently for every person, but efficiently only for those who believe. Or, “Christ did not die for all in general but for each person in particular.”¹⁰ This is an unlimited atonement view.

Key texts used in support of middle knowledge: 1 Samuel 23:7-13; Matthew 2:13; Acts 21:10-14; Matthew 11:20-24; Exodus 13:17. Middle knowledge and its derivative doctrines, such as the middle knowledge doctrine of salvation, are supported by means of very philosophical arguments.

Explanation

The desire of Molinism is to reconcile God’s sovereignty with man’s freedom in such a way that does not diminish either. How can God know everything without limiting the free choices of people so that their choices are rendered meaningless? Molinism is a complicated explanation of how this might work.

The doctrine of middle knowledge assumes that God’s knowledge can be divided into three logical parts. The first type of divine knowledge is called natural or necessary knowledge. It is this knowledge that is inherent in God, and by which he knows all necessary things. These things include knowledge of himself, of right and wrong, of logic, etc. It also includes knowledge of all possible states of affairs. This knowledge is essential to God, before any decision of the divine will.

The second type of divine knowledge is called middle knowledge (*scientia media*) because it stands between the first and third types. According to Molina, this knowledge is that “by which, in virtue of the most profound and inscrutable comprehension of each faculty of free choice, He saw in His own essence what each such faculty would do with its innate freedom were it to be placed in this or in that or, indeed, in infinitely many orders of things—even though it would really be able, if it so willed, to

¹⁰ Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, p. 193.

do the opposite.”¹¹ So, before He created, God saw what each person would freely choose to do about the gospel in every possible circumstance. God then decided which world to create, and so which circumstances to create. Thus He knows who would choose to be saved.

The third logical type of divine knowledge is called free knowledge. This knowledge comes after God’s decision to create the particular world in which we find ourselves. By this point in the logical ordering of God’s knowledge, and because of God’s decision, all the possible states of affairs have been reduced to the set of affairs that actually prevail in the current world. So God by his free knowledge knows all things as they actually are and will be.

A Critique of Libertarian Free Will

I have written a lengthy critique of Molinism. It is available online in English.¹² The middle knowledge doctrine of salvation is presented as if it were a “middle road” between Arminianism and Calvinism. In reality it is much closer to Arminianism than Calvinism because it bases the electing decision of God upon the free decision of the creature, similar to the foreseen faith understanding of Arminianism. It also says that man has libertarian free will. This idea of free will is somewhat problematic.

First, God is the most free of all beings. There is nothing He cannot do outside of those necessary requirements of His nature. For example, because He is holy, He cannot sin. Since He is infinite and eternal, He is not free to become finite or cease to exist. Within the boundaries of His own character, however, He can act and is free to do so. His actions do not compromise His immutability, which is an attribute of his nature, not His acts *per se*.

Second, the believer is less free than God but more free than the unbeliever. See John 8:36 in which Jesus speaks of being freed from sin. Paul teaches in Romans 6:14 that sin no longer has dominion over the believer. Romans 8:2 teaches that the Holy Spirit has given us life that frees us from the principles of sin and death. Because we are children of God, we are in a state of liberty from sin. That is freedom!

Third, the unbeliever is a moral agent and is responsible for his choices. But because he is depraved, he is a slave of sin (John 8:34). That slavery means that he is not as free as he thinks, and he is less free than a believer.

All humans lack a level of freedom because of sin. They also lack some freedom because they are finite.

Calvinism

Origin: John Calvin (1509-1564).

Acronym: TULIP, the well-known 5-point Calvinism label. These are understood as five landmarks or

11 Luis de Molina, *On Divine Foreknowledge*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 168. This book is a translation of part IV of Molina’s *Concordia*, first published in 1588.

12 <http://www.fbcaa.org/BibleStudies/doctrinal/HowGodKnowsCounterfactuals.pdf> and <http://archive.dbts.edu/journals/2010/Postiff.pdf>.

main points in the soteriology of Reformed theology.

Total depravity. The doctrine that people are totally infected by sin from top to bottom, dead in transgressions, and cannot effect their own salvation. Positively, according to Edwin Palmer, it says that men are only and always sinning; and negatively it states that man cannot do good, understand good, or desire good.¹³ We must note that although Palmer's definition makes it seem like people never do anything good, he does affirm that people are rarely as bad as they possibly could be, and that there is relative good done by people. The "only and always sinning" part indicates that this relative good is not pure good, that is, works done out of faith and love for God in obedience to His word. For support, see Genesis 6:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Psalm 51:5; Romans 3:10-18; John 15:4-5; Romans 8:7-8; Ephesians 4:18; 1 Corinthians chapters 1 and 2; John 6:44.

Unconditional election. That before the creation of the world, God chose certain individuals for salvation, apart from any merit in them, along with the blessings and obligations that accompany salvation. The reason for your salvation is that God sovereignly chose you apart from any personal merit. See Ephesians 1:11; John 6:37, 39; John 15:16; Acts 13:48; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Ephesians 1:4-5; Romans 8:29-30.

Limited atonement. The new and fair way to refer to this is as *definite atonement* or *particular redemption*. "The doctrine of definite atonement states that, in the death of Jesus Christ, the Triune God intended to achieve the redemption of every person given to the Son by the Father in eternity past, and to apply the accomplishments of his sacrifice to each of them by the Spirit. The death of Christ was intended to win the salvation of God's people alone."¹⁴ Despite this teaching, many reformed theologians affirm "universal offer" passages such as Isaiah 55:1; Matthew 11:28; 2 Peter 3:9; Revelation 22:17. For texts used in support of this point, see Romans 8:32; John 3:16-17 (*world* as opposed to Jews only); 1 John 4:10; Romans 5:8; Romans 8:32.

Irresistible grace. God's grace is His undeserved favor. The irresistible type of grace is "that when God has chosen some to be saved and when He sends His Spirit to change them from being hateful to being loving, no one can resist Him. He is irresistible. He does what He sets out to do."¹⁵ This does not mean a person is unwilling, nor that God forces him to believe. To counteract this potential objection, the term *efficacious grace* is sometimes used. God in fact changes the will of the person. See John 6:37, 44; Acts 16:14; John 10:16.

Perseverance of the saints. "Once saved, always saved." "Christians...will persevere in trusting in Christ as their Savior. They will not turn on and then turn off, but they will continue believing forever."¹⁶ Ultimately saints continue to believe because God continues to preserve them. For support, see John 6:39; John 10:28-29; Ephesians 1:13-14; 1 Peter 1:4-5.

13 Edwin H. Palmer, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Baker Books, 1972), p. 13-16.

14 David and Jonathan Gibson, *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective* (Crossway, 2013), p. 33.

15 *The Five Points of Calvinism*, p. 57.

16 *The Five Points of Calvinism*, p. 68.

Explanation

Reformed theologians believe that the five points stand or fall together as one main point: “*God saves sinners.*”¹⁷ Reformed theology also emphasizes the five *solas* (*sola fide* and *sola gratia* among them). Some teachers attempt to make one point be the “genius” of this system of theology. For example, some teach that election is the core teaching of Calvinism. Others make total depravity the core teaching. Others, the limited atonement. Once you hold to one of these teachings, they suppose that you must embrace all the rest.

This doctrine also goes under the heading of the **doctrines of grace**. These five points and their related teachings are called the doctrines of God’s grace because they center upon and focus upon God as the gracious author of salvation.

An important concept in Calvinistic theology is that of **monergism**. Mon = alone or only, erg = work. So monergism means “one working.” The idea is that God is the only ultimate agent working to bring about the salvation of a person. It is agreed that people have a role to play, but that role is completely dependent upon God’s work happening first.

The idea of **irresistible grace** is easy to misunderstand. As mentioned earlier, it does not mean God forces a person to be saved. It is easily confused with our personal experience that unbelievers often *do* resist the grace of God. How is that possible if Calvinism is true? The key idea is the difference between the **general call** and the **effective call** to salvation. In the general offer of the gospel, whenever the gospel is proclaimed, the “general call” goes out—the general invitation and command to believe. This *can* be resisted by the unbeliever, because the unbeliever is considering it by himself or herself. But when God’s Spirit specially joins His work with the proclamation of the word of God, He draws the person to God, illumines him, and actually enlivens him so that he willingly receives the gospel. This “special call” is what is not resistible.

Misunderstandings of Perseverance

Perseverance of the saints is sometimes misunderstood.

1. Perseverance can be emphasized so much that salvation seems to be obtained on the merit of perseverance. This amounts to salvation by works, because the person who is saved must persevere strongly enough to show his salvation.
2. Perseverance can be emphasized so much that assurance of salvation becomes impossible. I have heard someone say that he is 99% sure that he is saved. He cannot be entirely sure because he doesn't know if he will persevere.

Both of these errors overemphasize the individual's role in salvation to such an extent that they do damage to other clear doctrines of Scripture, namely salvation by faith alone and assurance of salvation. The Bible is clear that salvation is by grace through faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-10). It is also

¹⁷ *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, p. 43.

clear that a believer can know whether he is saved (1 John 5:13). We must not allow our focus to shift from God as the provider of salvation.

But perseverance cannot be ignored. It is important to note that John wrote “these things” (“Estas cosas”), and these things are the tests of eternal life that he wrote in the earlier chapters. For example, the test of whether one admits he is a sinner; whether one confesses sin; whether one loves his brothers; whether one says that Jesus Christ came in the flesh; whether one is living in a pattern of sin. These tests affirm or deny assurance. But true assurance is possible!

We have to remember that God starts our salvation and works in our lives so that we will do those things that please him (Philippians 2:12-13). We persevere because God preserves us. He guarantees that every believer will be brought safe to his heavenly kingdom (Philippians 1:6).

The real challenge with Calvinism is the “L” point about limited atonement. We will examine that subject in our second workshop.

Moderate Calvinism (“4-points” or less)

Difficulties for the Five-Point Position

Moderate Calvinists cite the following difficulties with the limited atonement view:

1. The limited view has difficulty explaining in what sense Christ died for the non-elect.
2. The limited view has difficulty explaining why God withholds his judgment against the ungodly and gives them common grace.
3. The limited view cannot consistently make a universal offer of the gospel.
4. The limited view merges the atonement’s accomplishment and application instead of making a distinction between them.
5. The limited view does not correctly emphasize God’s multiple purposes of the atonement.
6. The limited view has difficulty explaining how a person can be under the wrath of God before they believe since the atonement has already been accomplished and as-good-as-applied to them.

Explanation

As I mentioned, I consider myself to be a 4-point Calvinist, because I embrace total depravity, unconditional election, God’s drawing and effective grace in salvation, and the perseverance of the saints. I do not accept definite (limited) atonement the way that 5-point Calvinists teach it.

Some pastors are strongly opposed to the Arminian teaching of the doctrine of salvation because of strong belief in eternal security, but are unwilling to embrace all five points of TULIP. Some hold to Total depravity, but reject the other four points. These pastors prefer to speak about God’s preservation of the believer (1 Peter 1:5), are dogmatic against any limitation in Christ’s work, but are not as clear

about their beliefs on election or irresistible grace.

Almost any combination of the points can be imagined, so that there could be 2-point Calvinists, 3-point Calvinists, and 4-point Calvinists. As far as I know, all such variations reject limited atonement.

The four-point position is often connected with Moses Amyraut (1596-1664), a French Protestant theologian. His view is called **Amyraldism** or **Amyraldianism**. It is sometimes called **hypothetical universalism**. John Davenant (1572-1641), English bishop of Salisbury, is also connected with this view of the atonement.

There are actually a couple of variations of the four-point view. The first is that Christ's death was a **hypothetical payment** sufficient for the sins of all. The hypothetical payment becomes a real payment when one believes. The other is that Christ's death was a **real payment** for the sins of all, and it is the judicial basis of multiple purposes of God in the atonement, one of which is to save the elect. (See the next workshop for more on these purposes.)

Both four- and five-point Calvinists believe that the atonement is inherently sufficient for all but only intended to save the elect. But there are significant differences between four and five point Calvinists:

Five Point/Particular/Limited View	Four Point/Unlimited View
The death of Christ actually procures salvation with all of its gifts—substitution and faith included—and its scope has a hard limitation to the elect only.	The death of Christ provides the ground of salvation for anyone who will be saved, but the application of the atonement awaits a separate step which is based on God's election.
There is one primary purpose in the atonement.	There are multiple purposes in the atonement.
Accomplishment and application of salvation are effectively collapsed into the crosswork of Christ.	Provision and application are distinguishable aspects of the atonement, so that the unlimited atonement is accomplished at the cross and is applied at later time. The application is applied in a limited way based on election.

An important question is this: is there anything of real significance in the atoning work of Christ that extends beyond the boundaries of the elect? We will explore this tension, among others, in the second workshop.

The moderate Calvinist view is criticized as being inconsistent and illogical, and even worse, as not providing a true substitutionary atonement. The five-point Calvinist believes the text of Scripture and the logic of the Calvinistic system demands limited atonement.

Summary

We have seen that the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian positions are off limits for an orthodox Christian. The Arminian, Middle Knowledge, and Calvinist positions are far closer to the Bible and are the only “evangelical” options. But we must be careful to understand them properly. To say, for instance, that Arminians do not believe man to be dead in sin is incorrect. To charge a Calvinist with not offering salvation to all is also incorrect. Most *do* believe that the gospel should be preached to all people.

Some in our fellowship may hold to a more Arminian-like view of salvation and others to a more Calvinistic view. How to handle such differences? Truthful and loving humility is the key idea. More on that in our third workshop.

Various Notes

A Note About Limited versus Unlimited Atonement

I believe it is best to say this: If you mean to speak of the **intrinsic value** of the atonement, it is **infinite**. If you mean the **intended application** of the atonement for salvation, it is **limited**. See Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, Third ed., p. 741. I agree with Shedd’s explanation that the **atonement is unlimited** but **redemption is limited**. Other effects of the atonement are worldwide in scope, including the breadth of publication of the gospel, the condemning affect it has on the world, and the restoration of the subhuman creation that it will effect. We will see Bible texts that suggest this very thing in the next workshop.

A Note About “Not Selecting” A View

Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary professor Mark Snoberger believes that you are either Arminian or Calvinist and cannot choose a “none of the above” option. He recognizes there are various nuanced positions on the issue, but it basically boils down to this: “Do believers play any *independent* role in their own regeneration?”¹⁸ Believers *do* play a role, and all who are orthodox agree that God’s grace must assist in some way. But Arminians ultimately say that a believer makes his own independent choice to accept Christ. Calvinists say that the believer is dependent and can only make the choice by God’s grace that comes before. You very well may not embrace all the points of Arminian theology, or all the points of Calvinistic theology, but it is not possible to avoid being in one camp or the other.

A Note About Hyper-Calvinism

Hyper-Calvinism is not the same as Calvinism, because “regular” Calvinists (whether 5 point or not) believe in the need for evangelism. They believe this because God has commanded it. They may not be as active about evangelism as they should be, but they acknowledge it is required of them.

18 <http://www.dbts.edu/2014/09/18/on-being-a-biblicist-why-you-cant-choose-none-of-the-above-on-the-calvinismarminianism-question/>. See also <http://www.dbts.edu/2014/10/07/why-you-must-be-a-calvinist-or-an-arminian/>

A recent book-length treatment of particular redemption emphasized that “regular” Calvinists believe in the “sufficiency of Christ’s death for all; the free and indiscriminate proclamation of the gospel to all; God’s love for the non-elect and his salvific stance toward a fallen world; the atonement’s implications for the entire cosmos and not simply the church.” Although the definite atonement view is not presented this way in popular literature, the authors in that volume are able to affirm that “all Reformed theologians have agreed on the infinite *inherent* sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ: sufficient in itself to redeem the whole world and many worlds besides.”¹⁹ This ought to prevent us from making rash judgments about Calvinists like, “they don’t believe in evangelism,” or “they don’t believe Christ’s death was sufficient for the elect.” We may even have Calvinists in the UCB with whom we can happily share fellowship.

A hyper-Calvinist is a 5-point Calvinist who over-emphasizes God’s sovereignty to the point that man’s responsibility is entirely lost. We say on the basis of Scripture that believers have a responsibility to preach the gospel. Hyper-Calvinism denies the need for preaching or evangelism. We believe that man has a responsibility to pray. Hyper-Calvinism denies the need for prayer. The basis of this denial is two-fold. **First**, they say that God is in control and He will save whom He wills when He wills. He does not need human means to accomplish His work. He does not need missions or missionaries or churches to save the lost. He does it Himself through the ministry of the Spirit of God. **Second**, a free offer of the gospel cannot be made to the lost., nor can the duty to believe be pressed upon the lost, for the offer of the gospel only applies to the elect. Christ only died for the few, and the benefits of His death cannot be offered to the lost.

Note the *Articles of Faith of the Gospel Standard Aid and Poor Relief Societies*, (Leicester, England: Oldham & Manton Ltd., no date), which state very clearly this doctrine:

Article XXVI of the Gospel Standard articles: "We deny duty faith and duty repentance – these terms suggesting that it is every man’s duty spiritually and savingly to repent and believe. We deny also that there is any capability in man by nature to any spiritual good whatever. So that we **reject the doctrine that man in a state of nature should be exhorted to believe in or turn to God.**"

Article XXXIII of the Gospel Standard articles: "Therefore, that **for ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them to savingly repent, believe, and receive Christ**, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, to imply creature power, and on the other, **to deny the doctrine of special redemption.**"²⁰

The theology of hyper-Calvinists emphasizes God’s sovereignty and double-reprobation (God’s election of the saved and his election of the lost). True hyper-Calvinists are rare.

I must emphasize that a “good” five-point Calvinist is *not* a hyper-Calvinist and that charge should never be made by any of us GMSA missionaries or UCB pastors.

19 *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, p. 34 and 426.

20 <http://www.theopedia.com/hyper-calvinism>

A Note About Reformed Theology

Ligon Duncan writes in a Tweet on July 26, 2016: “Reformed Theology is a school of historic, orthodox, confessional, Christianity in which the sovereignty of God, the authority of Scripture, God's grace in salvation, the necessity and significance of the church, and covenant theology are maintained and emphasized.” (Emphasis mine.)

We can embrace the underlined portion of his statement. However, section 9 of the UCB Reglamentos says:

La iglesia se inició en el día de Pentecostés por la obra del Espíritu Santo y representa el propósito especial de Dios durante la presente edad.

This says that the church began at Pentecost. The church is distinct from Israel. Therefore, the UCB doctrinal statement is dispensational. It does not support covenant theology. This is because covenant theology normally teaches that the church started with the earliest believers in the Old Testament.

Because of this, a UCB church member or pastor cannot adopt a fully reformed view of theology, even if he accepts a “more Reformed” view of the doctrine of salvation.

The GMSA (MESA) and UCB doctrine are different than reformed doctrine in terms of ecclesiology (the doctrine of the church, its ordinances, its government) and eschatology (the doctrine of the future).

A Note About Church Ministry and Evangelism

The doctrine of salvation which we believe has important ramifications in our evangelism.

An Arminian or Calvinistic view of theology will influence the pastor’s philosophy of ministry. If the pastor believes a man is totally depraved, not seeking after God, and unable to respond to the gospel without God’s special help, he will be forced to trust God alone as he preaches the word of God to the lost. He will have to rest in God’s sovereignty, and in the fact that when God’s word is preached, it will accomplish something (Isaiah 55:11).

However, if the pastor believes, like an Arminian, that people have some ability to respond to the gospel, or are seeking after God without God’s aid, the pastor may design his ministry to appeal to the person’s “felt needs” to convince them of the value of the gospel. Or he may emphasize logic, reason, and evidences (apologetics) in his approach to defending the faith, in an attempt to “convince” the lost person that Christianity is right. Or he may put heavy pressure the lost to believe, as if enough human wisdom and “salesmanship” can persuade someone to be saved.

It is the pastor’s responsibility, and the church’s mission, to preach the gospel to everyone they can. But we must make sure that our method agrees with what the Bible teaches about salvation.

A Note About Church Ministry and So-Called Carnal Christians

The doctrine of salvation which we believe has important ramifications in our church

ministry. Suppose that someone in your church has been living in a pattern of sin for a while. How do you evaluate their spiritual condition?

1) A Calvinist could conclude that this person is either a Christian who is walking disorderly and needs to repent, or that the person is an unbeliever. Even if the sinner made a profession of faith at some point in the past, he might not be a true believer. The Calvinist is very open to the idea that the person may have made a false profession of faith. On the negative side, preaching with this mindset can lead to some people having a lack of assurance as they wonder if their sin is a sign of lack of salvation. Positively, this kind of preaching does emphasize the need for holiness.

2) A moderate Calvinist or Arminian might say the person is a carnal Christian. Carnal Christians maybe have not accepted the Lordship of Christ or dedicated them to following Jesus. In this case, the pastor might preach the need to dedicate oneself to the Lord to come up and out of the carnal state. A big problem with this theology is that it can give people false assurance. Those who are carnal may in fact be unbelievers! Preaching this way is perceived to be a good thing because it avoids questioning the validity of the profession of faith of another.

3) An Arminian might say that the person has lost their salvation and needs to be saved again. Positively, this idea promotes holiness in the church, but negatively it leaves people without firm assurance. They may make little progress in their Christian life because they are always worrying about whether they are saved or not.

A Note About the Offer of the Gospel

In discussions about the extent of the atonement, an objection made by defenders of unlimited atonement says that **a definite atonement does not allow for a universal offer of the gospel.** It is argued that this is because the limited intentionality of God causes the work of Christ to be abridged or clipped in such a way that there are some individuals to whom it cannot be said, "Christ died for *you*."²¹ Thus a broad offer cannot be made, or if it is, it is not *bona fide*.

To explore the strength of this argument against definite atonement, I want to focus on the word "offer." The word itself occurs in English translation far more frequently as a reference to a sacrifice or gift to God than it does to refer to an extension of the gift of salvation. Titus 2:11 may be the only example that connects "offer" to a tender of salvation (NIV), but even here the word "offer" does not directly translate any verb in the Greek text.

To be sure, the idea of an offer is present in Scripture, using other words or phrases than "offer" to express it. For example, "come" expresses the invitation idea in Matthew 11:28 and Isaiah 55:1-3. The Christian's ambassadorial office does have an inviting, imploring aspect to it (2 Cor. 5:20).

21 Note that language like "Christ died for you" is not used in the Bible when the gospel is presented.

But even with such invitational language, the Bible most often uses the imperative mood. "Come!" is a command in both the above verses. Many other expressions of the gospel are command as well. "Turn" is a command in Acts 3:19, 14:15, 20:21, 26:20. "Repent" is a command in Acts 2:38, 8:22, 17:30; Revelation 2:5, etc. "Believe" is a command in Mark 1:15 and Acts 16:31. "Follow" is a command in Luke 9:59 and 18:22 and John 21:19, 22. Romans 1:5 and 2:8 speak of *obeying* the truth, and Acts 6:7 of priests becoming *obedient* to the faith.

So, while I do not subscribe to the definite view of the atonement, I doubt the strength of the contrary argument on the basis the idea of an *offer*. That is because in proclaiming the atonement, the Christian does not extend a mere *offer*. Rather our proclamation, whether considered to be founded upon an atonement of definite or unlimited intention, allows for a universal proclamation and a universal command. The gospel sets forth a universal obligation or *ultimatum*. It is not merely an offer. It is imperative with dire consequences for rejection. The believer in definite atonement can indeed justifiably make a universal command. Whether that command is obeyed or not is another matter.

In other words, if the definite atonement advocate sees himself as primarily commanding the gospel instead of offering the gospel, he has no trouble doing so universally even if Christ's death is only intended to benefit the elect.

This reminds me that as a minister of the gospel, I am not only *asking* all people to come to Jesus. I am not only *inviting* all people to come. I am *telling* all people to come. "You must be born again!"

The Order of the Decrees

The doctrine of the atonement inevitably brings up the so-called "logical order" of the decrees of God. Some theologians emphasize this matter of the decrees of God as if it is all-important. Which order is correct?

Supralapsarian	Infralapsarian	Sublapsarian
Elect some to salvation; reprobate others	Create	Create
Create	Permit the fall	Permit the fall
Permit the fall	Elect some to salvation; pass by others	Provide infinite atonement
Provide atonement for elect	Provide atonement for elect	Elect some to salvation and pass by others

Did God first decree to provide an infinite atonement, and then decree to elect certain people to salvation? Or did God first decree to elect certain ones to salvation and then provide an atonement sufficient for those?

While these may be interesting questions, there is little practical value in debating them. Why? Because

we cannot fully explain the all-wise decisions of God in His design of the universe. A sequential ordering of thoughts is accommodated to our linear way of thinking, but not to God's infinite and timeless mind. Furthermore, God has not revealed this level of detail. We can and should discuss things that are revealed. We should not worry about those things which are unrevealed (Deuteronomy 29:29). We certainly should *not* be divided by such speculations!

Instead of concerning ourselves with speculative theology, we should be busy about obeying the revealed will of God.

The Definition of Foreknowledge

God knows what He will do in advance of it happening. It is not a knowledge of "prescience" in which God happens to be able to see what will happen in the future. It is more specific than that. It entails that God *decides* what He will do, and then on that basis, knows it in advance.

It is important that we reject the doctrine called *open theism* because it says that God cannot exhaustively know the future. This false doctrine says that most future events are not objects of knowledge, are not knowable, and thus no one, not even God, can know them.

Time for Questions and Answers

Workshop #2

The Bible on the Intent and Extent of the Atonement

The goal of this session is that we would understand the Biblical tensions that cause disagreements regarding the intent and extent of the atonement. When we say *intent* we mean “What did God *intend* or plan to do or accomplish with Christ’s work on the cross?” By *extent* we mean “For whom did Christ die” or “*How many* people are touched by the atonement—only the elect, or humanity more broadly?” My main goal is that we *understand* the reasons for tension, not necessarily that we all come to agree one one or another view.

The disagreement boils down to something like this: did Christ die for all people, as taught by Arminians and moderate Calvinists? Or did Christ die only for the elect, as taught by five-point Calvinists? In other words, was the atonement *general* in its design or was it *particular* in its design?

Non-Issues in the Debate

The following are not issues in the debate over the intent and extent of the atonement.

1. Christ’s death has infinite value. Both Calvinists and Arminians believe that Christ’s death – what He *did* – is so powerful and sufficient that every human being who ever lived could be saved by it.
2. Only some will be saved, not all. The *some*, the elect, are those who really believe the gospel. Obviously not all people do that. Those who do not are eternally condemned. Neither side of the debate suggests the doctrine of “universalism.”
3. Christ’s death, when applied to the life of the believer, supplies everything necessary to save and transform that person and bring them to heaven.
4. All people are to be told the good news of Jesus Christ. The offer and command of the gospel stands open to all. This is true because the Bible explicitly says so, and because we do not know who the elect are.

We have to keep in mind what the debate is *not* about. It is not about the areas mentioned above. It is not about our common doctrinal statement that we reviewed in our first session. It is about God’s intent and the resulting extent of the atonement.

Major Positions on the Extent/Intent of the Atonement²²

1) Limited Atonement (Calvinist). The purpose of Jesus' death was to purchase salvation and everything related to it, regeneration and faith included, but only for those people who are elect. The means of gospel preaching and faith are included in the Calvinist explanation. "The atonement *itself*, and not something outside of the atonement, is the cause for any conversion."²³ Grace, faith and repentance, along with all the blessings of salvation, are gifts from God (Romans 12:3, 2 Timothy 2:25, Ephesians 2:8-9; Acts 5:31, 11:18).

2) Unlimited Atonement (Arminian). The purpose of Jesus' death was to make a payment for the sin of every human being and thus make all people savable. The benefit of His death must be appropriated by faith, and the gospel must be preached to everyone. The possibility and ability to believe are from God, but faith itself is not a gift from God.²⁴ The gospel can be preached equally to all since Christ died equally for all. But not all are saved.

3) Multiple Intentions (Moderate or "Four-Point" Calvinist). Jesus' death did not have a single purpose or intention. There were multiple intentions of God the Father and the Son in Christ's cross-work. The atonement was not designed to save all men. The atonement was not designed only to save the elect. Rather, the atonement is designed to satisfy God's justice so that He can be both just and the justifier of the one who believes in Jesus. By this, I mean that Christ's death is a real (not hypothetical) payment to satisfy God's holy and just demands against sin, and of a quality or quantity enough for the sins of all mankind of all ages. It provides the basis for God to justly carry out the following several purposes for in the death of Christ:

A) Like the limited atonement view, Christ died to purchase the salvation of the elect. In a connected but distinguishable act, God applies the work of Christ through faith in Christ to His elect. It uses all the texts of the limited atonement view, but understands that Christ did not die only for the elect. It maintains a separation between provision and application in the atonement instead of merging them into a single entity as does the particular (limited) view.

B) Like the unlimited atonement view, Christ also died for every human. The one act of His death was inherently sufficient to pay for the sins of every human. But since this infinite provision is only applied by God through faith in Christ, only those who are elect and believe are saved. This permits God to extend common grace to all and the offer/command of the gospel to all people.

C) Christ did not come to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17). However, His death also serves to heighten the condemnation of those who reject Him (John 12:48).

D) Christ also died to reconcile the sub-human creation to God in what we can call restoration

22 See Bruce Ware's article on the Internet entitled, "Extent of the Atonement: Outline of the Issue, Positions, Key Texts, and Key Theological Arguments." It is available at <http://evangelicalarminians.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Ware.-Extent-of-the-Atonement.pdf> and www.epm.org/static/uploads/downloads/Extent_of_the_Atonement_by_Bruce_Ware.pdf.

23 *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, p. 261.

24 <https://arminiantoday.wordpress.com/2010/01/31/is-faith-a-gift-from-god-2/>. For example, John 4:42 says "we believe."

of the created order (Romans 8:20-23, Colossians 1:20).

E) Christ also died to satisfy God's justice regarding past sins and regarding the eternal future where sinners will continue to be punished forever for their sin.

I hold to the multiple intentions view. To be fair, it must be noted that the other views recognize other intentions in the atonement, if for no other reason than that the text of Scripture plainly states at least one other purpose in redemption in Romans 8:21. The limited atonement treats the other intentions as "implications" rather than as primary purposes.²⁵

Tensions

We will examine several points of tension, and I will address them from both the limited and unlimited perspectives. For the moment, I will leave out of the discussion the multiple-intentions view.

1. Does regeneration come before or after faith?

Limited atonement: regeneration logically precedes faith. Bible: The thorough effects of depravity are taught in 1 Cor. 2:14 and Ephesians 2:1 and 4:18. These texts and many others teach us that an unsaved person cannot exercise faith. God must first enliven him before he or she can exercise faith. A dead person cannot hear the call of God.

Unlimited atonement: faith precedes regeneration. Bible: 2 Timothy 3:15 says that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ. There are many passages that condition salvation upon faith (Acts 16:31, Ephesians 2:8-9) and many "by faith" (por fe, o por la fe) passages in the New Testament. Therefore, it is clear that regeneration comes after faith. Otherwise, if regeneration precedes, there seems to be no need to call for faith.

Dead people can indeed hear the voice of the Son of God, because the Bible says so in John 5:25. The whole matter of salvation is a miracle. Jesus taught us in John 3:8 that it is difficult to explain the work of the Spirit in a person to give them new life. We see the results, just as we see the results of the wind, but we don't see the wind itself, where it comes from or where it goes.

Resolution of the tension: Although this question causes division among believers, it should not. It is important to note that Calvinist teaching is that regeneration precedes faith *logically*, but not *chronologically*. That is, it does not come prior in time, but rather happens simultaneously with faith. Unfortunately, some Calvinists seem to misunderstand this, or speak incautiously about regeneration happening some time before the person recognizes that they have faith. Nowhere can we find a text that teaches a separation of time between saving faith and regeneration. I do not know of any Calvinist preachers that insist there must be a distance of time between regeneration and faith. I believe that faith and regeneration happen instantaneously and simultaneously.

It is important to believe that a special work of the Holy Spirit is needed in order for someone to come

²⁵ *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, p. 34.

to saving faith in Christ. Whether this work is called regeneration or illumination or conviction is a matter of debate, but there has to be *some* work of the Spirit for a person to become a Christian (2 Thessalonians 2:13; John 16:9; Titus 3:5-6).

2. Can the gospel be preached to every person?

This question is sometimes asked like this: “Is there a well-meant or *bona fide* offer of salvation to all human beings?”

Limited atonement: Yes, because we are commanded to preach to all people (Matthew 24:14; 28:19; Mark 13:10; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8; Col. 1:23; Revelation 14:6). Also yes, because all who will end up being saved (the elect) have been “bought and paid for” by the death of Christ for the elect. Furthermore, since we do not know who the elect are, we must preach to all. Finally, we must preach to all because God sovereignly ordains the means as well as the ends: the means to salvation is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It seems that the unlimited view doesn’t need to preach the gospel to the elect, because all their sins are paid. So all people must automatically be saved.

Unlimited atonement: Yes, on the basis of the same texts listed for the limited atonement view, and because Christ did in fact die for all people without exception. John 1:29 teaches that Christ takes away the sin of the world. It seems that the limited atonement view cannot preach “Christ died for you” to all people since Christ only died for the elect. On that view, there can be no *bona fide* (genuine; from Latin “in good faith”) offer of salvation to the non-elect.

Dealing with the tension: If you are an Arminian, it is hard for you to see how Calvinists can preach the gospel to all. But think of it like this: they are not required to say “Christ died for you” because that phrase doesn’t exist in the Bible. They may say, “Christ died for the ungodly” or “Christ died for us” or “Christ died for our sins” (Romans 5:6; 8; 1 Cor. 15:3). Or, they may say, “God commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30). Or, “You must be born again” (John 3:7). All those ways of stating the gospel are true without respect to who is elect or not.

If you are a Calvinist, you can understand how the Arminian wants and needs to preach the gospel. But it may be hard for you to understand how that gospel can be effective for anyone if Christ did not die in a special way for those who will believe. Their answer is this: those who hold to an unlimited atonement think of the atonement in two separate parts: provision and application. While the provision is unlimited, the application *is* limited, based as it is on God’s sovereignty and/or human faith. To them, becomes effective at application, not at the time of provision.

Ultimately the resolution of the tension is this: **both limited and unlimited atonement limit the effect of the atonement.** They have to do so, lest they fall into the heresy of universalism. The one limits the atonement at its point of accomplishment; the other at its point of application.

3. Is faith necessary?

In both views, faith is absolutely necessary. If someone suggests otherwise, that person does not understand the “normal” limited or unlimited atonement view.

Dealing with the tension: Although each camp may condemn the other because of supposed “logical contradictions,” it is not truly fair for one side to say to the other, “Your view DEMANDS that you must also believe that faith is unnecessary.” Such a statement does not ring true in the minds of those who hold the alternate view.

4. Is the atonement actually *substitutionary*?

Limited atonement: Yes, because Christ died only for the elect and in their place. He died for His sheep (John 10:15, 27) and no others. He took punishment in their very place. If Christ really did die for everyone, then either He substituted for all, and all should be saved, or the atonement is not substitutionary, and that is a heresy.

Unlimited atonement: The answer depends on who you ask. The moderate Calvinist answers yes, but Christ becomes “active” as substitute for a person when that person trusts in Christ. Again, the provision/application distinction comes into play. Christ died as a provisional substitute, but that substitution does not have effect unless received by faith and thus *applied*. If His work remains unapplied to an individual, then effectively there ends up being no substitution for that individual.

Arminian John Wesley believed in a substitutionary atonement. However, not all Arminians are convinced of the necessity of the substitutionary atonement doctrine. Current Arminian author Roger Olson tries to avoid labels in one article as he describes several aspects of the atonement, including a substitution aspect.²⁶ Elsewhere he writes that he is not settled between the penal substitution and governmental theories of the atonement but he seems perfectly fine with the governmental theory.

Side Note: The Governmental Theory of the atonement “maintains that Christ was not punished on behalf of the human race. Instead, God publicly demonstrated his displeasure with sin by punishing his own sinless and obedient Son as a propitiation. Because Christ's suffering and death served as a substitute for the punishment humans might have received, God is able to extend forgiveness while maintaining divine order, having demonstrated the seriousness of sin and thus appeasing his wrath.”²⁷ “This [governmental atonement] view holds that Christ by His death actually paid the penalty for no man's sin. What His death did was to demonstrate what their sins deserved at the hand of the just Governor and Judge of the universe, and permits God justly to forgive men if on other grounds, such as their faith, their repentance, their works, and their perseverance, they meet His demand.”²⁸

26 <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2012/09/a-neglected-theory-of-the-atonement/>

27 <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2011/02/about-the-atonement/>

28 Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Thomas Nelson, 1998), p. 479.

Our doctrinal statement says “la muerte de Cristo en a cruz fue un sacrificio vicario y expiatorio” which demands a vicarious or substitutionary aspect to the atonement. The governmental theory falls short of the fundamental doctrinal of substitutionary atonement. Why? Because in it, Christ’s work is not really attached to any person’s salvation.

There is no happy resolution to this debate. Thankfully, strong and moderate Calvinists, and some Arminians, recognize that the Bible demands a substitutionary atonement (1 Peter 2:21, 3:18; Hebrews 9:28; Romans 4:25; Galatians 3:13, and many other texts).

5. Does the Bible ever say that Christ died *only* for the elect?

Simply put, can we find “limited atonement” in the Bible?

Limited atonement: Yes, the Bible teaches it in many places. And this is demanded by the penal, substitutionary nature of the atonement. For instance, the text says that Christ will save His people from their sin, not other people.²⁹ John 17:9 says that Jesus was not praying for the world, but only for those whom God gave to Him. John 6:37-44 limits salvation to those God “gives” and “draws” to Jesus Christ.

Although the Bible uses terms like "all" and "the world," it uses them in a way that the original audience would have understood to refer to "a group that includes both Jews and Gentiles" as opposed to "a group that includes only Jews." The words "world" and "all" are used in a variety of nuances and do not always refer to humanity in a broad, universal, without-exceptions sense.

Unlimited atonement: No. In fact, the Bible emphasizes that Christ died for all, and there are even texts that explicitly say he died for the non-elect. The natural reading of the texts such as 1 Tim 4:10 and 1 John 2:2 clearly suggests that the atonement applies to more than just the elect.

1 Timothy 4:10

...The living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

...el Dios viviente, que es el Salvador de todos los hombres, mayormente de los que creen.

1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Y él es la propiciación por nuestros pecados; y no solamente por los nuestros, sino también por los de todo el mundo.

1 Timothy 2:1-6

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be

²⁹ As dispensationalists, we must be clear that “His people” in the context of Matthew 1:21 refers to the Jews. It does not refer to the world’s elect as opposed to the non-elect. But it does illustrate the selective nature of salvation.

made for all men...[God] desires all men to be saved...Christ Jesus...gave Himself a ransom for all...

Exhorto ante todo, a que se hagan rogativas, oraciones, peticiones y acciones de gracias, por todos los hombres...el cual quiere que todos los hombres sean salvos...Jesucristo...el cual se dio a sí mismo en rescate por todos...

The strength of this passage is that the “all” carries through from start to finish and refers to the same group all the way through—a group which includes unbelievers whose future salvation is unknown.

2 Peter 2:1

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you..even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction.

Pero hubo también falsos profetas entre el pueblo, como habrá entre vosotros falsos maestros...y aun negarán al Señor que los rescató, atrayendo sobre sí mismos destrucción repentina.

Isaiah 53:6

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Todos nosotros nos descarriamos como ovejas, cada cual se apartó por su camino; mas Jehová cargó en él el pecado de todos nosotros.

Generally, the limited atonement view understands the limitation to be implicit in many texts, not explicit. Adherents would make the limitation explicit by translating “all *kinds* of men” or “world *of the elect*.” Obviously, the difficulty with this is that it inserts words into the text that are not present in the original manuscripts. These words are inserted because of a theological interpretation and translation of Scripture.

Normally, translators supply words that clarify the understood meaning of an ellipsis (portion left out but well understood from the context). The suggestion to add “of the elect” or “of all kinds of people” stretches this translation tool to the limit where unlimited atonement advocates simply cannot accept it. This is an important hermeneutical consideration.

The convicting work of the Spirit is a broad ministry in which He convicts the *world* of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). It does not sound like it is limited to only the elect.

Dealing with the tension: This question exposes what in my judgment is the weakest link in the limited understanding of the atonement. No text says that Christ died “only for the elect.” Texts may say that Christ died for the elect, but there is a whole spectrum of texts that say Christ died for other groups as well. For example, Christ died for:

1. The world John 1:29, 3:16, 12:47; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 John 2:2

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 2. All | 2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 2:6, 4:10; Titus 2:11 |
| 3. The ungodly | 2 Peter 2:1; Rom. 5:6, 8 |
| 4. Every man | Heb. 2:9 |
| 5. His friends | John 15:13 |
| 6. His people Israel | Mat. 1:21 |
| 7. His sheep | John 10:15 |
| 8. His chosen ones | Eph. 1:3-7 |
| 9. The Church | Eph. 5:23-26 |
| 10. The Many | Matt. 20:28, 26:28, Mark 14:24, Heb. 2:10 |
| 11. Us | Titus 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:3 |
| 12. Me | Gal. 2:20 |

None of these texts can be used to support the fact that Christ died *only* for the listed group. Christ did die for me, but He did not *only* die for me.

To deal with the tension, we must also recognize that when we say “Christ died FOR me” and “Christ died FOR the world,” we probably mean something slightly different by the word “FOR” in each case. In the first case, all the blessings of salvation are included in the “FOR.” In the second case, the provision is meant, but not all of the application of the provision.

The way Christ died—the actual historical circumstances, the time on the cross, and everything about it—is such that it matters not how many people were intended to be saved. The intent of God does not change the “reality on the ground” of what Christ did. What Christ did, He did, and it is inherently sufficient for the sins of all mankind. There is nothing more He could have done; and in fact nothing less He could have done. I believe this is agreeable to both limited and unlimited advocates. But then the “double-jeopardy” problem applies to both, since Christ died sufficiently for all.

6. Are the unsaved suffering punishment for sins already paid for by Jesus?

This question is also known as the “double jeopardy” question.

Limited atonement: Because Jesus died for the elect only, He did not pay for the sins of the unsaved (non-elect). They suffer for their own sins in the lake of fire for eternity. Limited atonement Christians object to the unlimited atonement view because, they say, if Christ died for all, then no one should be in Hell. Otherwise, they are paying for sins that Christ already paid for. That is not just.

Unlimited atonement: Jesus did die for all, but since the saving benefits of His death are not applied to

the unbeliever, the unbeliever pays for his own sins. He refuses the payment of another, even though the payment is sufficient. The payment of Christ for them is not “wasted” because He had to die just the same, whether for the sins of one person, or the sins of one billion people. Substitution is split between provision and application, and if there is no application, there is no effective substitution. Sins are therefore not “paid for” twice.

Resolution: Don’t argue about it!

Additional thoughts: First, I am not convinced that we should speak about “paying for” sins in a purely monetary way.³⁰ The penalty for sin is not subject to mathematical equations. It is an ethical issue that has to do with punishment. Sins are punished in Hell; they are not “paid for.” An infinite stay in Hell demonstrates that sins are never “paid in full.”

Second, sin is not fully handled apart from the death of Christ. God is satisfied for all eternity that the sin question has been handled because Christ died for sin and sinners. This would not be the case if Christ had not died. An illustration may help you to see my point. Suppose that you have a young child who is murdered. Would you truly be satisfied if the murderer were given a life-time prison sentence? Would you truly be satisfied if the murderer were killed in the electric chair? Would you truly be satisfied if the murderer were subject to torture for eternity? The only thing that would really satisfy you is to have your child back. Of course, you might not know how satisfying that would be unless you lost the child first. In a similar way, God could not be satisfied about sin unless Christ died to take care of the problem. Now that it is done, God is fully satisfied. The eternal punishment of the lost is sufficient as a penalty for them, and God has the final resolution of the sin problem in His Son’s voluntary self-sacrifice.

We have a message to preach to the world that says that God has cared for the sin problem once and for all. His wrath is propitiated (satisfied) in Jesus Christ. What a truth!!!

7. Does God want all people to be saved?

Limited atonement: No. The single will and intention of God is to save the elect. God desires their salvation. If he “really” desired the salvation of all people, they would be saved. Why they are not saved is due to God’s sovereignty. Calvinists believe His choice is not arbitrary or baseless, but it is somewhat of a mystery.

Some believers in limited atonement say that God loves everyone, but only loves certain people with a kind of “electing love.” Others are more bold and say that God loves some people and He hates others. When we first read that, it may not seem to be Biblical. But look at some Biblical texts to make sure of your conclusion. See Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:13 which say that God loved Jacob but hated Esau. Psalm 5:5-6 teaches that God hates all workers of iniquity and those who are bloodthirsty and deceitful; 7:11 teaches that God is angry with the wicked every day; 11:5 says God hates those who love violence. God has made some vessels for honor and some for dishonor; some for wrath, and others for

³⁰ In theological literature, the monetary idea is called “pecuniary.”

mercy (Romans 9:21-23). God has mercy on whom He wills, and others He hardens (Romans 9:15, 18). The limited atonement view reminds us all of Biblical truths that we have to include in our theology even if we do not agree.

Unlimited atonement: Yes, God desires the salvation of all. This is proven by the teaching of 2 Peter 3:9:

...not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

...no queriendo que ninguno perezca, sino que todos procedan al arrepentimiento.

The unlimited atonement advocate objects to the limited atonement view because they say it has to stretch the meaning of “all” to “all kinds” or “all without distinction” in order to exclude the non-elect.

The Calvinist replies that 2 Peter 3:9 is found in a context that is written to the beloved brothers—Christians. The verse itself says that God is patient toward us/you—the Christians. It is reasonable to conclude that God does not want any "of you believers or future believers" to perish but to come to repentance.

The Arminian can say “yes” with no qualifications—God desires the salvation of all. The Calvinist balks at this because he objects, “Then why doesn’t everyone end up being saved? Is God’s will frustrated? Is He not sovereign?”

The four-point Calvinist qualifies his “yes” answer. The qualification is that there is a sense in which God is compassionate toward the lost and does not desire them to die (Ezekiel 18:23 and 33:11). He extends common grace to them and provides the restraint of sin as well, which are based in His kindness and (this is debated) in the atoning work of Christ. But there is another sense in which God did not will for them to be saved, as evidenced from many passages (like Matthew 7:21-23).

8. Are all people going to be saved eventually?

Limited atonement: No.

Unlimited atonement: No.

There is no conflict to resolve here. The tension is that limited atonement supposes that unlimited atonement *demand*s that all be saved, while unlimited atonement supposes that limited atonement cannot offer the gospel to anyone since they don’t know who is elect. These are suppositions that are not in fact true and should not cause division between otherwise like-minded believers.

9. Does the Old Testament teach limited or unlimited atonement?

Limited atonement: The Old Testament teaches our view. The Old Testament emphasizes the idea of covenant and election of the people of God. It teaches heart-circumcision for the saved. The priestly sacrifices applied especially and particularly for the remnant/elect, and only incidentally upon the rest

of the community of Israel. The parallel with the priestly ministry of Christ (John 17, for instance) cannot be overlooked. The general nature of corporate sacrifices is bounded by the election of the nation as a whole, so that universal atonement should not be found there.

The nation of Israel is a type of the professing church, which can include unbelievers (Acts 20:28-30; 2 Peter 2:1; Heb. 6:4, 10:29; 2 Peter 2:20). The work of Christ does give them some benefit, but not to the point of salvation.

The remnant within Israel is a type of the *true* church within the professing church, and it is these for whom Christ really died.³¹

Unlimited atonement: The Old Testament teaches our view. The general and nation-wide effects of the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), the atonement made for unintentional sins (Leviticus 4:13-21), and the bronze serpent that was elevated for snake-bitten people to look at (Numbers 21:5-9) all point to general provision made by God for the sins of the nation. The priests did something for the entire nation, not just those who were saved. These general provisions are parallel to the general provision made by Christ on the cross for the world (John 3:14-15). The priestly function in the nation, therefore, did not encompass only the elect. The priests also ministered in a way that did something for the non-elect.

When the limited atonement view suggests that Christ's death offers benefits for the professing-but-not-possessing church, this is no different than saying it offers benefits for the unbeliever generally. This is because unbelievers "in" church are not one bit different than unbelievers outside of the church.

10. Are there few who are going to be saved?

Despite the fact that some Arminians believe Calvinists are very pessimistic about this question, the Calvinist believes God will save as many as He wishes. This will be a huge number (Revelation 7:9).

Many Christians believe that only a remnant will be saved, a number which, although large, will amount to a small percentage of all people who ever lived.

So, there is not really a tension here. Arminians believe the same kinds of things. Luke 13:23 records the disciple asking the same question. In answer, the Lord taught about the broad and narrow ways. In the end, many will seek salvation, but will not be able to find it. Matthew 22:14 says that many are called, but few are chosen.

11. Did God choose me, or did I choose God?

We could be very vague and answer this question with a "yes," meaning that both are true (God chose: 1 Peter 2:4; John 6:70, 15:16; we chose in the sense of believing: Deut. 30:19; Acts 16:31).

A vague answer does not satisfy most theologians, however. The issue is when the choosing occurs. Here is a very stark difference between the views. **Limited atonement** says flat out that God chooses

31 This idea is found in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, p. 238.

people and this happened, in fact, before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4, 2 Thess. 2:13). It is these and these only that God intended to save. The **moderate Calvinist** view agrees with this position.

The **Arminian unlimited** view says that people choose God, otherwise their free will is violated in a substantial and very distasteful way. The person's choosing of God is the basis for the faith that God foresees prior to the creation of the world.

I see no resolution for this difference.

Other Seeming Tension Points

Did God create evil? Neither Calvinist nor Arminian believes that. Are humans subject to fate? Not according to either view. Are humans free? Calvinism says yes, but in a limited way. Arminianism says yes, in a very unlimited way. Are humans responsible for their choices? Yes, in both views. Does God force people to become Christians? Not on either view. Can people do anything good? Arminians answer yes. Calvinists do too. Both should recognize that all an unsaved person's works are somehow tainted by sin.

Don't both Arminians and Calvinists follow the teaching of a **man** (Arminius and Calvin)? Neither camp believes they are following the teachings of an individual; they believe that the system they follow is the best interpretation of the **Bible**.

Is Resolution for All These Tensions Possible?

It is not going to happen that all theologians, pastors, or Christian people will ever fully answer or resolve these questions, at least in this life, and possibly not even in heaven (because we still will not know everything when we are in heaven; nor will we have infinite minds).

Each side strongly doubts that the other can be claim to be faithful in its exposition of Scripture, or consistent in their exposition. The Calvinist believes that Arminianism focuses too much on man and robs God of His rightful glory in His freedom to save whoever He wants to. The Arminian believes that the Calvinist removes human responsibility and denies man the choice to believe.

Some adherents of the limited view, and some of the unlimited view, are so convinced of the absolute truth of their position that they cannot see how their opponents can be right. "The other side" is certainly not consistent. The divisions can be very strong. I have heard people say things like "I was saved out of Arminianism." The implication is that the Arminian mindset is basically equivalent to the unsaved mindset. So how do we handle division of this sort? That is the subject of our next workshop.

Personal Note

The Bible indicates God intended to provide a salvation that would save the elect. At the same time, the atonement can be offered genuinely to the non-elect but is willingly rejected by them.

An important aspect in my theology is the Biblical fact that no man knows or can know who is elect ahead of time. This information is not revealed to us in the Bible or in any “sixth sense,” and we are not omniscient. After a person is saved, we can say with some confidence that he or she is elect, but that is only after the fact. Because we do not and cannot know who is elect, we are basically obligated to ignore the question of who is elect or not and simply preach the gospel indiscriminately to all. If person A rejects our message, we can move on to person B. But that doesn’t mean that person A is not elect. It simply means they rejected the message of Christ *at that time*.

Another very important part of my theological is that I do not let the logic of a system of theology drive me, but rather the text of the Bible is what I want to drive me. If there is a question about Calvinism or Arminianism, and there seems to be a clear text of Scripture that answers that question, I take the Bible answer! We really ought not to preach theological systems, but Bible passages in their context.

I believe the limited atonement position overreaches when it says that the atonement itself brings about conversion. This “compresses” a long sequence of causation into one event and makes that event basically indistinguishable from any other related thing (calling, convicting, conversion, faith, etc.) It almost seems to make those things unnecessary.

I believe it is helpful to think about multiple causes of salvation. The **ultimate cause** is God. He planned salvation from the beginning. The **meritorious cause** of salvation is the pardon of sin and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. The **effective cause** is the Spirit of God. He produces repentance and faith and conviction as He works in a person for regeneration. The **instrumental cause** of salvation is the preaching of the gospel. The **obtaining cause** of salvation is personal faith.

Finally, I believe that it is important that we understand that these questions about the atonement bring us right close to the outer edge of God’s revelation of Himself. Definite atonement advocates have a difficult time expressing how the infinite sufficiency of the atonement relates to unbelievers in a meaningful way. Unlimited atonement advocates have their own difficulties in explaining things like how Christ was an actual substitute for the elect and no others. The reason, I think, that it is difficult to come to resolution on some of these matters is that they are not fully revealed. That in itself may be an indication that the details are not meant to be known or cannot be fully understood by our finite and sinful minds. We should humbly accept that and carry on the work we clearly have been assigned without getting bogged down.

Other Matters in the Atonement

There is much more to the atonement than the question we have studied above. For instance, there are various theories of atonement (ransom to Satan, moral influence, governmental, example, and penal substitution, among others). Although there are some elements of truth to other theories, the penal substitution theory must be held to have an orthodox view of the atonement.

Then there is the question of just what does the atonement *provide*? The following table gives an outline answer, but much more can be said.

Problem that Man Has	Solution Provided in Christ's Atonement
Inability: man cannot save him/herself. Ephesians 2:1.	Substitution. Mark 10:45, 1 Peter 3:18, Romans 5:8, 1 Thess. 5:10, 1 Cor. 15:3.
Wrath of God against sin. Romans 1:18	Propitiation or satisfaction. 1 John 2:2, 4:10.
Enmity of the sinner against God and alienation from God. Romans 5:10, Col. 1:21.	Reconciliation. Romans 5:10-11.
Bondage of the sinner to sin. John 8:34	Redemption and Adoption. John 8:36, John 1:12.
Guilt of sin. Romans 3:19, James 2:10.	Expiation. Ephesians 1:7.
Condemnation. Romans 5:16, 18.	Justification. Romans 5:16, 18.

Time for Questions and Answers

Workshop #3

How to Handle Differences of Belief

The goal of this session is to remind ourselves how to properly handle doctrinal differences among ourselves. This includes an explanation of the relative importance of the disagreement over the atonement in relation to the rest of the Bible's teaching of salvation.

Disagreements are especially difficult when they touch areas of belief that we hold close to our heart. We may respond more energetically against a different belief in the doctrine of salvation than we do in a different belief about creation or prophecy.

Some of the material that I presented in the first session may have caused some of you to shake your heads and wonder how someone could believe in a certain way. I have had the same same experience. But I cannot let that cause me to respond in a non-Christian way toward those who believe differently. I must always be sanctified in how I respond to such differences.

Imagine that you have a difference of opinion over the extent of the atonement. How do we handle it?

Put Differences into Proper Perspective

1. Consider the substantial doctrinal agreement between you and the brother in all areas of theology. This agreement should include doctrines such as the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, the Trinity, special creation, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead, His ascension into heaven, His second coming, salvation by grace through faith alone, etc. Then think about the comparative weight of your differences in light of these common areas.
2. Think about the relative weight of your differences in relation to the whole of the doctrine of soteriology. We know that we are not saved by believing in five-point Calvinism or Arminianism. We are saved by believing in Christ. But there are boundaries to a Biblical doctrine of salvation. I have prepared some slides that will help us to see how these boundaries can be respected.
3. Remember the Bible does not give detailed answers for some of the questions that we ask. We must recognize that we are talking about an area of the Divine mind concerning which there is not as much clear and concise revelation as we might hope.

Where something is revealed in Scripture, we can be dogmatic. Where it is not, we need to be humble, cautious, and loving. When the Bible reveals something, that something is clear; but when the Bible does not reveal information about something, then we have to humbly accept that we may not be able to be as precise as we might like.

The revelation of God's design for the atonement is less explicit than is God's revelation for His saving

action at the cross and the requirement of genuine faith in Jesus Christ.

Watch Your Character and Example

Have you ever had a feeling of frustration at another pastor or Christian who held a different view than you do? Have you been angry at them? Upset? Felt they were a heretic? Rolling your eyes at the other person's lack of insight? Thinking that this whole topic is ridiculous and Christians should not be spending time on it? Those things can easily result in a practical separation of believers. How then do we handle with those feelings?

Couldn't God have such feelings toward you because you have been sinful and wrong in various areas of your life? If He judged you with the judgment you use against others, particularly other brothers, how would you fare (Matthew 7:2, James 2:13)? But does God treat us like that? Have you become sinfully upset with a brother or even with others who hold to a somewhat different view than you do? By His marvelous love, God shows us the way to deal with others who are different than we are; and with others who may be wrong.

Anecdotally, I have observed young men who have started to understand the "doctrines of grace" and they get very excited, forget their Christian virtues, and go about trying to convince others to become five-point Calvinists. They look down upon anyone who holds a different view. This is not the mark of spiritual maturity but rather of youthful zeal.

Here are some tips on how to handle doctrinal differences.

1. **Think. Think** of the character you display in handling a difference with someone else. Do I become angry or do I exercise patience? Do I want to criticize or love and pray for the person with whom I differ? **Think** about the church-wide effect of exposing the difference or fixating on the difference in an argumentative kind of way. What does that teach the church people about handling conflict?
2. **Be Humble.** Humbly consider that you may not know everything as well as you think you do (1 Cor. 8:1). You may have some pieces of your theology incorrect. In the same way that you think your brother is wrong in some area, you may in fact be wrong in some other area. Be teachable. But you also may not know your brother's thinking as well as you think you do. You may call him a hyper-Calvinist, when in fact he is not. At that point, you have become a fool, answering a matter before you understand it (Proverbs 18:13).
3. **Love.** Christian virtues are not set aside when you become a pastor. That is to say, leadership and protecting the flock does not permit you to jettison Christian character! Primary among Christian virtues is the virtue to love your brothers. By this outsiders know that we are followers of Jesus (John 13:35).
4. **Avoid Arguments.** Do not get involved in useless arguments over words. It is not useful to argue over Calvinism or Arminianism of the good sorts that we have discussed here. Paul tells Timothy and

Titus to avoid word-wars because they lead to more sin (1 Timothy 6:4, 6:20; 2 Timothy 2:14, 2:16, 2:23; Titus 3:9; see also 1 Timothy 1:6). This sort of activity generates unnecessary strife. For example, it is loving and wise to **avoid** a debate about the logical order of regeneration, faith, repentance, and conversion. If we agree that these realities happen at the moment of salvation, then we are on the same page. There is no profit in debating whether WE think one logically precedes another. Leave the details to God.

The doctrinal matters that we have considered are useful and can sharpen our understanding of Scripture. But when they turn into controversy between believers, then these controversies are foolish and worthless. They do not at that point serve to edify anyone.

Remember Your Team and the Enemy of Evangelism

We are called to contend for the faith. We are not called to contend against one another who are in the faith! Satan delights in division, distortion, deception, destruction, and discord.

1. Mark 9:40 reminds us that the one who is not against us is on our side. That is a broad principle which needs to be evaluated carefully. Is the other person *really* on our side? For example: if someone believes that salvation is purchased through good works, then they are *not* on our side. If someone believes differently about something like the pre-tribulational rapture, they very likely are on our side.

2. Answer the question: what team are we on? You may play a different position than I do, but we are all on the same team. You may be a goalkeeper, defender, mid-fielder, forward, or striker, but you are on the same team.

Maybe a better illustration would be to think of the pastor like a soccer coach. Each coach has a different set of game plans and strategies and way of looking at the opponent. But if we are all in the same league, working against the world, the flesh, and the devil, then we do well to recognize that we are not supposed to be fighting against one another.

Make Use of Separation

Sometimes separation of one sort or another may be helpful. There are different kinds of separation. Paul and Barnabas separated their ministries from one another over a non-doctrinal issue (Acts 15:37-40). The Bible does not give us warrant to say that either of them was wrong. It is my view that neither were wrong. Paul had different priorities than Barnabas. Paul needed team members who were reliable in very difficult circumstances. Barnabas was an encourager and someone who I think was willing to take along a young man who needed training in order to become more useful to God.

Let me give you an application of this kind of separation today. Pastors who have strong opposing opinions regarding the atonement should not minister in the same church. They can more harmoniously labor by being in different churches and not spending all their time together. This does not mean that they can never see each other. They must not look at each other as unbelievers. They cooperate at a

distance.

A second kind of separation happens when a believer needs to be ashamed for acting out of accordance with acceptable Biblical practice. We see this in 2 Thessalonians 3:6 and 3:14. Sometimes a person needs to be isolated from the group in order to let him know the severity of his error.

A third kind of separation is the kind we see between Paul and Alexander the copper-smith. It is the most severe kind of separation, and it is caused by **apostasy**. Some differences rise to the level requiring discipline or total separation, and the apostasy of Alexander was one of them. We are instructed in several places in the Bible that we must separate from certain people for our own purity and the testimony of the gospel. We are to separate from:

- Apostates and false teachers – 2 Timothy 4:14, 2 John 10.
- Divisive people – Romans 16:17-18, Titus 3:10.
- Professing believers who are unrepentant over sin – Matthew 18:17, 1 Corinthians 5:11.

Remember the Autonomy Principle

Each local church is a self-governed body of believers.³² Under the ministry of its pastor or pastors, it may grow over time to believe a certain way about the doctrine of salvation. You may disagree with that way if you are from another church. But remember that, within the boundaries of orthodox doctrine, it is the privilege—and responsibility—of that church to understand Scripture the best way it knows how. An outsider cannot rightly come in and lord it over the church by demanding that they change their sincerely held beliefs.

If you are a pastor coming into a church or conference setting, you must be sensitive to what that church or what the conference attendees believe about these issues. Perhaps you are invited to a church where the pastor or the church members have a different understanding of this matter. Do not go in to “convert” them all to your view. Be humble and recognize that your understanding is not the only one that can be held with good faith toward God. Perhaps the church would invite you to share a viewpoint different than theirs. That is fine, but make sure you are clear in advance with the church/pastor about this, and then teach from the Bible.

I am trying to respect this principle as I teach in these workshops. I have tried to be transparent about my own views, but I also have tried to be fair with other views. I take into account that there may be various ones of you who believe differently on these things. I am glad to be able to teach among you and, on the basis of our shared beliefs, to know that we are brothers in Christ.

32 One way we know this is that the New Testament never instructs Christians on how to organize local churches into higher-level entities. God’s program is *decentralized* in that it operates through a multitude of churches in various geographical areas. The New Testament never indicates a hierarchy of churches, or bishops, or denominations or associations, to rule over the church. In fact, our Lord teaches against the hierarchical idea in Matthew 20:25-26.

Do Not Waste Time

Some doctrinal issues are either so **clear** or so **minor** that we should not waste time on debating them. Some are so **sinful** we should not spend any time on them. This is because there are other, far more important things that need to be done to build the church. A **minor issue** like the identity of the king of the north in Daniel 11 should not take up any significant portion of our time.

I ran across a good example of a **bigger but very clear issue** recently. The Presbyterian Church in America debated in June 2016 whether to form a committee to study the matter of ordaining women, permitting them to teach, among other leadership functions. The PCA leadership seems to favor women in all kinds of church leadership including pastoral work.³³ Conservatives are opposed to this, but the committee was formed, and it appears that the denomination will eventually change its historical (and Biblical) stance. But the Bible is clear that women are to learn submissively, and not to teach or have authority over men in the church (1 Timothy 2:11-14; 1 Cor. 14:34-35). They should not be wasting time and money doing a study on the matter, which is very clear. Instead, they should concern themselves with more important matters, like honoring God and evangelizing the lost!

Paul tells Timothy and Titus that some things must be avoided by the pastor in order that he not sin. Avoid these: other forms of doctrine, fables, genealogies, idle talk, profane and old wives fables, disputes and arguments over words, useless wranglings, profane and idle babblings and contradictions of falsely-named knowledge, profitless words, profane and idle babblings which are like cancer, foolish and ignorant disputes which cause strife, fables, Jewish fables, commandments of men, foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and striving about the law which are unprofitable and useless (1 Timothy 1:3-4, 6; 4:7; 6:4-5; 6:20; 2 Timothy 2:14, 16-17, 23-24; 4:4; Titus 1:14; 3:9).

Do Not Give Up Doctrinal Truth

Watch out that an attitude of carelessness does not creep into your heart. Just because you are conciliatory in the face of some doctrinal differences such as the ones we have discussed on the extent of the atonement, this does NOT mean that you can be laid back or relaxed about all kinds of doctrinal deviation. Lines have to be drawn somewhere. We cannot be “wishy-washy.” I have tried to give an example of that with the slides showing the six fences on the doctrine of salvation. There are some beliefs that we simply cannot accept. Not every point of view is “OK” or “equally valid.” Even among those who claim to hold the same “principles,” there are some “applications” of those principles that are not correct.

We continue our duty to contend for the faith by taking heed to such differences and handling them wisely.

33 <http://baylyblog.com/blog/2016/09/pca-and-ordination-women>

Test Cases

Water baptism. Suppose you believe in baptism by immersion after someone becomes saved. Another person believes baptism for babies. How would you handle that difference? Could you worship together in a UCB church?

I would kindly express my disagreement with the infant baptism position, show texts of Scripture that support my belief, and express the dangers of infant baptism for the church and the requirement for regenerate membership. If the other person is not convinced, then it would be necessary to have them find another church where they can worship according to the dictates of their conscience. That would be a Presbyterian-type church, but not a UCB church.

Calvinism. If I believed five-point Calvinism, I think I could be a pastor of a UCB church. I can teach how I understand the Bible to teach. But remember this: teach the **Bible**. Don't teach a confession of faith (like the Westminster Confession) or a book by a Calvinist author. Teach the **BIBLE**. I could not rightly exclude a moderate Calvinist or a moderate Arminian from the church. They presumably agree with the church's doctrinal statement. Both pastor and members would also have to take care not to pick a fight with members who differ with me on this issue.

Hyper-Calvinism. If I truly believed this doctrine (as described in the first workshop), it would not be acceptable for me to be pastor of a UCB church. If I were a committed hyper-Calvinist, it would be practically very difficult for me to be a member of a UCB church because of its doctrinal statement. Separation would be necessary to keep the peace.

Amillennial eschatology. This is similar to the questions about baptism and hyper-Calvinism. A local church or association of churches has the privilege to require subscription to a premillennial statement of faith. If they do, then a pastor who is amillennial is not qualified to be pastor of that church. He must find another church to join and shepherd, one that is favorable to his views. Again, a separation is necessary to maintain harmony in the local churches.

Roman Catholic Doctrine. The dogmas of the Roman church, such as Marian devotion, transubstantiation, or the obtaining of salvation by works or sacraments are heresy. We must fully and completely separate from these doctrines and those people who hold them. We cannot have fellowship with those who preach another gospel. We certainly can and should help those who have been misled and victimized by such wrong teaching. May God give us many of those types of people, whom God will enlighten with the truth to be saved through our ministries.

Remember the Target of Evangelism

Do not forget that it is the unbeliever who needs the gospel. We cannot arguing all the time about salvation when the lost are dying and need Christ. Spend your time wisely on the most needful things.

In our next workshop, we will look at some practical aspects of our private and corporate evangelism.

Time for Questions and Answers

Workshop #4

Private and Corporate Evangelism

The goal of this session is to remind ourselves of the need to put Biblical evangelism into practice and to give some ideas about how to do that in our private and corporate witness.

We all must study the doctrine of salvation so that we can know it well and teach it properly. But we must also actually be busy about proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the residents of our cities and communities. We might know a vast number of nuances between this or that doctrine, and that may be intellectually interesting, but such knowledge will not help any unbeliever to be saved. You have to proclaim the truth of Christ for salvation to occur.

The Need for Evangelism

I probably do not need to convince you that evangelism is required by God, but I will mention a couple of texts. First is Romans 10:13-15:

13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed?

And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?

And how shall they hear without a preacher?

15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent?

**As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace,
Who bring glad tidings of good things!"**

13 porque todo aquel que invocare el nombre del Señor, será salvo.

14 ¿Cómo, pues, invocarán a aquel en el cual no han creído?

¿Y cómo creerán en aquel de quien no han oído?

¿Y cómo oirán sin haber quien les predique?

15 ¿Y cómo predicarán si no fueren enviados?

**Como está escrito: ¡Cuán hermosos son los pies de los que anuncian la paz,
de los que anuncian buenas nuevas!**

The plain fact of the matter is that for someone to call upon the Lord to be saved, they have to encounter the gospel message and respond to it. They have to hear the message, or at least read it from a Bible translated into their language. There is no other way that salvation comes. God does not send angels to preach the gospel.³⁴ He uses people.

The second text is Matthew 28:18-20:

³⁴ This is true even in Acts 10, where an angel told Cornelius to find Peter. Peter, not the angel, told Cornelius the gospel.

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying,
"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 Go therefore
and make disciples of all the nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you;
and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

18 Y Jesús se acercó y les habló diciendo:
Toda potestad me es dada en el cielo y en la tierra.

19 Por tanto, id,
y haced discípulos a todas las naciones,
bautizándolos en el nombre del Padre, y del Hijo, y del Espíritu Santo;
20 enseñándoles que guarden todas las cosas que os he mandado;
y he aquí yo estoy con vosotros todos los días, hasta el fin del mundo. Amén.

It doesn't matter what your position is on Arminianism and Calvinism. We have to be clear about this: Jesus Christ commands us to be involved in the in the "Gran Comisión." We must make sure that it does not become "la gran omisión."

Purpose and Plan Your Church Life to be Centered on the Great Commission

1. In the Church Budget

In English we have a saying: "Put your money where your mouth is." It means that if we talk about something like we support it, then we should get out our wallet and give some money to actually do something about what we talk about. Otherwise, our talk is just talk and it is not real. We also say, "talk is cheap." Do you have a similar saying in Chile in Spanish?

It is the same thing in the church. It is easy to talk about evangelism and the great commission, but are we actually *doing* it with our money? In some churches, a lot of money is spent on activities and the building and social projects and benevolence. And some money needs to be spent on those activities. But what is spent on actually doing the Great Commission?

Every year, our leadership team presents a budget to the church for their approval at our January business meeting. A number of years ago I was working on our church's annual budget. I wondered how to organize it and make it clear to the church where its offerings were being spent. This sparked a thought in my mind. Why don't I include the Great Commission in the budget as a line item, and show how we are trying to focus upon it? So here's what I came up with:

Category	Sub-Category	Explanation
Personnel	Pastor	The pastor is your primary great commission worker.

Category	Sub-Category	Explanation
	Assistant Pastor	An assistant, if you have one, helps the pastor and is in training perhaps to be a senior pastor someday.
Great Commission	Local Missions	The finances you spend to reach your own community.
	Global Missions	The finances you invest in missionaries who are planting churches and teaching the Bible in far-away lands.
Building	Utilities: Electricity, etc.	These expenses are necessary to have a public meeting space, if you cannot meet in homes or other facilities.
	Insurance	
	Maintenance	
	Parsonage	If the church helps the pastor with housing.
Other	Bank and legal fees	

The Pastor

The fact is that we are all missionaries. You who are pastors are your church's first supported missionary. Your church may not be able to support any foreign missionaries because of budgetary constraints, but the church already has one missionary that it supports – YOU! You are responsible to do the work of an evangelist (2 Timothy 4:5). You must baptize new converts. You must teach the Bible (2 Timothy 4:2). These things are the three main ingredients of the Great Commission:

- 1) Make disciples
- 2) Baptize the disciples
- 3) Teach the disciples to obey what Jesus commanded

I think of the pastor as a *local* missionary because he has not “gone” someplace else. Typically we think of missionaries as those who have traveled a far distance away (Matthew 28:19). But you are where you are, and it is your ministry to do the Great Commission where you are already!

The pastor's salary or financial allowance may be the largest line item on your budget if you are a small church. That is OK. He needs to be supported well, particularly if he gives himself thoroughly to the study of God's word and its proclamation (1 Timothy 5:17).

Assistant Pastor or Pastoral Intern

An important part of church work is training the next generation of leaders in the church (2 Timothy 2:2). Every pastor should, if they can, try to have one man, or a small group of men, that they are training for future leadership. An assistant pastor may be partially or fully supported by the church so that he can dedicate himself to the task of being trained, working with the pastor, leading church ministries assigned to him by the pastor, etc.

Great Commission

By explicitly including the Great Commission in the budget, you remind yourself and the church family that you exist to glorify God by doing the Great Commission. And since ministry costs money, you decide to put a hefty amount of money toward that task. Missions work can be done locally. This includes local outreaches, giving tracts; doing mailings; having a website if that is appropriate in your community; doing visitation; sponsoring meetings where you teach the Bible; working in retirement communities; and the like.

The church's ongoing teaching ministries for men, women, children, and local outreach, printing notes and teaching materials, and the like, should be seen under the heading of the Great Commission. Benevolence can also be placed underneath this category, because part of keeping our Lord's commands is to love one another and help each other when needs arise.

Missions work is traditionally thought of as a global "far away" enterprise. Funding for that should be included in your budget as well, as the church is able. But funding is only one part of global missions. Prayer is a critical element. Participation by getting to know the missionaries, traveling to visit them, and communicating with them are all necessary parts of carrying out the great commission globally.

Building

Often, buildings take up a large portion of our budget. This is unfortunate because the Bible says nothing about church buildings. We find them to be a practical necessity in areas where the community or building codes do not allow meetings in residential areas. Or, we may need a building with features like a large auditorium that is not available in the community otherwise.

We must guard against being caught up in buildings and construction as if buildings ARE the Great Commission. They are not. Buildings are tools to serve the larger goal of the Great Commission.

Other

There are other miscellaneous expenses that arise in a church. Inasmuch as these do not serve the goal of doing the Great Commission, you should try to minimize to as small as possible.

Some Other Comments about Money

It is easy to be controlled by or focus on money instead of controlling the money and focusing on ministry. The budget can easily become inwardly focused on "our needs" and "our association" and "what we get out of it."

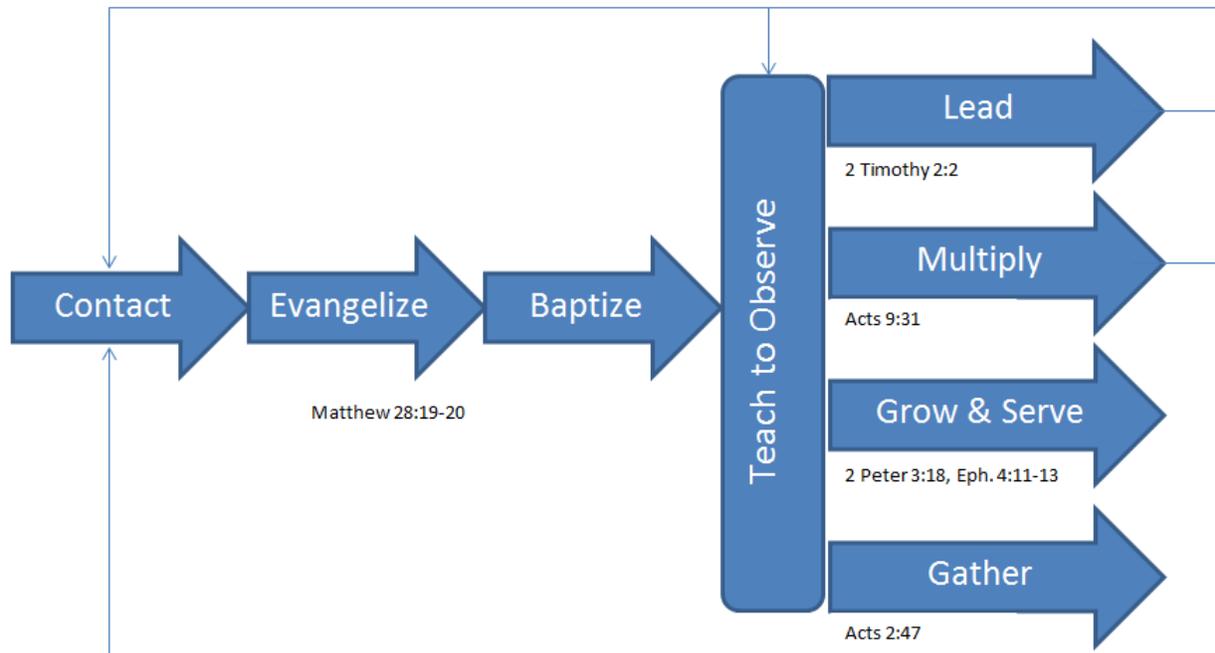
Another way that money becomes a focus is when we preach a lot about it and demand God's people give a certain amount. I have never taught tithing as a law for the church, and I encourage you not to do so either. Giving is to be sacrificial and generous, and that may be 10%, or more, or less depending on the donor's situation. The church should give voluntarily because they want to be involved in God's work, not because they feel they have to in order to experience God's good graces—or the pastor's!

We need to see God’s resources the way the Bible does: as a means of sowing more seed, so that more people are saved (2 Cor. 4:15, 9:9) and so that more people are added to the heavenly chorus of praise to God. The purpose of evangelism is to increase God’s glory in this world and the next.

2. In the Church Discipleship Ministry

What is your church discipleship program like? Here is the way I have structured our program.

First, I think about bringing individual people to Christian maturity.



Notice that the process follows Matthew 28:18-20. We begin by evangelizing a new contact, then when they are saved, they get baptized. Then we teach them to obey what our Lord commanded in the New Testament. This can be broken down into several component parts. I have chosen basic words like gather, grow, serve, multiply, and lead, and the Bible passages listed with each.

Second, I think about doing the above process for every individual in the church. That is a big job.

3. In the Church’s Church Planting Focus

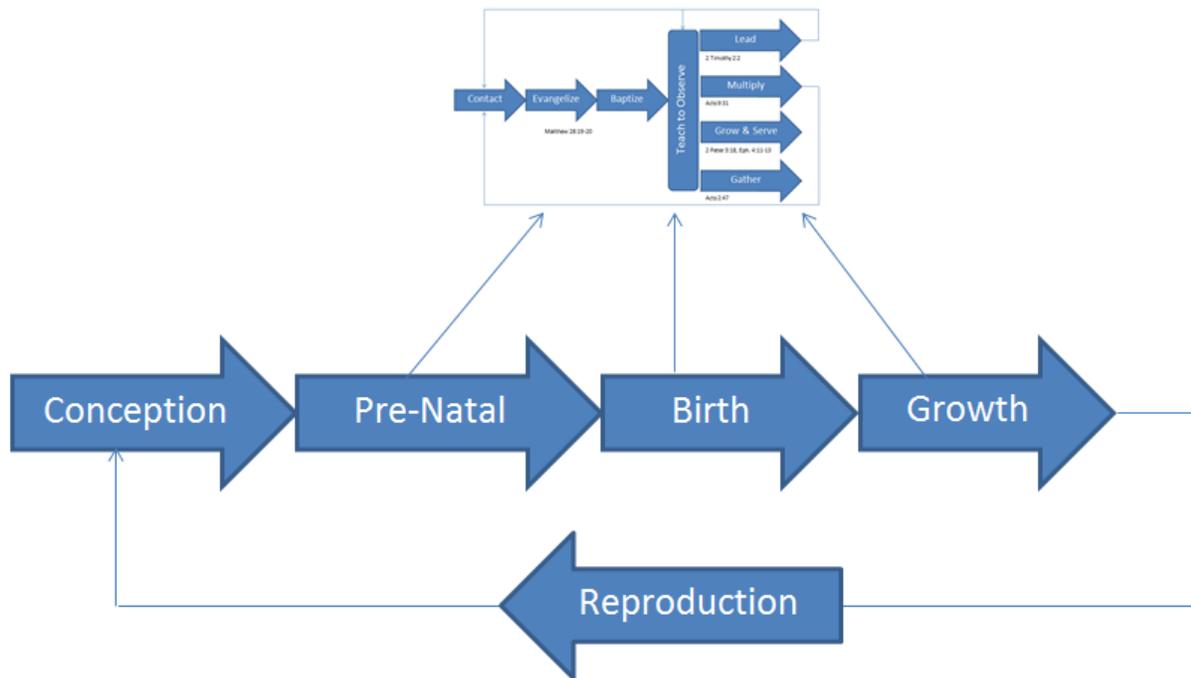
Planting churches is one very important way that a church and pastor can demonstrate that they are serious about evangelism. When you go to a new area where there is no church, you put yourself into a situation where you must be disciplined about evangelism. You *must* evangelize because there is no other way to raise up a group of believers. Yes, you may pick up some de-churched people; or some dissatisfied believers from a failed church in the area. But the bulk of the work has to be given to making new contacts and evangelizing them.

That is what the missionary’s work is all about – to make disciples, baptize them, and then begin the

never-ending task of teaching them to obey everything that the Lord Jesus commanded us in the Bible. The baptism and teaching ministry happens in a local church. Therefore, we must start a new church in an area where there is none, so that people can be baptized and taught in that area.

What we want to do is not only plant churches; we want to plant churches that will grow up and plant other churches!

One way to view the church planting process is pictured below:



The first step in the church planting process is the conception phase, like the start of a new life of a baby. The idea is hatched to plant a church in an un-reached area. The pre-natal phase is when the planters lay the foundation and prepare the soil, so to speak. The birth phase is when the church starts public meetings and begins to grow to maturity. When it has reached maturity, which may take quite a number of years, it is old enough to begin having its own children by reproducing. At each stage, you carry out the discipleship process that I showed earlier, making disciples, baptizing them, and teaching them all the kinds of things that our Lord taught His disciples and what they wrote about in the New Testament.

This is a never-ending process. God calls us to be faithful in doing it until the end of our lives, or until the Lord returns.

4. In the Pastor’s Teaching of the Church People

Evangelism is one of the most important responsibilities of Christians, but it is also the easiest to leave undone because it is hard. Many believers think it is embarrassing to talk to others about Jesus. Many people reject what we tell them about Jesus. And naturally our sinful nature does not want to do what

God calls us to do.

Ephesians 4:11-14 gives us an outline of how this is supposed to happen:

1. The pastor equips the saints³⁵ for the work of the ministry. He does this by thoroughly teaching them the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17). He shows them how to apply it to their lives and service to God.
2. The believers then do the work of the ministry, with the goal of building up the body of Christ. The pastor can and should participate, but the work of ministry does not rest solely on the pastor.
3. This building of the body of Christ includes bringing in new people through evangelism. It also includes bringing the members to maturity and unity in the faith through teaching, rebuke, correction, and instruction in righteousness from the Bible.

Purpose and Plan Your Personal Life to be Focused on Evangelism

Evangelism is difficult for some pastors who are not “people people.” This is one reason Paul included the command to Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim. 4:5). It is part of the job description of a pastor.

Because the pastor is commanded to do the work of an evangelist, we have to figure out ways in our community to do that. You can become involved in some social activity or sport where you have contact with other people; you can tutor someone who doesn’t know how to read or speak Spanish; you can join a local group of businessmen; you can reach out to prisoners or old folks; you can make contacts through local clubs and government groups; you can invite the community to a comparative religion class; you can do 100 other things.

You must do *something* to carry out the Lord’s command, *and to be an example to your people*. You show them how to evangelize, and help them to evangelize.

Time for Questions and Answers

³⁵ Saints refers to all believers in Jesus Christ, that is, those who are sanctified.

Workshop #5

The Pastor's Life and Ministry

Practical personal purity concerns for pastors. 1 Tim. 4:12-16. Me: consider including a list of all pastoral responsibilities.

Work Hard

The pastor should be a very hard working person. In North America, among those who are not on welfare, there is a general expectation that a hard working person should work more than 40 hours per week. 50-60 hours at work is not uncommon for professionals. If we expect our people to come to church and be involved several times a week, we pastors need to be an example and also work 50-60 hours per week, *and then on top of that* attend our church meetings. We cannot be lazy, because that is not godly, nor is it a good example. Laziness is “doing nothing when you should be doing something.”³⁶

The pastorate is not a job. It is a calling. It is not a place where you can get by with the least amount of work. It is hard work if it is done thoroughly and well.

Give Attention to Purity

The Devil is working overtime to attack spiritual leaders in order to make them ineffective for Christian ministry. This can be done through temptation about money (1 Timothy 3:3, 6:10; Hebrews 13:5), or temptation to lord it over the flock (1 Peter 5:3).

A never-ending threat is that of sexual temptation (2 Timothy 2:22). It takes hard work for pastors to avoid the trap of sexual immorality through pornography, prostitution, wandering eyes, and illicit relationships with women.

How can we address this temptation? Job 31:1 should be our mantra. Live joyfully with your wife (Ecclesiastes 9:9; Proverbs 5:15-19). Spend lots of time with your family and your church family. Work hard (see above) so that you have less time available for sin. We have a saying in English: “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop,” so don’t let your hands be idle. Rest when rest is needed; at other times, do the work of ministry!

Focus on the Glory of God

Why does God save people? Why does God do all of the things He does?

He does so with the result that honor comes to Him. For example, see these texts: John 2:11, 9:3, 11:4 and 40; and especially Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14. The highest purpose of all of God’s works is to bring

36 <http://www.gotquestions.org/idle-hands-devils-workshop.html>

glory to God. The salvation of mankind accomplishes this goal. Therefore, salvation is not man-centered. It is God-centered.

The big implication of this is that our lives should be focused on honoring God through Jesus Christ. Not honoring ourselves. Not bringing fame to our church. Not honoring some famous personalities. It is easy to fall into a self-centered desire that pridefully seeks the recognition of others, or wants to exercise domineering authority over the flock. Fight against these tendencies as they dishonor God.

Beware of Trends in Theology that are Concerning

New Calvinism is on the rise.

- A mixture of Reformed, Calvinistic and covenant theology.
- Emphasis on Reformed and Puritan authors.
- Often continuationist.
- Contemporary music forms including rock and rap.
- Lax or even enthusiastic about alcohol use.
- Focus on gathering for conferences and emphasis on popular personalities.
- Includes some portions of the “conservative evangelical” movement.
- Usually very anti-dispensational.

Diminishing of Dispensational theology.

- Dispensationalism has been painted by evangelicals as intellectually backwards, socially irresponsible, too literalistic in its interpretive method, and too pessimistic in its outlook.
- When it is associated with fundamentalism, at least in the United States, it is considered far too separatistic.
- Schools that do not care much about dispensationalism have become more popular, while dispensational schools have either disappeared or downplayed the teaching of these important distinctives.
- But a dispensational approach to the Bible is the only way to get a complete and correct picture of God’s program for Israel and the Church, and for the Kingdom past and future.
- Its literal hermeneutic is essential for properly understanding all portions of Scripture. It avoids the typologically-based interpretive method that has become so popular today. It also teaches us to avoid allegory, *sensus-plenior*, and spiritualized approaches to the Bible text.

Time for Questions and Answers