

Whom the world cannot receive

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

Jn 14:16-17

The traditional Reformed view of the Doctrines of Grace is under attack from every quarter of evangelicalism in these days. For four hundred years this attack has been mainly from Arminian sources, but in recent decades there has been an increasing distortion of five-point Calvinism into an Amyraldian four-point version.¹

Arminianism essentially posits that man can co-operate with God. A universal atonement was procured by Jesus on the cross and this salvation is offered to all men without exception. Anyone who goes to hell does so because he rejected the Gospel; he resisted grace. People who get saved do so because they respond positively to the Good News and then believe from their own free will; it is they who take the first step. Some Arminians add a vague idea of a prevenient universal grace that is hovering around helping people to see their need of salvation. They say this to help put the focus on God since they know that their Gospel is man-centred.

But it is no use, all Arminians rely upon the doctrine that man is not totally depraved, not lost in sin, not a slave to temptation, not unable to choose God, not dead in trespasses, not spiritually ruined. They teach that man can choose God, can believe without regeneration and can come without being called. The Gospel message is proclaimed, but it is man that chooses to accept it; man believes. Faith thus comes from man's own heart.

Amyraldism has corrupted the theology of many Reformed folk since the days of Moses Amyrald.² It was worsened by the widespread popularity of the views of Andrew Fuller, which are by no means Reformed.³ As originally developed, Amyraldism teaches that God loves everyone, that God wants everyone to be saved, that God offers a sincere promise in the Gospel to anyone who would listen. Yet it also teaches that God elects a certain number to salvation since man does not respond and God calls these people to certain salvation. Since Amyrald there have been variations and developments to this doctrine.

The most common variation today is the concept of the free offer, or the well-meant offer, or a sincere offer in the Gospel. This idea is now well nigh universal

¹ Four point Calvinists deny that the atonement is restricted to those elected in eternity. They teach a universal atonement sufficient for all.

² Or Moises Amyraut (1596-1664) a French Protestant preacher who sought to unify Reformed and Lutheran theology. His theology was confused since he accepted the divine sovereignty of Calvinism resulting in particularity of salvation (only those chosen are saved), but the universalism of Arminianism (anyone can be saved). Thus Amyraldism was known as Hypothetical Universalism; it can only be idealistic and theoretical because it is self-contradictory.

³ Andrew Fuller (1754-1815); an English Baptist theologian whose ideas developed in opposition to the Hyper Calvinism of his day. Fuller's essentially Amyraldian views are held by many in Reformed circles today.

in Reformed circles. It teaches that since God wants to save everyone, he loves everyone. Thus the atonement was universal in that it was sufficient for all, even though it is only effectual for some in practice. This means that anyone can be addressed as loved by God, that salvation is available to anyone. Evangelists thus tell individuals that God loves them and that Jesus died for them personally, that they can find salvation immediately if they pray.

The Bible doesn't say so

Now all of these ideas are contrary to the specific claims of Jesus and the teaching of his apostles.

- If people only come to God if they are called, the motive power is from God not man (Jn 6:44, 65).
- If man is dead in sins, he cannot do anything to initiate his salvation (Eph 2:1-10). Man is not just spiritually sick or a slave to sin, he is spiritually dead; he can do no spiritual or good work. Believing is a spiritual work, a good work, which a dead man cannot achieve.
- If we can only believe when faith is given to us (Eph 2:8) then we cannot choose to believe.
- If we can only repent when repenting grace is given to us (2 Tim 2:25) then we cannot choose to repent.
- If only those who are ordained to salvation in a given place can be saved, then those who are not elected cannot be saved, no matter what they do (Acts 13:48).
- If it takes God to open our hearts in order to even hear the Gospel (Acts 16:14), we cannot respond to it unaided; we can't even hear it.
- If being saved is a new birth initiated by the Spirit as he wills (Jn 3) then man cannot birth himself.

Such texts are familiar to us all, but I want to highlight this verse in John 14: whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. This statement by Jesus on the eve of his betrayal encapsulates the Calvinistic position and the impossibility of all others.

Whom the world cannot receive

Jesus is comforting the disciples who are beginning to understand that he is really leaving them. They are afraid and do not understand how God's mission will continue. The Lord tells them that he will send another helper, the Holy Spirit, who has been with them, but will soon indwell them (this is the prime difference in experience between Old Covenant and New Covenant saints).

The crucial practicality of regenerated life in Christ is the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. Having the Spirit of Christ means having Christ;⁴ the fruit of the Spirit is the life of Christ manifested in us. Christians have the Spirit indwelling forever. There is no possibility of a believer falling away unless someone can rip the Spirit out of their heart.

⁴ Eph 3:17, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

Now Jesus says that the world cannot receive the Spirit. It can't see him, it can't know anything about him and it can't receive him. The word *receive* means, 'to lay hold of', 'to take to oneself and not let go', 'to apprehend' - the world cannot take hold of the Spirit and has no clue about him; which is why they cannot understand Jesus either.

Understand this clearly, the world *cannot* receive the Spirit. The Greek word is a primary adverb showing the absolute negative. No one who is a part of the world lost in sin can receive the Spirit. It is impossible; a worldly person cannot apprehend God's Spirit. This is why Arminianism and Amyraldism are totally erroneous. A person who is not elect cannot move from the world into God's kingdom by his own free will or effort. This transfer can only be effected by God.⁵

But are we not part of the world? How did we receive the Spirit if we were also once lost in sin?

Humanity is divided. It is the story of two men. Read the Old Testament through, especially the Psalms, and see the repeated contrast between the wicked and the righteous. This is not just a literary technique to describe religious practicalities as viewed by sight; this person appears good, that person does bad things. No, it is a statement of divine purpose. Mankind is divided into the elect and the wicked.

The whole of history can be seen as the outworking of God's election. History is about God's salvation being worked out in men, and God's salvation is fundamentally based upon his choosing in eternity. History is election manifested. This is even true in a global sense. Some nations had no light of the Gospel for hundreds of years. This was part of God's plan who appoints the history and boundaries of nations⁶ and sends out apostles. It is not our job to explain this, just to accept it. When God wanted to change a nation, he sent missionaries. Why did Ireland and Southern England have a Gospel witness within twenty years of the cross? Why did Southern India, despite being about the same distance from Jerusalem, not have any Gospel witness until William Carey? I cannot say.

God elected all those who would be part of Christ's body in the depths of eternity. We were named in Christ and loved before we were even created.⁷ We were not seen by God as part of the world that is forever lost in sin and doomed to destruction from the start,⁸ we were seen as hidden in Christ awaiting to be called in time to repent.⁹ The elect are not part of the world and never were. From birth they are protected until they are ready to be regenerated, converted and justified.¹⁰

⁵ Col 1:13, He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

⁶ Acts 14:16, [God] in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Acts 17:26, And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.

⁷ Eph 1:4, He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

⁸ Rm 9:22, the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction.

⁹ Ps 22:9-10, 58:3, 71:6, 139:13; Gal 1:15.

¹⁰ Heb 1:14, [Angels are] ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.

Those in the world cannot receive the Spirit, no matter how hard they try. Esau suddenly understood he needed salvation, despite rebelling against God all his life, and he sought repentance with tears, but he couldn't find it since God was not going to give it to him.¹¹ Why, because God hated him.¹² All who are not elect are hated by God as evildoers,¹³ just as all the elect are loved.¹⁴

The world cannot receive the Spirit. But thank God, we who know Christ were never a part of that world, but were earmarked in eternity to be included in Christ and loved by God. As a result, in due time we were given the Spirit. The fruit of this was his regenerating work; we then believed, repented and were justified since we had a changed heart.

None of these things can be achieved by men; no matter how moral, sincere, zealous or desperate they are. The world cannot receive the Spirit.

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.

1 Cor 2:14

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¹¹ Heb 12:17, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought it diligently with tears.

¹² Mal 1:3; Rm 9:13, Esau I have hated.

¹³ Ps 5:5, You hate all workers of iniquity. Ps 11:5, The wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates.

¹⁴ Rm 9:13, Jacob I have loved; Eph 1:4, He chose us ... in love.