

Truth versus Heresy

Though both the above are often spoken of as separate, they are really one and the same. They claim that Jesus offers the Gospel to everyone. John Gill, one of the best Protestant theologians, dismissed the idea, as do a number of modern evangelical groups.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 31 (“What is Effectual Calling?”), speaks of being persuaded to “embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the Gospel”. This is not how we today interpret the idea of an ‘offer’. In the Catechism it means that God’s elect are drawn by God’s calling. Today, the idea of an ‘offer’ is rarely properly defined, and is mostly not in accord with the Catechism, but in accord with the false notion that the Gospel is an offer we may, or may not accept, rather like something we may buy in a shop. In other words, an Arminian theology.

The Canons of Dort put it this way:

“Moreover, it is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel” (II.5).

Many are called – but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14). This opposes a statement by John Murray (“The Free Offer of the Gospel” [the majority report submitted to the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1948] by John Murray with a foreword by R. Scott Clark), that says “the free offer of the Gospel is a grace bestowed upon all”.

Like some Calvinists (though I am not a Calvinist) I cannot accept Murray’s definition, for it flies in the face of biblical declaration. God is not a servant, or a merchandiser who offers a product, and waits for someone to buy it! Rather, He elected all who will be saved in eternity, before He made what we now refer to as ‘creation’. Preachers do not know who these elect are, and so they are to preach to all men (except those we may not preach to, depending on the will of the Holy Spirit), but only the elect, if present, will respond and be saved. Thus, there is no ‘offer’; there is only a declaration by God and a salvation based on God’s election: a statement of fact, of an act already executed. An ‘offer’ (in the modern sense) would drag the Gospel downwards

The Free Offer and The Well-Meant Offer

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into a mire of human choices, making God a mere salesman desperate for a sale, and human beings mulling-over what they will do!

The Majority Report of the general Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (1948) says the problem centres on *"whether it can properly be said that God desires the salvation of all men."* Though I believe in what scripture says – that God CANNOT desire the salvation of all men when it was He Who chose the elect in the first place. Apparently, though I do not consider myself to be a Calvinist, this is enough to brand me an Hyper-Calvinist! I would rather say I believe my Bible.

David J Engelsma said

"Ours is a denial that arises out of the Reformed faith itself, that is in perfect harmony with all aspects of the Reformed faith (including the serious, external call to all who come under the preaching!), and that is made for the sake of the maintenance of the Reformed faith. It is not a rejection of the church's duty to preach the gospel to all men indiscriminately. We believe that the many must be called." ("Is Denial of the Well-Meant Offer Hyper Calvinism?")

Is there a general call? I think the term needs a far deeper analysis and definition, though we can say that preachers must preach to all. But, I do not see this as a 'call to salvation'. Rather, it is a call by God for all men to repent and obey Him, whether or not they become saved. It would be better to not use the word 'call', and to replace it with something like 'demand'. It is also true, as Jesus shows us in His words to the disciples, that we may not preach to those who reject the Gospel. It is also true that we are sometimes constrained by the Holy Spirit against preaching to certain people.

Is there evidence for an 'offer' in scripture? No, there is not. This is just plain fact, with no theological choice or denominational fancy. Stating this makes me a Bible believer, not an 'hyper-Calvinist'! And believing in an offer (by this is meant a person who hears the Gospel can choose the offer or reject it) is Arminian heresy, not genuine biblical truth.

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