

PART TWO: SYSTEMATIC SOLUTIONS TO UNIVERSALISM

CHAPTER 2: THE PROBLEM DEFINED

Theological tension has existed throughout history over the harmonization of biblical passages teaching the salvation of the elect with those teaching the salvation of all humanity. Systems have been developed attempting to deal with the perceived¹⁰ inconsistencies and contradictions between the two groups of passages. Each of the resulting systems has tended to stress one group of passages at the expense of the other.

Can a theological solution be developed which inductively recognizes the force of both predestination and universalism? Does an inductive, literal explanation of one group of passages have to exclude an inductive, literal acceptance of the other group? The author believes that a solution can be formulated which gives integrity to both otherwise contradictory groups of passages.

CHAPTER 3: PREVIOUS SYSTEMATIC SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM¹¹

Each of the following systems of theology have attempted to resolve theological tensions resulting from a literal interpretation of two sets of perceptually contradictory passages. One set appears to teach that the extent of the atonement was only for those whom God predetermined for salvation. The second set of passages appears to teach that the atonement was for the salvation of all humanity. These systems have developed with the intent to resolve the inconsistencies between the passages.¹²

I. Universalism

Universalism stresses the universal passages. This system concludes that the works of Christ brought (or will bring) salvation to all men. Universalism either ignores the inductive literal interpretation of passages teaching election/predestination or manipulates the meaning of the text into the universalist system. The desire to stress a universal element of the atonement has resulted in the formation of a theological system that ignores the Scripture's emphasis on the final judgment of the unrighteous.

II. Strict Calvinism

Although not as extreme as Universalism, Strict Calvinism¹³ reverses the imbalance. Attempt to do justice with an inductive explanation of the passages on predestination and final

¹⁰ It is "perceived" in consistent or contradictory because of man's fallible understanding. God's Word, when correctly interpreted is infallible.

¹¹ The overview is meant to be a generalization of the systems. It is recognized that any generalization excludes teachings from proponents of the systems that are exceptions.

¹² My evaluation of these systems is restricted to each systems interpretation of the universal passages and does not reflect on my deep appreciation for the integrity and reliability of the overall interpretation of entirety of Scripture. I'm especially indebted to the integrity of both Moderate and Strict Calvinism.

¹³ I've chosen the designation "Strict Calvinism" to distinguish this system from Moderate Calvinism. We could have likewise used the designation "Classical or Consistent Calvinism".

judgment results in neglect of the same principles of interpretation on the universal passages.¹⁴ Not that the passages are ignored, but rather, the literal force of these passages are sacrificed for the sake of the system.¹⁵ Universal elements of the atonement are forced to bow down before the altar of predestination of the elect.¹⁶

III. Arminianism

In response to the tensions of predestination and universalism Arminianism rejects a literal interpretation of both sets of Scriptures. Predestination is weakened by an overemphasis of God's foreknowledge and a denial of God's sovereign decrees. The free will of man becomes a central focus in the system. The recognition of the final judgment of the unrighteous prevents the system from adopting the Universalist's conclusions that all have been or will be saved, but in doing so there is a loss of force in the interpretation of the universal passages.

IV. Moderate Calvinism

This system attempts to bring harmony to the universal and predestination passages. There is an attempt to treat both sets of passages with integrity. The Moderate Calvinist takes the foundation of the Strict Calvinist system and modifies it through an inductive analysis of all passages. The error of this system is to be found in the introduction of a hypothetical element at the inductive level. Moderate Calvinism rejects the full ramification of a literal interpretation of Universalism by stating that salvation/deliverance is "provisional" and thus "potentially" available to all people. A close analysis of universal passages, however, never imply anything less than the "actual" salvation/deliverance of all humanity. This hypothetical introduction into the inductive process greatly weakens the structural framework of the Moderate Calvinist's system.¹⁷

¹⁴ The Strict Calvinist does not deny the tensions but uses a principle referred to as "Analogy of Faith". This principle requires "Scripture that explicitly teaches a doctrine" to explain such passages which do not explicitly teach the same doctrine but some other doctrine or aspect of divine truth." Gary D. Long, *Definite Atonement* Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, Co. 1977, p 31)

¹⁵ It seems to the author that the principle of "Analogy of Faith" puts too much confidence in man's logic. We formulate a system of theology, we find inconsistencies between Scripture with our understanding of our system, then we force our understanding of obvious passages onto those passages which do not conform to our system of understanding. Is it not better to recognize that the inconsistencies are in our system and not in God's Word? It is better to either modify the system to conform to Scripture, or if the system can not be modified, find a better system, or recognize the fallibility of the present system until a better system explains the anomalies.

¹⁶ Limited Atonement limits the effects of the Christ's Atonement to those who God predestined to eternal life. Other names given to this doctrine are "Definite Atonement", "Particular Atonement" and "Limited Redemption". My intent in this book is not to debate this doctrine with the Moderate Calvinist doctrine of "Unlimited Atonement". My intent is simply to demonstrate both system's weaknesses in interpreting the universalist passages.

¹⁷ The following is a representative statement of Moderated Calvinism, "The atonement is *sufficient* for all; it is *efficient* for those who believe in Christ. The atonement itself, so far as it lays the basis for the redemptive dealing of God with all men, is *unlimited*; the *application* of the atonement is limited to those who actually believe in Christ. He is the Saviour of all men *potentially* (1 Tim. 1:15); of believers alone *effectually* (1 Tim. 4:10). The atonement is limited only by men's unbelief. Evans, W., & Coder, S. M. (1998, c1974). *The great doctrines of the Bible*. Includes index. (Enl. ed. /). Chicago: Moody Press.