

The Application of Salvation: Calling, I

Let us begin with prayer.

Precious Father, we pray amen to these prayers. We thank You for the grace You have given us in Your Son. Thank You for working in our lives and encouraging us in many ways. Lord, we commit our class time to You. Build us up in our faith as we think about the way You have applied salvation to our lives. Make us grateful. Give us a greater desire to pursue holiness, Father. Work in us, we ask, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen.

We have a number of tasks and we are slightly behind. We need to finish up the matter of the extent of the atonement. I need to not drag this out too long, but we ran out of time last time. I presented Millard Erickson's very fair presentation of the different viewpoints and noted weaknesses on both sides. I presented Erickson's own case and admitted it has some strengths but also some weaknesses. I do not presume to settle this matter for everyone, but here is my best attempt. I agree with Erickson that sometimes the Calvinist case has been much more theological than biblical and frankly, I think more work needs to be done. Here is an attempt: I have three arguments for particular atonement, which is the view that Jesus did not nearly make possible salvation for everyone. I think that would have helped no one, but that He actually secured the salvation of the people the Father had given to Him, that is that He actually made atonement for the elect. This is the position of so-called limited atonement. I prefer the terminology definite, particular, or even efficacious atonement. Three reasons and Ephesians 1 is a good place to go for the first one. I like the argument from Trinitarian harmony. Particular atonement best fits the biblical picture of the persons of the Godhead working together in the area of salvation.

The particularist position is increasing with the Trinitarian harmony expressed in passages such as Ephesians 1:3-14. In the interest of time, I am going to assume you have read the passage recently. I am reading from the notes. Let me show you Paul's own structuring device. This passage is divided into three sections, each ending with the refrain "the praise of his glory." Actually, I think the longhand is given the first time in verse 6: "to the praise of his glorious grace," and then I consider it shorthand in 12 and 14: "to the praise of his glory" in each section following. So if you have those indicators, you have verses 3 through 6, 6 to 12, and 13 and 14—three divisions that we can see by picking up on that refrain that Paul puts at 6, 12, and 14 in the passage. Furthermore, in each section, God is praised for salvation and there is a main actor; each person of the Trinity is the main actor in one of these sections. In verses 3 through 6, the Father is praised for electing the people of God before creation. In verses 6 through 12, especially the Son is singled out for praise. It is the only place that mentions His works. In verse 6 we see that God has truly given us His grace in the one He loves. "In Him we have redemption through his blood." Christ is praised for redeeming the same people of God. The first person plural pronouns continue. In verses 13 and 14, the Holy Spirit is praised for sealing the people of God. Technically, the Father seals the people of God in Christ with the Holy Spirit. But this last, I will call it paragraph, is the only place the Spirit is mentioned in the passage. The sealing is until the day of their future redemption in glory.

There is a change in pronoun from "we" to "you." It is a shift from speaking of Jewish believers to Gentile believers, as is indicated by the expression in 12: "We, who were the first to hope in Christ." Contrast it with 13: "And you also were included." Most of these things I have said are not my own interpretation but common agreement among expositors. I am just using this information along theological purposes to ascertain the extent of the atonement. In this passage, it is the saving work of the Father and of the Spirit in particular, and I really see it that way. The Father did not choose everybody in Christ before the creation of the world and surely not everybody is sealed by the Holy Spirit until the

day of redemption. Furthermore, the Spirit seals those in the context who believe and those who believe are those who have been previously chosen by the Father. So if the saving work of the Father and the Spirit is particular, can we say that the saving work of the Son is not? Can we say that the Father chooses some, the Son attempts to redeem all, and the Spirit then seals some? Is the Son working out of harmony with the Father and the Holy Spirit? Is He attempting to save all, making salvation possible in some kind of a hypothetical notion of the atonement, while they save only the elect? I know I have lots of questions here. We have got a question now.

The notion of an affected, and therefore particular, redemption best fits with this idea of Trinitarian harmony. The Father chooses His people before creation. The Son redeems those people and the Father seals those same people in Christ with the Holy Spirit for the day of redemption. Thus arising out of the text is a theological argument for particular atonement based upon Trinitarian harmony. The members of the Godhead do not work against each other. They work for the same purposes and goals. They work in harmony. Other passages hint at the same, but this will be sufficient for our purposes in this lesson, which unfortunately have to be a kind of survey.

Secondly, the doctrine of particular intent and then extent of the atonement best expresses the efficacy of the cross, not in some theoretical notion of efficacy or in some notion of atonement apart from the Bible, but rather as that which is taught in biblical passages themselves. Revelation 5 will be my passage here where we have an efficacious and effective atonement that is spoken of. The scene shows the elders encircling God's throne, on whom is the Father and the Lamb and before whom are the seven spirits of God, which is a reference to the Holy Spirit. In verse 9, they sing a new song speaking of the Lamb. "You are worthy to take the scroll"—of God's judgment—"and to open its seals, because you were slain"—it is a strong word meaning slaughtered or put to death by a violent death—"and with your blood you purchased"—men, while not in the Greek, in English translations it is inserted because what follows is the proposition—"for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." You purchased some people, many multitudes—all translations insert a word because of what we called the partitive construction that follows. It indicates a whole out of which the preceding is a part. That is, those purchased are a subset of the tribes, languages, people, and nations. In this latter passage, we learn that Christ is the Lamb who was slain and with His blood purchased people for God from every tribe and language and people and nations. Does the idea of a potential or hypothetical as opposed to an actual atonement fit this passage? That is, Jesus tried to make salvation possible. Again I do not think so, but rather He died to absolutely purchase people for God. His death was effective—with His blood He purchased people, John said. Furthermore, within the passage, there is a hint of how we might construe "the world" and "all" in those other passages. By the way, this passage answers the query as to how those holding a particular atonement can give a free offer of the Gospel to everyone. Since Christ died for everyone, that is for men from every tribe, people from every language group, every people and every national entity—every nation. They are not really four distinct ideas, but pretty much four ways of saying a very similar thing. Since Christ died for everyone, all without distinction—that is people out of every people group, language, and locale—then we can preach with confidence knowing that He has His people there already who will respond. This is not unique; holding to the other five points, Calvinism is the same thing. It is a matter of harmonizing in practice, belief in God's sovereignty and salvation with human responsibility of the messenger to get the message out. So it is not unique to the doctrine of that particular atonement.

What I am claiming is this: the Bible itself presents the cross as effective, and unless one then holds to universalism—the idea that everybody is saved in the end—there must be a definite or particular, and hence limited, scope to the work of Christ. It is unlimited in effectiveness. It accomplishes exactly what God intended for it to accomplish. It is unlimited in perfection, efficacy, and sufficiency. Because that is

the case, it is limited in its final application. Everybody has to hold that unless you are an absolute universalist, but I am urging that it is also limited or definite in its intent by God, and then in what it actually accomplishes. Think about it in your own Bible studies. The cross is presented as effective.

Thirdly, there are exclusion passages. Erickson correctly said that proponents of limited atonement do not prove their case by merely presenting the passages that say Jesus died for His people or the Church or His sheep. He even indicated in passing that is the case unless the passages say something like, He did not die for the goats. As a matter of fact, certain passages imply that. I call these exclusion passages. Particular redemption best accords with those passages which exclude some from Christ's saving work. And I have in mind passages, especially from the fourth Gospel. I did not look for them. I kind of found them without looking for them. In John 10 for example, Jesus says a number of times that He will lay down His life for His sheep. Is this not exactly the argument Erickson opposed? So far it is. Is it therefore not convincing? So far it would be. In the same context He looks His enemies in the face and says, "I did tell you [who I am] but you do not believe." This implies it is not for lack of evidence that we do not believe. It is because of your culpable unbelief, said in terms of human responsibility, but He answered them in terms of divine sovereignty as well. "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep." In our minds we almost reverse the passage. We say, "You are not my sheep because you do not believe," and there is some truth to that. But it is not what Jesus said. He is speaking of more ultimate matters. He said, "You do not believe because you are not my sheep." Jesus thus distinguishes the sheep from the non-sheep. I will call them goats. Can we say in John 10 that Jesus laid down His life to save the goats? I do not think so. That is, John 10 itself includes an exclusion: "I lay down my life for my sheep" and "You are not My Sheep." I would be hard pressed to say, He laid down His life to save them. It is the same in John 17 though we will not take our time to turn there. Thus Erickson is wrong, at least some of the time, when he says that Calvinists merely imply exclusion of some from the statements that Christ died for His sheep and His Church. In some passages, there are conceptual exclusions. More work needs to be done in this area. This is my own proposal. At this point I would like to write an article sometime debating Millard Erickson in print and then maybe even give him a chance to respond. I think that would be fruitful. He certainly is an ideal partner in dialogue because he is such a fair and godly man.

Why is this important? First of all, it is an historical question debated in Holland in the early 17th century with the five points of Arminianism that came first—of course, there was a Dutch theology that prompted Arminius' response—and then the five points of Calvinism that followed. So the issues were on the table historically. Erickson addresses them as he studies the doctrine of salvation and as he positions himself in light of the five points of Calvinism as a four-point Calvinist. He takes issue with that central point. I treat it here because it is an important part, historically, of the Reformed faith. It is not the only aspect of the doctrine of salvation. I presented much broader concerns, like the biblical themes of Christ's saving work—victory, sacrifice, legal themes, and the Second Adam idea—as well as the events: Christ saves us in His incarnation, sinless life, death, resurrection, ascension, and so forth. But within that broad framework, it is an issue that is important to us, even because it is controversial. Likewise important is to affirm, as we will in the next lecture, the equally important idea of the necessity of preaching the Gospel. I say it to my own shame that sometimes reformed churches have been less than zealous for the Gospel. And that is wrong, it is simply wrong. Furthermore, this is an issue for me in terms of the biblical data itself. I believe it points in a particular direction. Of course, good people disagree so we have a controversy. I have worked to try to present both sides fairly and to give you my own opinion. I thank you for your understanding in that case. I commend those matters to you for further study.

Let us turn to the last topic of our course. We have studied together the doctrine of human beings, the doctrine of sin, the person of Christ, His saving work, and lastly now, the application of salvation. Viewing salvation in its broadest dimensions, we see it as planned, accomplished, applied, and consummated. This is just to locate where we are on the theological map. Salvation planned has to do with the doctrine of election. We are not there now. That is taken up in the course, *Spirit, Church, and Last Things*. Salvation accomplished has to do with Christ's saving work; we have just been there. Salvation consummated has to do with the resurrection of the dead, our final sanctification, our glorification, and our justification in its final, official, outward form of God acknowledging us and acquitting us before the universe. That is kind of an exciting prospect and one that we do not think about. We will talk about each of those matters because our concern is with salvation applied. We call this whole area "the application of salvation." It is a whole group of doctrines, calling, regenerating, justification, sanctification, adoption, union of Christ, perseverance, and conversion—lots of things all at once. You ask, "Who invented all these? Did a bunch of theologians invent these things to keep themselves busy?" God invented these. That is, all of this is a study of the grace of God. God planned to give us His grace before creation. He did the work necessary for grace to reach us in the cross and resurrection of His Son. When we talk about the application of salvation, with which we are concerned now, we are talking about the grace of God actually impinging on our lives. God brings His grace into our historical existence. In other words, the result of this is that we come to know the Lord. You say, "I did not know all those things. Somebody just shared the Gospel with me and I believed it." True enough. But the Bible considers this so important; it looks at it from seven or eight different vantage points that we might glorify God for our salvation, and that we might appreciate His grace again and again. So this is really the application of salvation. Two immediate concerns jump to my mind. One is the grace of God, as I have already mentioned. Another is God the Holy Spirit and His operations, because if we analyze these works, since God is a Trinity, you cannot separate the persons from one another, but nevertheless, almost always the Scripture attributes election to God the Father. Certainly it is the Son who died on the cross and rose again. Not in separation from the Father or the Holy Spirit, but certainly in distinction. The Trinity was involved in the consummation. The application of salvation—whose work is it? The answer is the Trinity. Can we specialize? Can we say one person is the main operator here? Surely, it is God the Holy Spirit. Grace. Let me read to you a little piece I wrote a few years ago for Table Talk, "Freely By His Grace." "The definition of grace. Unmerited favor, we say. This is our stock answer when asked to define God's grace. The words roll easily off our tongue and that is the problem. The words roll off our tongue without passing through our minds or hearts. This definition is not incorrect, but like many common definitions, it is so familiar that it has almost become an empty slogan. It packs no punch. How then can we more meaningfully define God's grace? Simply put, God's grace is His good will toward those who deserve His ill will. It is His redeemed kindness shown to people who, if they got what was coming to them, would end up in hell forever."—And I do not talk about hell lightly anymore. I have just spent a couple of years writing a book on it. I will never be the same.—"Grace, therefore, is not only unmerited favor. It is favor against merit."

Ephesians 2:1-3 digs a deep hole for us sinners. Before we believed in Christ, we were spiritually dead, or devoid of the life of God, as seen in verses 1 and 5. We must not confuse the spiritual death with an activity, for we follow the ways of the world, of the devil, indulging our sinless ways and thoughts—verses 2 and 3. What do we deserve from God? "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath," verse 3. Due to our rebellion against our Maker, we deserve His eternal wrath. This dismal picture of our condition—spiritual death, ungodly living, and being objects of His wrath—is the background of God's grace. "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved," verses 4 and 5.

Here is grace: great love and rich mercy delivering sinners from death, ungodliness, and wrath. What is the cost of grace? For sinners who turn to Christ for salvation, the cost is nothing, as we read in Romans 3:22-24: "This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by this grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." Grace is free. It is without charge to all believers. Although grace is free to us, it is costly to God. Romans 3:25-26 tells how God the Father set forth the Son as propitiation in His blood. The Father punished His beloved Son with the wrath our sins deserved that we might go free, which is redemption, and that we might be declared righteous in His sight, which is justification. We can summarize the cost of grace because it was so costly to God, but to us who trust His Son it was free. How do you appropriate grace? Roman 4 answers loudly and clearly, by faith alone, not by anything we can do. Grace and faith are inseparably bound together. I wanted to use the word "correlative," but I could not in a popular article. Grace and faith are correlative. They are inseparably bound together. In verses 13-17, Paul rejects the notion that Abraham merited God's promise through law keeping. Paul argues that it is impossible because the law does not save, rather it brings wrath. "Therefore, the promise comes by faith so that it may be by grace." Grace establishes faith. For God's kindness alone provides the way of salvation, and believing—not meritorious doing—is the companion of grace. Doers insult grace because they are ignorant of its cost. The gall of doers trying to add their feeble attempt to the saving work of Christ! Believers put their confidence in Christ alone. We can now understand the sufficiency of God's grace. In the words of 2 Thessalonians 2:16, "God the Father loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope." Grace is all we need to bring us safely to eternal life. It is also all we need to enable us to live the present life to the glory of God. God made this plain to Paul in 2 Thessalonians 12:9: "My grace is sufficient to you but my power is made perfect in weakness."

Let us talk about enabling grace. Theologians distinguish saving grace from enabling grace. The former saves us from our sins. The latter enables us to live for God day by day. We fail to ask, like Paul begins and ends his letters, for prayer that God's grace would enable us. In his letter is Paul praying that the believing churches and individuals would come to know God's saving grace? Hardly. He is praying that they would grow in their appropriation of God's enabling grace. What should our response to grace be? What then is our response to this abundant grace? Eternal gratitude is the answer. Here is the highest motivation of a Christian life: to live "to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves," Ephesians 1:6-7. Let us think a little bit more deeply about God's grace. In light of this distinction, let us look at some examples (though we do not have time to look at all these examples).

Now first of all, let me say, they are both grace; we are looking at subsets of grace. It is one grace. The hymn writer is right: "'Tis grace has brought us safe thus far and grace will bring us home." We can talk about saving grace, enabling grace, sustaining grace, and bringing-us-home grace (I do not know how to say it). Grace is from beginning to end. But I am distinguishing between two concepts. They are the same thing and yet they are inseparable. They are related, but there is a distinction here. What I am trying to say is that in our extolling of saving grace—and I am hardly against that—we have minimized, or maybe even overlooked, enabling grace and the fact of the matter is that we need God's grace to live a Christian life even as much as we need God's grace to be saved once and for all. Ephesians 2:8-9 will suffice for one proof passage for saving grace. In the context in which I was reading before, we then read "for it is by grace we have been saved through faith"—notice again, grace and faith are correlative; they are inseparably bound together. This is in the context I would render salvation; I would explain, "and this salvation not from yourselves, it is a gift from God. Not by works that no one can boast." Evangelical Christians of all types agree: salvation is by grace and faith. We respect the concept of saving grace and it is in all those passages that are listed under that topic. We know about that. We also need to learn more, however, about enabling grace. Now they are united. You do not get enabling grace

without saving grace. And in reverse, enabling grace is really saving grace. It is just a matter of perspective. I am not talking about a totally different thing. But let me show you two passages. Let us start with 1 Corinthians 15. Paul is so honest; he said some things in his epistle that we would never say. In 1 Corinthians 9, for example, he says that he is all things to all people, that by all means he might save some. We would never talk like that. We would never be so unspiritual as to say that we saved somebody. Paul is not doing an unspiritual thing, but he is such an instrument of God in the salvation process he can talk like that. He gives glory to God. He knows he did not die on the cross. He surprises us here when he speaks of the resurrection appearances of the risen Christ. He says in verse 8: "Last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born." He explains in verse 9: "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." Watch what he says in verse 10: "But by the grace of God I am what I am." I would label that saving grace, because he went from being chief persecutor to being chief proponent or main creature. What an astonishing twist! He experienced a revolution. We cannot even begin to imagine what was going on inside that man when he received the answer from God in heaven to his question, "Who are you, Lord?" and the answer came back, "I am Jesus, who you are persecuting." Then an explosion went off inside of him, an absolute revolution. Can you imagine? He did not lack for zeal, but he acted ignorantly. He thought he was serving God. And now the one he thought was a false prophet speaks to him from heaven and says, "I am Jesus." No wonder God puts something like scales on his eyes. It was an object lesson. Blind people can get around very well in familiar surroundings. They count steps and their other senses compensate, but for somebody who has seen, who has had sight all of his or her life, to suddenly be struck blind or lose your sight is absolutely frightening. That is where Paul was. God wanted to show him how seriously blind he had been for so long so He gave a little object lesson. All of a sudden, he was physically blind. Anyway, God's grace made Paul what he was. From a persecutor into an apostle, "and his grace to [Paul] was not without effect." Here is another one of those things we would never say because we are too super-spiritual. "No, I worked harder than all of them." Can you imagine him saying that? He said he worked harder than all the other apostles, "Yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." This working for God, with God's grace, speaks of enabling grace. It is grace that made Paul a Christian and an apostle when he was a persecutor and it is God's grace that enabled him to work very hard indeed.

Second Corinthians 12 is my second passage to show enabling grace. What I am trying to say is we have unfairly pigeon-holed grace into the saving grace category. It is not wrong to put it there, but it is wrong to only put it there. We have trapped it in that little box, shut the box, then shut the drawer, if you will, instead of seeing how grace pervades the Christian life in the New Testament. We are not only saved by grace, but we live the Christian life by grace. Three themes intertwine and say basically the same thing. The New Testament can talk about the Holy Spirit empowering us, it can talk about the power of God, or we can talk about the grace of God. Enabling grace does not leave the love dimension behind, but the focus is on power, or enablement. Saving grace is more powerful than we realize, but the element we most emphasize is good will, favor, or compassion. It is not wrong, but what I am saying is that grace involves both of these concepts—love and power. The loving element is more prevalent in our conception of saving grace. The power element is more prevalent in our conception of enabling grace. We see it right here in 2 Corinthians 12. In this context of 2 Corinthians 12, Paul is apparently the person who was caught up to the third heaven and received unspeakable revelations. As they are unspeakable, he does not speak about them, but he does say he was tempted to become puffed up about these things. Verse 7 says, "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh." We do not know exactly what it is, but it is some kind of a physical problem. It is in his flesh—perhaps problems with his eyesight as the result of some kind of an illness. Galatians is sometimes correlated with 2 Corinthians along these lines. I am not going to speculate as to what the problem is, but he was given a physical malady, which is "a messenger of

Satan.”—It reminds me of Job 1 and 2. The notion is certainly that Satan under God was allowed to smite Paul for God's greater purposes—“To torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.” Three times an apostle prayed and he did not get what he wanted. This was perfectly justifiable; it was not to be used as a cop-out, but God sometimes answers our prayers by saying wait, keep praying, My child, I want to cultivate our relationship, but I am not ready to do that now. Other times He answers our prayers by saying no. If we as human parents know how to give good gifts—I am thinking of the language now of the Sermon on the Mount—so does the Lord. He also knows when to say no. If you have a little one crawling around on the kitchen floor, watching you put the silverware away, who is just fascinated by those bright, shiny, silver things, we know as sharp knives, and is crying to play with them, there is no way you would let the baby play with the knives. The baby thinks the knives are good, he or she wants to play with those shiny looking things; you are holding them—“Mommy and Daddy, I want them.” A loving parent would never be moved. There is no way you would let your baby play with the knives. You would tell him no. You would try to distract the child if he or she started crying, but you would not give him that which you knew was bad regardless of how much he or she wanted it. In the same way, but separated to an infinite degree, God is much wiser than we and knows what we need. Paul wanted this removed. I cannot blame Him for asking. God wanted him to have it. Three times, God said no. “My grace is sufficient for you”—notice the parallelism—“for my power is made perfect in weaknesses.” Enabling grace is very much akin to the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. It is another way of talking about that idea. “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.” He could just as well have said, “Christ's grace.” “That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” I wish we had more time. I commend the notes to you for your own study and, Lord willing, ministry. The application of salvation is important and beginning with the grace of God and the Holy Spirit is very important.