

The Redemptive Covenant

There is an implied covenant in the Bible that is external to the Covenant of Grace, yet it is linked to both its Performance and Indemnity Clauses. This external covenant exists between the persons of the Godhead, rather than between God and man. Its purpose is to provide for the redemption of God's elect from the penalty of their sin, and to fulfill the requirements of the Performance Clause on their behalf. This results in their redemption from the grave, and their inheritance in the kingdom of God (they go to heaven instead of hell). They do nothing to avoid eternal punishment, and nothing to earn salvation, other than to believe that Jesus Christ is the one who was sent by God to fulfill these things. Christ fulfills them through,

1. living a perfectly righteous life to satisfy the Law on behalf of the elect,
2. dying on the cross to atone for the sin of the elect, and
3. rising from the dead to apply the benefits of his death to the elect.

OK. So who are “the elect?” Or, as we phrase it theologically, “For whom did Christ die?” We find the word “elect” used in a number of places in the Bible. The reformed view is that the elect are a specific number of people, from all ages, neither more nor less than those who were chosen before the foundation of the world.¹ They were given into the hands of Christ to be redeemed when the time was right.² Atonement in this view is “Particular Atonement.” Only those given to Christ are atoned for. The offering he made was for a specific group of people, individually named, and pre-written in the Book of Life.³ Christ came to redeem them and no others.⁴ There is no condition for them to become elect. They are already named as members, making their election unconditional. And it must be unconditional because, being corrupted by the Fall, mankind is unable to meet any conditions that might be imposed.⁵

That was what Adam ran up against. He was totally depraved in that nothing he could do would be done perfectly, or with perfect motives. But because his name was written in the Book of Life, because he was elect, he would inherit the kingdom of God anyway. He was unable and unwilling to resist having his sin covered by the grace of God.⁶ He also persevered to the end because everything necessary for his salvation would be accomplished by his future surety: Jesus Christ. The covering he received in the Garden, and the system of altar and sacrifice that God provided him in the world, was merely a shadow of what was to come. That is what is contained in the promise of Gen. 3:15.

¹ Eph. 1:4; 2Tim. 1:9-10

² Rom 3:25-26 in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. 2 Tim 1:9-10 who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ.

³ Phil. 4:3; Rev. 13:8; 17:8;

⁴ Matt 7:22-23 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' NIV

⁵ Jer. 17:9; Rom. 7:18,23,24; Rom. 8:7,8; 1Cor. 2:14;

⁶ Gen 3:21 Also for Adam and his wife the LORD God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.

Two of these points, particular atonement and unconditional election, are the primary points of difference between Arminianism,⁷ and the historic reformed faith. Those who reject one or both of these points are called 4-point or 3-point Calvinists respectively. Those who reject the total depravity of man are semi-Pelagian. That means they have adopted one or more of the points of Pelagius.⁸ There are two other points of the five points of Calvinism: irresistible grace (saved entirely by God's actions), and perseverance of the saints (continuing in salvation to the end entirely by the Spirit's actions). These two will also logically fall if salvation is conditional; that's because the condition means they are not irresistible or inevitable, but dependent. This group of five points is what we call a logically "tight" system, a package deal.

Christ's Last Will and Testament

The reformed view is that the Redemptive Covenant is the last will and testament of Jesus Christ. Beneficiaries are named in a will prior to the death of the testator. Upon his death, they become the recipients of his estate, without any action on their part.⁹ They are named and particularly granted their rights to an inheritance in the provisions of the will. Their only act is to receive or accept their inheritance. There is nothing they can do to get their names placed on the will in the first place.¹⁰ Their election is entirely by the grace of the testator. In this case, God chooses the elect according to his love for them, without regard to their merit. But some, hearing that election is not by merit, conclude that we are chosen by whim, all other things being equal. This idea is repugnant to most people. It is repugnant to me. Furthermore, I believe it is wrong and harmful to say that God chose us in Christ at random. It suggests that believers have no worth, and are not at all deserving of God's grace. That is true only in the sense that we are no more deserving of salvation than any other person.¹¹ We are all dead in sin.¹² However, we are precious in God's sight, not because of what our sin cost Christ, but because of our identity in Christ. If we were precious to him based on the quantity of our sins, as Paul said disparagingly, we could increase our value by sinning all the more (Rom. 6:1). But we are precious to God because we belong to him.

In the Arminian view, Christ atoned for us universally, elect and non-elect alike. That means the elect are no more precious to God than those who perish. Thus, it makes no difference whether one person is saved, or all men are saved. Christ paid neither more nor less for the lot of us. There was nothing personal in what he did. He didn't die for Johnny any more than he died for Jane, because he didn't call either of them by name. They stepped forward on their own.

⁷ What I refer to here are the teachings of Arminius himself, rather than the teachings of other Arminians such as Hugo Grotius, John Wesley, Charles Finney, John Miley, H. Orton Wiley, Norman Geisler, et al. Arminius, who was the most conservative of them, would probably have disavowed their teachings.

⁸ Pelagius was a contemporary of Augustine (a.k.a. Austin) who taught that man did not inherit sin from Adam; man is only "ill" not totally depraved; Jesus was only an example to follow; and so we are saved by our own works patterned after Christ's behavior, rather than by grace imparted through Christ's sacrifice.

⁹ Heb 9:16-17 For where there is a testament, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is in force after men are dead, since it has no power at all while the testator lives.

¹⁰ This is particularly true since Christ died already, before we were born. We cannot "get in his good graces" now so that he will amend his will to include us. The Arminian view of election by foreknowledge implies *exactly* this kind of process.

¹¹ Adam betrayed God; Noah was a drunk; Abraham was a liar; Jacob was a cheat; Moses was a murderer; David was a murderer and adulterer...

¹² Rom. 3:23; Col. 2:13

Apart from foreknowing what they would do, God is just as surprised by those who choose to accept Christ, as he is by those who can make that choice but don't. In this view, both the Father and the Son wring their hands hoping that we accept their offer. Prayers of intercession, asking for the salvation of our dear ones, must fall on deaf ears, because God is helpless to save them. That is in their own hands. It's a matter of choice on their part. The blood of Christ is squandered on those who reject him. The price he paid for them in blood was not "dear" or "precious," because they were no more desirable in his sight than any other. Moreover, the price he paid failed to obtain them of itself; it failed to actually and finally purchase their salvation.¹³

But if indeed Christ died only for his own, giving his life on the cross for specific people, then we gain infinite worth.¹⁴ We were purchased at a great price,¹⁵ a ransom paid for each one of us by name,¹⁶ and no others. He paid for *my* sins, *my* transgressions, *my* vanities, one by one, each and every sin that I would commit over the course of my lifetime, each one with my name on it.¹⁷ He knew me before I was born,¹⁸ and loved me,¹⁹ and died for me,²⁰ in particular,²¹ precious in his sight.²² *That* is the description we find in the Bible. *That* is the good news for each of us who are called according to his purposes.²³ We were not randomly self-elected, nor were we randomly selected, but specifically called. We are his beloved children, his people, the inheritors of Christ's estate, those who are individually named in his will. Our reaction to this, is to ask with incredulity, "Why me??!" And yet, must we really ask why a Father loves his child?

God Loves His Children. We are worthy of salvation for that reason alone. We must be convinced of his eternal love for us. We must be confident that Christ died for each of us as an expression of that personal love, that we are born of God's seed and not the seed of the enemy.²⁴ Yet, uneasy with that, and feeling as if we are unlovable, we presume that such love must either be a mistake, or conditional.²⁵ Even if we are his children who are named in his will, surely some

¹³ Luke 19:9-10 And Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." 1 Peter 1:18-19 knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

¹⁴ 2 Thess 1:11 "Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling." Notice that we are *considered* worthy rather than being worthy in deed. In other words, we have intrinsic value as the children of God, and we should behave accordingly. We are called to demonstrate our existing worth – which is for Christ's sake (who is the reason for both the worth, and the demonstration).

¹⁵ 1Cor. 6:20; 7:23;

¹⁶ Matt. 20:28 – paid for many, not all; compare 1Tim. 2:6; does it contradict Matt. 20:28? The Greek for "all" is *pas* (NT:3956). It has two senses: individual and collective. Individually it means "each", "every", "the whole". Collectively it means some from all groups. In 1Tim.2:6 it can mean each and every one of the chosen, or it can mean some from every one of the nations. But it cannot mean every one from every nation. "All the world went after him." "All Judea were baptized in the Jordan." Did "all" mean all?

¹⁷ Matt. 9:2,5; Mk. 2:5,9; Lk. 5:20,23; 7:48; Acts 3:19; 22:16; 1Jn. 2:12

¹⁸ Gen. 25:23; Job 3:11 (interesting question – what's your answer?); Ps. 22:9,10; 71:16; 139:13; Isa. 44:2; Jer. 1:5; Lk. 1:15; Gal. 1:15;

¹⁹ Isa. 43:4; Jer. 31:3; Mal. 1:2,3; Jn. 13:34; 15:12; Rev. 3:9

²⁰ Rom. 5:6,8; 2Cor. 5:14,15 (notice that "all" doesn't mean all); 1Thess. 5:10

²¹ Matt. 4:19; 20:16; Mk. 10:49; Jn. 10:3; Acts 2:39; 15:17; Rom. 8:30; 9:7,11; 11:29; 1Cor. 1:23-24; 2Cor. 1:21;

²² Isa. 43:4; Ezek. 44:28; Eph. 1:14;

²³ Rom. 8:28;

²⁴ Matt 13:27-28 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.'

²⁵ John 8:24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins ; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins ."

of us will not be saved because of our rebellion. If you reject the idea of covenantal love, and particular redemption, and the sufficiency of Christ, then indeed you must draw such a conclusion. It is one of Satan’s greatest lies to say that we are unworthy. But that would not be the Gospel, the good news.

Two Explanations

If Christ paid the price in full, covering the penalty completely, meaning no part of the debt of our sin remains outstanding, then those for whom he died are fully redeemed, *assuming salvation is unconditional*, of course. Therefore, if he died for *everyone*, for the whole world (as the Arminian view has it), then we must conclude that the whole world is redeemed and hell is empty. Conversely, if he died for the whole world, and hell is not empty, then he could not have paid their debt in full, or else their redemption is conditional.

If hell is not empty, and salvation is *not* conditional (as the reformed view has it), then we must conclude that there is a fixed number of elect, all of whom were redeemed. Also, there was a fixed penalty that Christ paid on the cross, neither more nor less than what was due for the elect. Furthermore, all those for whom he died were declared justified at Christ’s resurrection. It was a corporate, one-time payment, not a series of individual payments made as each person comes to him (which is the Arminian view). This is true even though each of us was uniquely and specially paid for. We were justified completely at Christ’s resurrection.

The Arminian would say that Christ did indeed pay the debt for the whole world, but the *gift of salvation is conditional* rather than unconditional. The condition is accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. All those who accept Christ become elect, but God does not foreordain who they will be. He either foresees who they will be and elects them for redemption by the power of the Holy Spirit, or else they are completely free to choose Christ, and thereby elect themselves. In this view, it is akin to a trust account set up for a group of unknown beneficiaries (their number is not fixed). The trust account has an infinite amount of funds to completely cover the debts of however many beneficiaries offer proof of their right to the funds. The penalty paid from the benefits accrued on the cross is more or less, depending on the number of those who accept Christ and “cash in” their demand for payment against the trust funds.²⁶ They are individually justified (paid for) at the moment they accept Christ.

Both of these views are plausible explanations of the process of redemption, but they cannot both be true; they contradict one another. Each of them speaks to what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross. Each of them speaks to the sovereignty of Jesus Christ. If redemption is unconditional, then his sovereignty is unrestrained and we *will* be saved. If redemption is conditional, then all of Christ’s efforts are dependent on something outside of his control, which is our own sovereignty: our autonomous willingness to accept or reject him as Lord and Savior. Of course, God can choose to limit his sovereignty, as he did by taking on fleshly form. He can also choose the mechanism by which we are saved (Christ’s actions, our actions, or a combination of the two). What he can do, and what he did do, are two different things.

²⁶ Some would argue that the penalty is not more or less, because the payment was infinite. There is no such thing as infinity plus one, or infinity minus one. All debt was covered by infinite amount. The only issue is how to appropriate the coverage.

The question of a Redemptive Covenant depends on *whether God chose a people for himself before the foundation of the world*. If he did not choose a people for himself, then Christ could atone for everyone, and place the payment in a general trust fund; no one in particular had to be atoned for.

Two Seeds – Two Destinies

There are those who bear God's name, and those who do not. There are those who enjoy God's favor, and those who do not. There are those who are of Jacob, and those who are of Esau. There are two seeds, two crops, and two destinies. The one will be harvested, and the other burned.²⁷ The seed is not a physical seed, but a spiritual seed.

Rom 9:6-8 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

In Isaiah, we find that God has redeemed his people, called them by name, and claimed them for his very own:

Isa 43:1 But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.

This is consistent throughout the bible. There are two seeds mentioned from the very start. In Gen. 3:15, there is the seed of Eve, and the seed of the serpent. We aren't talking about two human families here (e.g. Isaac and Ishmael, or Jacob and Esau). We're talking about two spiritual families. The serpent wasn't going to give birth to a human child, but he would indeed have spiritual offspring. This is where the sons of God and daughters of men come into the picture (Gen. 6:1). In Obadiah, we discover that the two spiritual families, and the two human families, are linked. Jacob is used as a nickname for the people of God, the seed of God who bear his name. And Esau is used as a nickname for God's enemies, the seed of the enemy who bear his name. And there is a destiny for each:

The house of Jacob shall be a fire, And the house of Joseph a flame; But the house of Esau shall be stubble; They shall kindle them and devour them, And no survivor shall remain of the house of Esau," Obadiah 18 NKJV

We read in Mal 1:2-3, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet Jacob I have loved; But Esau I have hated..." In Romans, this is expanded:

Rom 9:10-15 And not only so, but also when Rebecca had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad — in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call — she was told, "The older will serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ESV

²⁷ Matt. 13:30 – Parable of the Wheat and the Tares

The names Jacob and Esau are representative names for the elect and the non-elect: those who are called, and those who are not. This is an essential component of the Covenant of Grace. But it is the entire basis of the Redemptive Covenant. Obadiah tells us that the sons of Esau will not survive God's Judgment.

It is tempting to think that the world is filled with a mixture of Jacobites and Edomites who are equally atoned for by Christ. Then it is up to each individual, regardless of their lineage, to identify himself or herself as a child of God. You should be uncomfortable with such a conclusion, because of the two seeds mentioned in Genesis 3:15. Romans tells us that the one is cursed from conception, and the other is blessed from conception.

God's Favor

There is a related theme in the Scripture. It is the idea of the *remnant*. There are those who are reserved by God, and who enjoy his favor. If Christ died for specific people by name, then how were they chosen? Did they *become* children of God by something they did (or were foreseen to do), or have they *always* been his children? As you have seen, I advocate the second position. Does the bible advocate it as well?

Gen 6:7-9 So the LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land ... But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD... Noah walked with God. ESV

Did Noah find favor because he walked with God, or did he walk with God because he found favor? Every Christian should know that apart from Christ, apart from having found favor in God's sight, there is nothing in him that desires God.²⁸ He indeed walks with Christ because he has found favor in the sight of God. Finding favor in God's sight, or being blessed by God, or enjoying God's grace, are all the same thing. Abram found favor in God's sight, Gen 12:1-2. Isaac found favor in God's sight. In Gen 25:11, it says that Isaac dwelt at Beer Lahai Roi, which means "the well of the Living One *who sees me*." Isaac was *known* by God, *seen* by him.

Jacob found favor in God's sight after testing. Please understand that the testing did not cause his blessing, but it did result in his blessing: he was chosen to be tested. How do we know? We know because Jacob was favored by God before he was born.

Rom 9:11-13 (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), it was said to her, "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

This tells us that it is because of God's pre-existing favor that the blessing is later bestowed.

Gen 32:26-28 And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks." But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!" So He said to him, "What is your name?" He said, "Jacob." And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel ; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."
Gen 35:11-12 Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company

²⁸ Rom 7:18 For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.

of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."

Moses too found favor in God's sight. He didn't elect himself to be the Law Giver. He didn't arise in his generation of his own accord to lead his people out of Egypt. God knew him, and favored him. He prepared the stage for him, and blessed him, and used him to bless Israel.

Ex 33:12 Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.'
ESV

Hannah and her son Samuel found favor in God's sight. David found favor in God's sight. Job found favor in God's sight, not because he was righteous, but because God kept a hedge around him, separated him from other men, and specially blessed him.

Job 1:8-10 And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?" Then Satan answered the LORD and said, "Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. ESV

Mary found favor with God. And her son, Jesus, found favor with God.

Luke 1:30 And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ESV

Luke 2:40 And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.

Luke 2:52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man. ESV

Here is the crucial part: it is because we are in Christ, placed in his hand by God, that we too find favor with God. Christ is our covering and our blessing.

John 10:27-30 My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."

Covenant Conditions

Let's assume that there are indeed named beneficiaries. Does that preclude conditional salvation? Most wills bestow the estate of the testator upon his spouse, or his children, or both. In some wills, there are conditions placed on the beneficiaries; for example, if the spouse does not remarry; if the child goes to college to become a doctor; when the child reaches maturity; etc. But we rarely see a condition as the cause of being named in the will in the first place ("whoever steps on the crack in the sidewalk outside my house on the Tuesday following my death"). That would be incompatible with the many expressions of God's love for his people, the nature of "calling" itself, knowing us in the womb, or loving us eternally. Named conditions, when they exist, deal with the application of the proceeds of the estate. Thus, in the Old Testament, the first covenant, the condition is that the Bride and her children are to abide by the requirements of the Ceremonial Law, the system of altar and sacrifice. In the New Testament, under the better covenant, those conditions are removed – the system of altar and sacrifice has been done away

with. The veil has been torn,²⁹ and the temple has been destroyed,³⁰ because they are no longer necessary. A new temple of our body has been provided:³¹ a new wineskin for the new wine.³² God lives in this temple by his Spirit,³³ causing us to will and to act according to his purposes.³⁴ Many Christians today do not know that the title “Old Testament” or “New Testament” refers to a last will and testament. But now *you* know.

The Extent of Our Depravity

If there was an eternal decree of election in which God chose those who would belong to him, and if they were totally incapable of saving themselves by their own actions, then such an election requires a capable person to obtain and preserve them. God would have to establish an agreement, a Redemptive Covenant, under which that capable person would fulfill the requirements of salvation on their behalf. Arminians reject an eternal decree that ordains those who would be saved by Christ. In part, they reject it because they reject the total depravity of mankind. They consider man hampered but not disabled. Therefore man needs assistance to be saved, but not to the point of being saved in spite of himself.

Fore-Knowledge vs. Fore-Ordination

Arminians advocate selection by foreknowledge according to man’s will. That is, God chooses those whom he knows will choose him. It’s like throwing a banquet and inviting only those you know are willing and able to come. You never get turned down, and so you avoid the disappointment and embarrassment of a rejection. If we were pre-chosen according to God’s foreknowledge of our choice, then there was no election; there was only *selection*. By comparison, if there was foreordination, then there could be no conditions attached to salvation. Every one whom God elected, and only those, would invariably come to him. Foreordination means that God ordained it, just as he ordained the creation of the universe: “Let there be light, and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). It is what we term the *Eternal Decree*. It is done by fiat, not accommodation. What God ordains inexorably comes to be. If he ordained grace, then grace is irresistible. If grace is conditioned, then it is resistible.

The primary verse supporting the Arminian view is Rom 8:29, “For **whom He foreknew**, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...” Keep in mind that Arminian and reformed views both agree that we are predestined. The only issue is how the elect were chosen. Let’s look at another supporting verse in the introduction from 1Peter 1:1-2, “To the pilgrims of the Dispersion..., **elect according to the foreknowledge of God** the Father...” The Peter passage is followed shortly by this: 1Peter 1:19-20 “but with the precious blood of Christ,

²⁹ Matt. 27:51; Heb 10:19-22 Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

³⁰ Lk. 21:6; prophecy related to the destruction of the temple in 70AD.

³¹ 1Cor. 3:16

³² Matt. 9:17

³³ 1Cor. 6:19

³⁴ Phil. 2:13 NIV

as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. **He indeed was foreordained** before the foundation of the world...” Please note that the same Greek word is used for both *foreknew* and *foreordained*; the verb used is “know” and not “ordain.” So far, the Arminian argument seems irrefutable. In Eph. 1:1-4 we read, “just as He **chose us in Him before the foundation** of the world...” This doesn’t change anything either. The Arminian agrees that we were chosen before the foundation of the world. It’s just that those who were chosen, were the ones that God foreknew.

Now, what does it mean that he *foreknew* them? Does it mean he foreknew that they would accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, or does it mean that he loved them with an everlasting love, and has always known his children? You’ll have to work that out for yourself. I will only say that the historic view of the church is that God has always known you. He did not choose you because you first chose him, nor because you would later choose him. Rather he first knew and loved you, and therefore chose to redeem you, that you might love him in return (1John 4:19).

Conditional Salvation

All this being said, What are we to make of the condition that is specified in the bible, that we must believe in Christ to be saved?

John 8:24 Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins ; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins."

It seems as if we are saved *because* we believe (*if* you believe, *then* you will be saved).³⁵ Salvation obviously requires the believer’s declaration of faith, yet what saves the believer is not his declaration of faith. It is Christ’s act of atonement, and Christ’s righteousness. These are what satisfy the requirements of the law, not the believer’s faith. It is Christ’s satisfaction of the law that *causes* our salvation. And then, by declaring our faith in Christ, his satisfaction is considered our own. In philosophy, his satisfaction would be the *efficient* cause of our salvation, and our faith is the instrumental cause.³⁶ Faith is the *means* by which I *receive* the gift of salvation, not a *condition* which *creates* it. The Greek grammar used throughout the NT indicates we are saved *by* faith or *through* faith, but never *for* faith. Consequently, the reformed view says that the cause of my salvation is independent of the faith by which I receive it. Everything needed to save me was done on the cross two thousand years ago. But I received my salvation in 1980. Everything needed to save Abraham was done on the cross two thousand years ago. But he received the *promise* of his salvation c. 2020 BC (Heb. 11:17). Both of us were saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, even though Abraham knew nothing of Christ. He trusted God to provide everything needed for his salvation, just as he trusted God to provide the ram for Isaac. We say he “looked forward” to Christ.

³⁵ “Saved” in this context is limited to the event of our justification. Salvation, theologically, includes both the event of our justification and the process of our sanctification. Justification is both the forgiveness of sin, and the imputation of righteousness.

³⁶ If I have a cup in my hand and let go of it, gravity is the efficient cause of it falling to the ground. Letting go of the cup is the instrumental cause of it falling. If I do not let go of the cup, then it will not fall. However, in outer space, even if I let go of the cup, it does not fall. Therefore, letting go of the cup cannot be the efficient cause of it falling, because it doesn’t fall in space. It is only the instrument, the means, by which the cup may fall. Faith is the instrument by which I receive my salvation, not the reason for it. This is to the glory of Christ.

In the Arminian view, however, we're not talking about an instrument at all. Christ's satisfaction, they say, was an element needed for universal redemption, but no one is actually saved until they believe. Salvation is thus dependent on belief, not independent of it. Belief is a necessary condition before salvation may exist.³⁷ This kind of conditional faith requires us to have both the *capacity* to believe in Christ, and the freedom not to believe in Christ. Arminians assert that Christ obtained this kind of capacity for everyone, elect and non-elect, on the cross. With such a capacity, we can resist the Spirit's work, and go against God's wishes that none should perish (by which they mean no one in the world). And this is possible, they say, despite God's sovereignty. But then it follows that, if faith is the condition of my salvation, and my faith is lost, my salvation is lost too. This has grave implications for those with impaired capacity, or those who lose their capacity altogether. I'll get back to this problem of capacity shortly.

The reformed view rejects the idea that anyone is capable of accepting Christ apart from the direct operation of the Spirit on that person. This is because of the *total depravity* of man in general. Thus salvation must be God-initiated on an individual basis, directed only at the elect. It is *particular* atonement, without conditions. His Spirit imparts the capacity to believe in Christ prior to faith. This is done by instilling a new heart of flesh in place of the heart of stone (Ezek. 11:19). The bible also describes it as bestowing sight, strength, hearing, and life (the blind see, and the deaf hear – Matt. 11:5). The believer's capacity is specially imparted to him, so that what he receives is a gift and not a prize. He accepts it because God's Spirit is the active and sovereign agent in his salvation.³⁸ That is, believers do not resist the operations of the Spirit. Yet they come to Christ most willingly.³⁹ They are not coerced into the kingdom against their will.

What difference does it make whether we say that believing in Christ is the *condition* of our salvation, or simply the *instrument* by which we receive him? Aren't these just word-games? At issue here are two things. The first is the sovereignty of God. If salvation is conditional, and we may refuse it, then God's will that none should perish is thwarted.⁴⁰ The required condition can only be met by the believer, thus it is the *believer's* sovereignty that saves him, not God's. The second issue is what Jesus Christ actually accomplished on the cross. In the Arminian view, Christ died for the whole world, but he only made it possible to be saved. Thus, if hell is not empty, his death was ineffectual for those who are there – conceivably, it could have been

³⁷ What we have here is a disagreement as to what "saving" means. Fire requires a triangle. We must have fuel, oxygen, and heat. If any of the three is missing, there can be no fire. Fire is *conditioned* on the presence of all three components. The reformed view is that we do not ignite the torch of our salvation through faith. Faith is not a component of salvation. Rather, Christ provides all the necessary components: fuel, oxygen, and heat. He ignites the torch and hands it to us through faith. In the Arminian view, our faith is indeed a necessary component without which the torch cannot be lit; it is not simply the instrument by which we accept the torch.

³⁸ John 6:37 "All that the Father gives Me **will come to Me**, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out." Paul tells us that we are dead in our trespasses and sin (Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:13). We are told that in this condition we cannot see (Jn. 3:3), cannot hear (Mk. 4:12), and cannot understand (1Cor. 2:14). **We are incapacitated**. Who then will make us alive and change our heart of stone to flesh? God promised to do that in Ezek. 11:19, putting a new Spirit in us. John tells us that the Spirit reveals God to us. John 16:13-15 "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; ...He will take of what is Mine and declare it to you." The Spirit is the one who effects God's will in us. Ezek 36:27 "I will put My Spirit within you and **cause you** to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them." Is this before or after our conversion? We are incapacitated; it *must* be prior to being born again (Jn. 5:21; 6:63; 1Pet.3:18).

³⁹ John 6:45 "It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Therefore everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to Me." The idea here is that the Spirit, having enabled and "educated" us (see note above), we come to Christ of our own accord.

⁴⁰ The Arminian view is that "none" means no one in the world. If hell is not empty, as all agree, then by their own definition, God's will is thwarted. The reformed view is that it refers only to the elect: Matt. 18:14 That none of his *sheep* should perish. John 10:11-18 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep..." Matt 25:32-33 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

ineffectual for everyone. However, his duty to see that none of the elect perish is not a failed endeavor in this view, because only those who choose him are elect.

The reformed view is that Christ actually paid our personal debt on the cross, relieving us of its burden right then and there. If that is true, then our debt was taken care of apart from any contribution on our part. In other words, in the Arminian view, I cannot be saved by Christ alone. He needs my contribution of faith to make his death effective. In this view, I do not receive a gift from my Father, with my name on it, simply because I am and have always been his child. Instead, I win a lottery prize that others did not win, because I redeemed my ticket and they did not, even though they possessed a ticket with the same winning number on it. The importance of this distinction will become clear shortly.

Which view does the bible support? Let's look at a "shadow" from the OT to see if it helps our understanding.

Day of Atonement

In the OT, there was a Day of Atonement (Lev. 16-23), *Yom Kippur*, a day on which a goat is chosen by lot. It receives the sins of the nation, and the nation as a whole is cleared when it is led from the Tent of Meeting into the wilderness. Christ is not described in the Bible as the scapegoat. He was not chosen by lot. Instead, he was sent to the altar as the Paschal Lamb. He was sacrificed there, so that his blood would atone for an individual's sin. He did not clear the debt for the world in general, but for each of the elect. He was knowingly and intentionally offered up for them one by one.⁴¹

Heb 7:26-27 For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself.

To repeat, the redemption price was either made available for *anyone* to claim, so that they might pay their debt with it and gain access to the kingdom; or else the provisions of the will actually paid and cleared the believer's debt upon Christ's death, and bestowed on the believer an irrevocable right to an inheritance in the kingdom, without any conditions to be met on his or her part. The believer is foreknown, and therefore he is foreordained to salvation as the child of God, dearly loved, wheat and not tare, lamb and not goat, Jacob and not Esau.

⁴¹ Christ was made a sin offering for us through a single sacrifice. A question arises even in the reformed view as to whether his death was made on behalf of the elect corporately, or individually. Isa. 53:5 suggests corporately ("our" transgressions), but Heb. 6:6 suggests individually (*each* of us crucifies him by our own sin). Calvinists believe it is individually, and further, they suggest that his suffering on the cross increased with the number of those for whom he died. My sins would be identifiable in the stripes he received for me. "He was wounded for our transgressions." Loraine Boettner considers this a false assumption (see his treatise on *Limited Atonement*). He coined the phrase: "Christ's atonement was *sufficient* for all, but *efficient* only for the elect." In this view, Christ's sacrifice was capable of covering everyone in the world by its very nature, but it did not. The Spirit applies the benefit of his death only to the elect. Boettner rejects the notion that the price of our redemption (the value of Christ's death) is assessed according to the number of beneficiaries. The value of Christ's sacrifice is not quantifiable, he says, because it is infinite. This is necessary because Christ himself is infinite. Its value is not based on the accumulated cost of our sins. Nor does God apportion its value, so much for each of us. It has its own inherent, infinite value, he says. This is the evangelical view of the cross, useful to both Arminians and 4-point Calvinists. Still, if it is a blanket payment because it is infinite in extent, did Christ consider me in particular while he was on the cross? Did he look straight at me, as he looked straight at Peter across the courtyard? (Lk. 22:61). Or was I hidden among the flock? Whichever view we hold, we need to realize that we are known by our "given" name, not by a group title of "elect." We're not lost in the crowd. We are each precious in his sight. This is the lesson of the parable of the shepherd who left the 99 to find the one who was lost (Lk. 15:4). It is a particular atonement, made for each of us, with our name separately listed in his testament.

The reformed view is that **Christ died for the named heirs in the will**. He did not make everyone potentially salvable. He did not fail to preserve those given to him by the Father as a result of their ability to resist the Spirit. He finally and completely saved the elect on the cross. Nor was Christ blocked from saving anyone because they failed to meet some condition, or because they lacked the capacity to choose him. Rather, salvation is a sovereign act on God's part that irresistibly bestows his unmerited favor on us. Why must that be true?

The Problem of Capacity

The bible teaches that Jesus paid the penalty in full for us on the cross. There is no debt remaining, and so there is no condemnation remaining. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, that we can do that can make us any more or less saved than we already are. That's because we have nothing to do with our salvation. The bible says our eyes are blinded,⁴² our ears are deafened. We cannot see the kingdom of God or hear the call of Christ, unless the Father enables us to see it, and to hear his call. It is all in his hands, not ours.

John 6:37-40 All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will never drive out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me: that of all He has given Me I should lose none, but should raise them up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me: that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

John 6:44 No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

When John the Baptist doubts Jesus is the Christ, he sends his disciples to ask if he is the one who was to arise. Jesus tells John's disciples to go to him with this evidence:

Matt 11:5 The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them.

These miracles identify Christ as the Promised One. They are signs of what is actually happening in the spiritual realm – the elect are receiving spiritual sight, the strength to stand, relief from the corruption of sin, the ability to hear his call, and *life*. As I said, we have nothing to do with our salvation. Jesus paid it all. The Father gave us to his son before time began. And in time he sent his son to save us. He predestined us to salvation, and he ensured it would be accomplished.

Eph 1:4-5 "For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will."

We are incapable of escaping our eternal destination by anything we do or don't do. If we are able, and we understand the gospel message, we are obligated to respond to it, and to accept and acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. ***But if we are not able, God's grace is not defeated.*** Let me give you a few examples.

⁴² John 12:40; Rom. 11:7; 2Cor. 3:14; Matt. 13:13-15; Lk. 8:10

If we are chosen before time began, can we prevent an unborn child from going to heaven by aborting it? What if a man declares his faith in Christ, but suffers from Alzheimer's and forgets it? Did he lose his salvation? Of course not! Rom 11:29 "The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." What about Down's Syndrome children who cannot figure out any of this? What about children who die in infancy?⁴³ Do only mentally competent adults who have verbally expressed their faith in Christ go to heaven? Scripture rejects such foolishness. What about those who are schizophrenic, hallucinatory, incompetent, or severely depressed? Do they miss out on salvation because their body or their mind failed them? No! Why not? Because we are "looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith," (Heb 12:2) and not to anything we have done. He starts it; he maintains it; he completes it. He seals us with his Spirit who is the guarantor of our salvation (Eph. 1:13-14).

If faith is the condition instead of the instrument of our salvation, then these people will lose their salvation by circumstances beyond their control. That's what "condition" means.

Whom did Christ Pay?

Let's go back to the Garden for a moment. Adam's covenant was with the Father, not with anyone else, and so his obligations were to the Father. The penalty clause specified what the punishment would be for the debt created by Adam's sin.⁴⁴ That debt is owed to the Father, not to anyone else. Therefore, the ransom was paid to the Father, not to anyone else. Redemption does not purchase us from Satan. We were Satan's prisoners and under the curse of death by God's decree; it was part of the penalty. This is called the *forensic* view of the cross. I'm not going to go into Satan's role in all of this right now, nor examine the extent of his dominion and domain. I am only going to say that we owe nothing to Satan, and everything to Christ.

Conclusion

Our belief in Christ is *not* a pre-condition to our salvation. It is the result of it. We are, and have always been, dearly beloved children of God Almighty. We are children of the promise, named heirs to the kingdom, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. But there are also children of the devil,⁴⁵ who are born of a different seed, from a different tree. *Consider these two seeds.* Satan is cursed just as we are cursed. He is eternal, just as we are eternal. The difference between us is that we are covered by Christ and he is not.⁴⁶ We are covered by Christ not because of anything we have done, but because of who we are in him.

There is no covenant in all of Scripture that provides for Christ atoning for Satan. He is always called the "enemy" and never the "friend." If Christ did not atone for Satan because he is

⁴³ Here we find the basis for infant baptism: to include them in the covenant pending their mature confession of Christ. Acts 2:39 For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁴ Matt 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

⁴⁵ John 8:19 Then they said to Him, "Where is Your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither Me nor My Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also." John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.

⁴⁶ John 14:30 the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. NKJV

the enemy, then he did not atone for any of Satan's seed, and his seed surely exist among men. Yet, if Christ died for the whole world, as some assert, then he must have died for Satan's seed. This would be true even if the payment was never made for them because they didn't meet the "condition." The reformed view rejects universal atonement which asserts that Christ died for the seed of Satan, and it rejects conditional salvation which asserts that Christ was unable to save anyone without their permission.

Our sense of the security we have in Christ depends on what we believe about the way we are saved. If we can choose or reject Christ at will, gaining or losing our salvation, then we have a tenuous relationship with him, established and maintained under our own power. But if we have always been in Christ, and had nothing to do with our election or salvation, then we are secure in Christ, forever protected in his hand.

What we do have some control over, now that we are liberated from our prison of death, is our sanctification. It is enabled, empowered, and exercised by the Holy Spirit. Even so, it is a cooperative endeavor. It is worked out in the Body of Christ, and in the crucible of the world. It is in both places that we experience and express the love of God. The focus and foundation of our walk with Christ, like our sense of security, depends on our understanding of what God has done for us in Christ, and what he has called us to do.

That is the subject of the next lesson.