

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series: Exposition of Romans
Number: 108
Text: Romans 9; I Tim. 4:10
Date: March 30, 2008(am)

Pastor/Teacher
Gary L.W. Johnson

EXCURSUS: CALVINISM VS. ARMINIANISM (Part VII)

The passage in I Tim. 4:10 is one of a handful of texts (along with II Peter 3:9 and I John 2:1-2) that Arminians constantly make appeal in order to oppose Calvinistic doctrine. For example, Greg Boyd, an Arminian (best known for his advocacy of Open Theism i.e., God does NOT possess exhaustive knowledge of the future) cites I Tim. 4:10 as conclusive proof that God wants everyone to be saved saying, “If God genuinely desires all to be saved, the reason why some are not must be because they don’t accept salvation, while those who are saved do accept it.”¹ What does Paul mean? How do you reconcile a text like this with other texts – like Romans 9:13-18 – that explicitly teach God’s particular grace?

I. THE CONTEXT OF I TIMOTHY 4:10

The Bible gives its readers both the light and the dark aspects of truth, both the good and the unpleasant, the positive and the negative. And the Scriptures speak most plainly of truth and error. We are prone to see *grey* areas whereas the Bible gives us *black* and *white*. I Tim. 3:16 opens with the phrase *kai homologoumenos*, which may be rendered by “*common consent*,”² or by “*confessedly, undeniably, most certainly*,”³ turned the reader’s attention to the contents of the truth that the church of the living God is to guard and defend (3:15). The incarnation, the vindication and justification of the incarnate One, his self-exhibition to the angelic world, the proclamation among the Gentiles,--a Person, not a program, the special burden and mission of Paul—the positive reception of that truth in the world, and finally the ascension and session of the embodiment of the truth, God the Son Himself. The one last great climactic event, His appearing and His kingdom, is for the moment passed over (see II Tim. 4:1). What concerns the apostle at the moment is the reverse of the truth, the error to come, the apostasy from the glorious truth just detailed (I Tim. 4:1-5). And he does not hesitate to frankly picture the latter times when apostasy develops (cf. 1:5). One is reminded of Cromwell’s words to his artist who asked him how he wished his picture to be painted. It is said that he replied in words to this effect, “Paint me as I am, paint me wart and all!”⁴ The plainness of the apostle in his warning is a lesson for the present time in which an apostasy from the truth is in process, with even the evangelical churches turning away from the exposition of the Scriptures, from doctrinal preaching, and substituting for divine truth for “user-friendly entertainment.” Paul’s instruction for his young legate, “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed” (6), is right on the mark for us today. Timothy’s responsibility is ours as well.

II. THE COMING APOSTASY (1-5)

A. The certainty of the apostasy (1). There is no doubt about its coming. Paul says the Spirit speaks “expressly” about it, using an adverb that means explicitly, or without disguise. He refers to the general tenor of the prophetic and apocalyptic passages, such as Matthew 24-25, or perhaps he writes from his own revelation and understanding as is found in passages such as II Thessalonians 2 (cf. Acts 20:29-30; II Tim. 3:1-9). As Donald Guthrie has

written, “Whenever truth flourishes, error will raise its head.”⁵ The expression “the faith” is here the faith that is believed (*fides quae creditor*), the body of redemptive truths, not the faith by which we believe (*fides qua credimus*), the subjective sense of the word. The “doctrines of demons” have their ultimate source in Satan and his demons, and they concern primarily marriage and food, suggesting their ascetic nature and hinting at incipient Gnosticism. The demonic teaching was designed to deceive by lying hypocrisy (v. 2), reminding one of Genesis 3:1-5 and the arch enemy’s deceptive lies spoken in the Garden of Eden. Such teaching is pious talk, but wickedly immoral. The conscience of such false teachers will be seared with a hot iron” (lit., cauterized!) cf. Eph. 4:19. The Eddyism, the Armstrongism, the New Ageism, Mormonism, the Health and Wealth Gospelism, and Televangelism and other deceiving errors come to mind.

B. The content of the apostasy 3-5. The ascetic character of their teaching is clear from verse 3. The antidote to the lies of the future is seen in the words, “believe and know the truth.” Only they can really give thanks properly. In verse 4, the common grace of God emerges in that He is the giver of created things, and they are good. They come from no grudging heavenly Father, and they come lavishly. The sanctification of our food is through prayerful words of thanksgiving. Eating and drinking are not secular activities for the Christian; they come from God’s common grace to us (cf. Matt. 14:19; Acts 27:34-35; I Sam. 9:13). At stake even in our eating is our conception of God.

III. THE CONDUCT CONSONANT WITH GODLINESS (6-10)

A. Doctrinal study (6). The faith and the excellent doctrine will enable Timothy to suggest (NKJV, “instruct;” but the word is better rendered by suggest, fitting for a young man) to his listeners the dangers of the coming apostasy. The words of faith and the excellent doctrine he has been taught have prepared him for becoming an excellent minister of Christ Jesus.

B. Ethical practices (7-10). Avoiding the profane and nonsensical fables (cf. 1:4), Timothy is to give himself to exercise toward godliness. The dogma he has been taught is to lead to discipline (cf. I Cor. 9:27)! The “for” (8) explains why godliness is the most important kind of exercise we can engage in. While bodily exercise is profitable to a limited extent, godliness is profitable for all things, and it even reaches into the future. The “Faithful Saying” of verse 9 confirms the previous statement and forms a nice introduction to verse 10, the text that is the principal subject of this study. The expression *eis touto gar* of verse 10, as both Barrett⁶ and Kelly⁷ indicate, looks back to verse 8, explaining that the labor and striving⁸ is with a view to the promise of life mentioned there. The last relative clause of verse 10 is the problem text, to which we must devote the rest of our analysis. For the sake of simplicity, we shall discuss the text under two heads, namely, those interpretations that may be called *soteriological*, that is, that understand the term *Savior* to refer to God as savior from the guilt and condemnation of sin, and interpretations that may be called *non-soteriological*, that is, that understand the term *Savior* to refer to God as deliverer or preserver from the devastating influence of sin in the world. Berkhof defines common grace in this way, “(a) those general operations of the Holy Spirit whereby He, without renewing the heart, exercises such a moral influence on man through His general or special revelation, that sin is restrained, order is maintained in social life, and civil righteousness is promoted; or (b) those general blessings, such as rain and sunshine, food and drink, clothing and shelter, which God imparts to all men indiscriminately where and in what measure as seems good to Him.”⁹ We shall look at the *soteriological views* first, that is, views that take the word *Savior* to refer to salvation from the guilt and penalty of sin.

1. First, the text might be thought to refer to universal salvation, or universalism. Since salvation, however, is not a work of God in Christ that

is accomplished in differing degrees, the term “especially” would be meaningless.

2. **Second**, it has been thought that one might escape universalism, or universal salvation, that is, that Christ has died for all persons without exception, by taking the “all” in the sense of all kinds of men (cf. 2:4-7), that is, Jews and Gentiles. In this context, however, there does not seem to be anything that might support such a view. Further, and more important, this view is also unsuited to “especially” (cf. 6:10-11). He saves *only* believers. In addition, we have not yet considered the meaning of *Savior*, that is, whether it really has the sense of to save from the guilt and penalty of sin.
3. **Third**, relying on the opening clause of chapter two, verse 4, one might conclude that Paul is simply suggesting that the living God wishes to be the Savior of all men. This lofty aim, however, finds resistance from man’s will. The will of man is in bondage to sin and cannot of itself respond to the gospel (see Rom. 8:7-8; I Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1, etc.). Concerning this Arminian, view Warfield has written, “But they suppose that, though dead in sin, man can resist, and successfully resist, almighty grace. Resistance is, however, itself an activity: and the successful resistance of an almighty recreative power, is a pretty considerable activity—for a dead man. It all comes back, therefore to the Pelagian ground that, at the decisive point, the salvation of man is in his own power: men are saved, or men are not saved, according to natural differences in men. Thus the grace of God is fundamentally denied and salvation is committed, in the last analysis, to man himself.”¹⁰ The text, of course, does not say that He is a salvation-desiring God, but a saving God. This salvation is a foreordained salvation, provided by a God who cannot be frustrated in His purposes (see Acts 13:48), a salvation whose obstacles have been removed by the son’s substitution.
4. **Fourth**, it has also been maintained that the Savior referred to here is a savior provided for all in the potential sense. As Fausset puts it, “He is the Saviour of all sufficiently and potentially (Ch. 1. 15); of believers alone efficiently and effectually.”¹¹ The text, however, says that He *IS* the Savior of all men. According to the text the salvation referred to is neither potential nor provisional; it is an effectual work for all men. Since it is plain that the Scriptures do not countenance universalism, we must look for another explanation. Steven M. Baugh in an excellent short study has illustrated the Arminian dilemma in this way, “The Arminian position teaches that Christ’s atonement was made for all of mankind, but only those who exercise their free volition to receive it are actually forgiven and saved. This is like a lifeguard who throws life rings to two drowning men. One man takes the life ring and is saved, the other refuses the life ring and drowns.” Baugh asks, “In what sense is the lifeguard the savior of *both* men, but especially of the one who lived. How is the lifeguard the ‘savior’ of the drowned man?”¹²

CONCLUSION: Next week we will look at the interpretation that contends that the word *Savior* is used in a non-soteriological sense of a *deliverer* or *preserver*. But I think from what we have covered so far that we could conclude with John Owen, “What then, I pray? what will be concluded hence? Cannot Christ be a mediator between God and men, but he must be a mediator for all men? Are not the elect men? do not the children partake of flesh and blood? doth not his church consist of men? What reason is there to assert, out of an indefinite proposition, a universal conclusion? Because Christ was a mediator for men (which were true had he been so only for his apostles), shall we conclude therefore he was so for all men? *‘Apage nugas!’* (lit. away with such nonsense!)¹³

ENDNOTES

-
- ¹ G. A. Boyd, God of The Possible: A Biblical Introduction to The Open View of God (Baker, 2000) p. 138.
- ² G. Abbott-Smith, A Manual Greek Lexicon of The New Testament (T & T Clark, 1937) p. 318.
- ³ W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Univ. Chicago, 1957) p. 569.
- ⁴ I am reminded of Warfield's quip on this. "Cromwell was right in demanding that the artist should paint the wart on his nose. But it would hardly do to look at the wart through a microscope and paint it and it alone in this exaggerated light in all its hideous rugosities and label it 'Cromwell.'" The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield X (rpt. Baker, 1981) p. 96.
- ⁵ D. Guthrie, The Pastoral Epistles (Tyndale, 1957) p. 91.
- ⁶ C. K. Barrett, The Pastoral Epistles in the English Bible (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 70).
- ⁷ J. N. D. Kelly, A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus (New York and Evanston: Harper & Row, Publishers 1963), p. 101.
- ⁸ The text is unclear here. A number of mss have oneidizometha, suffer reproach (AV; NKJV) for agonizometha, strive (NIV; NRSV, "struggle"). The decision between the two variants is not easy, for Col. 1:29 may have influenced copyists. See Bruce M. Metzger, A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (London, New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 641-42. The committee preferred agonizometha, but not strongly.
- ⁹ Berkhos, p. 436. Common grace is unlimited by election, does not remove the guilt of sin and only has a restraining effect on sin's corrupting influence, and is resistible, "as a matter of fact is always more or less resisted." In common grace the call to repent and believe is "invariably ineffectual."
- ¹⁰ Benjamin B. Warfield, The Plan of Salvation (Boonton: Simpson Publishing Company, 1989 [orig. ed., 1915], p. 84.
- ¹¹ A. R. Fausset, A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments, VI, 492>
- ¹² Steven M. Baugh, "'Savior of All People': I Tim 4:10 in Context," Westminster Theological Journal, 54 (1992), 331. Baugh goes on, in his excellent article, to show that one cannot convincingly argue that "Savior" is a title and, therefore, whether one responds or not, the Savior is still a Savior, just as a lifeguard is still a lifeguard if someone drowns in his time of service. He points to the anarthrous use of the noun here, "implying that this is not a title of God, but a description of his actions. He is 'a Savior' of all people, because he *acts* as Savior toward all" (p. 332). cf. C. F. D. Moule, An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 114; BDF, 252.
- ¹³ The Works of John Owen X (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1971) p. 190.