

In Search of the GUT

(The Unpardonable Sin in the Light of the Gospel)

by

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Isaac Newton, the father of classical physics, discovered the laws of motion. These laws explain why objects move, how fast they move, and the direction of their movement. Anyone who has taken an introductory course in physics is intimately familiar with these three laws.

- 1) Objects at rest remain at rest unless acted upon by an outside force; objects in motions remain in motion along the same course unless acted upon by an outside force.
- 2) The acceleration of an object is proportional to the force acting upon it divided by its mass; $F=ma$.
- 3) For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

These three laws seemed adequate for explaining the motion of any object, that is any object which one could see in Newton's time and for many years thereafter. However, with the advent of powerful microscopes man began to peer into the microscopic depths of the universe and here we discovered some very tiny objects called electrons. All of the matter on the earth is composed of protons, neutrons and electrons, the basic building blocks of the atom, the smallest unit of any given element. The nucleus is composed of protons and neutrons and encircled by a cloud of electrons in orbit at relativistic velocities. These electrons move up and down from one

orbital energy level to another. The problem is no one knows why or how to predict this movement. Therefore the location and velocity of an electron can never be known at the same time. It seems as if they move randomly. Newton's laws of motion do not seem to apply in the microscopic universe. Indeed there seems to be no rule of cause and effect. It is as if there were a discontinuity in the fabric of the universe, an annoying continental divide between the macroscopic world and the microscopic world. When we discovered the electron, suddenly the predictable, understandable, orderly universe became completely *disorderly*.

A scientist by the name of Erwin Schrodinger developed a set of rules and equations which enables one to calculate the position or the speed of an electron but never both at the same time, thus this field of study is called Schrodinger's Quantum Mechanics. Anyone who has studied graduate level physics is probably more familiar with this set of equations than he or she ever wanted to be. Although these rules and equations are helpful and they enable us to design semiconductors which are the basis of all modern electronics, they do not provide the handy cause and effect explanation that would reunite the macroscopic and the microscopic worlds, nor do they enable us to predict the movement of the electron. The quantum mechanical world is so frustrating that Schrodinger himself once said "I wish I had never had anything to do with it." Einstein, the father of modern physics, was also frustrated by the apparent discontinuity between the macroscopic world and the microscopic world. He searched in vain for a theory that would reunite physics into one seamless and understandable whole. He refused to believe the movement of the electron was entirely "uncaused". He also strongly believed there must be a single theory which explained both the worlds. He is quoted as saying "God doesn't play dice with the universe".

Today many of the cutting edge physicists are obsessed with finding what they call the Grand Unifying Theory (GUT), the one theory, which will reunite the universe into one homogeneous unit like the one we thought we had when Newton discovered the laws of motion.

In Search of the GUT

It would appear that some theologians are also searching for a GUT. The Grand Unifying Theory of the atonement at times seems just out of reach. The problem goes like this: The Bible teaches that Jesus died for our sins. At the same time the Scriptures seem to teach that the unbeliever will die for his or her own sins. If in fact both are true, we have a clear case of double jeopardy. The same sin is punished twice. How is this to be understood? Did Jesus really die for us? Did He pay the whole price of our salvation? Is the free gift of eternal life really free?

If one considers the “in Christ” motif, the problem becomes even more perplexing. This Biblical concept presents the idea that Jesus is a corporate man. The entire human race was “in Christ”. Therefore, when Jesus died, “all died” (see 2 Corinthians 5:14). Jesus died for our sins, therefore “in Christ” we died for our sins. This is not however meant to suggest that we get any credit or merit for what happened to us in Christ. All of the credit goes to Christ and it is a free gift to us. Therefore Jesus is our Saviour, the full penalty (death) has been fully paid for every soul. However this presents a dilemma. If I died for my sins “in Christ”, (if I should reject this truth) how can I die a second time for my sins in hell? Does the plan of salvation really amount to double jeopardy? We need a grand unifying theory that will unite the mercy of God which saved us, with the justice of God which demands the destruction of sinners. There must be no illogical discontinuities in our understanding of the gospel. These flaws in our understanding produce cognitive dissonance which weakens our faith and proportionally weakens the power of the gospel which we experience. Ultimately they can lead to doubt and a complete loss of faith,

which is one of the most precious possessions one can ever know. It is imperative that we find the GUT of the atonement.

Three GUT Proposals

There are three schools of thought which attempt to provide a GUT for the atonement, the Calvinist, the Arminian and the Universalist. The Calvinist solves the problem of double jeopardy with the doctrine of double predestination. The idea is that God predestined some people to be saved and He also predestined some to be lost. Therefore, Jesus died only for those whom God foreordained would be saved. This group is called the “elect”. Calvin’s theory of double predestination further teaches that Jesus did not suffer and die for the lost. Thus in the Calvinist view there is no double jeopardy. This teaching is referred to as “limited atonement”. Since the Bible is very clear that Jesus “died for all” (2 Corinthians 5:15), the Calvinist position fails to provide a satisfactory GUT.

The Arminian camp teaches that Jesus died for everyone who ever was born or ever will be born. However, according to this position, the death of Christ alone is not sufficient to justify and save anyone. The sinner must respond to the sacrifice of Christ by believing in Christ and confessing his or her sins. Otherwise there is no atonement for those sins. They are not forgiven, and the death of Christ does him or her no good. Thus the Arminian believes the death of Christ for the sins of the world, is merely *provisional*, not *actual*. This could be referred to as “conditional atonement”. Traditionally, Seventh-day Adventists fall into the Arminian camp.

The problem with the Arminian GUT proposal is it makes no attempt at solving the double jeopardy dilemma. It actually embraces it. While the Arminian Christian sings as fervently as anyone else, “Jesus paid it all”, his understanding of the atonement says “nothing was paid at all”. The payment was simply put into an “escrow” account. It is available but it is not transferred to the sinner’s account unless certain conditions are met. When it comes to the issue of salvation, the Arminian slogan is: “We have a part to play”. If we do not perform our part satisfactorily, the payment remains “in escrow”. Arminians often state it this way: If one

fails to play his or her part, (i.e. believe and confess his or her sins) then they take their sins back upon themselves and they will suffer for the same sins for which Jesus made “provision”. There is a huge problem with this idea. Nowhere in the Scriptures is the atonement called merely a “provision”. The “escrow account” is not described in the Bible. The Scriptures teach that Jesus made atonement for sin (see Romans 5:11). Therefore, if the sinner atones for the same sins in hell, we clearly have a double atonement, which is a form of double jeopardy. There is no good news here. This position clearly falls far short of providing a grand unifying theory.

The Universalist believes Christ actually died for everyone’s sins. Therefore they have all been atoned for and forgiven and everyone will be saved. Universalists believe nobody will be lost. This group has the smallest following and justifiably so. It does solve the problem of double jeopardy, but it does so in the most obviously unacceptable way. While the errors of Calvinism are somewhat subtle, and the errors of Arminianism are very subtle, Universalism boldly and clearly contradicts the Scriptures. Surely Universalism is not the GUT of the atonement.

The Essence of the Gospel

In his first letter to the Corinthian church, Paul provides a cursory summary of the gospel. “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:1 – 2). What is the essence of the gospel which the apostle “declared”? Paul continues: “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). This is the heart of the gospel: “Christ died for our sins.” It is simple and yet profound when properly understood. Often the problem is, it is *not* understood.

Christians have struggled for years with the meaning of this simple truth: “Christ died for our sins.” How is it to be understood? If Christ died for our sins, why will the unbeliever die?

The Wages of Sin

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). This is the essence of what God told our first parents way back in the Garden of Eden when He said, “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof *thou shalt surely die*” (Genesis 2:17, emphasis supplied). James repeats the same message: “when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15). Here we find a simple, straight forward, formula. Sin brings death. The result of sin is death. Indeed, the legal penalty for sin is death. Why? Because the law of God, which represents the justice of God, demands the death of the sinner. Notice 1 Corinthians 15:56. “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.” The demand of justice is: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4). This is the just requirement of the law. But “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Why then are not “all” dead? Before we tackle the dilemma posed by the death of the unbeliever, in spite of the death of Christ, we need to understand why anyone is a live.

Adam and Eve were told the day they sinned, they would die. Why didn’t they die that day? Some have reasoned that they did die, because they died spiritually, but the wages of sin is more than spiritual death. There are three primary aspects of human nature, the body, soul and spirit (see 1 Thessalonians 5:23). The “body” obviously refers to the physical aspect of man. The “soul” refers to the emotional and or intellectual nature. The “spirit” refers to the spiritual nature of man. (The “soul” and the “spirit” are not synonymous. See Hebrews 4:12.) The Scriptures teach that the wages of sin is death. This is not only “spiritual death” but the “second death”. That is death of body, soul and spirit. The whole person must die. God did not say to

Adam “the day you sin, *part* of you will die”. He said, “the day you eat of it, you will surely die”. The question is: Why did Adam continue to live? And more than that: Why are we alive in spite of the fact that “all have sinned”. Did God mean what He said, or was He only bluffing? How is it that God could declare that the result of sin would be death, “that day” and yet Adam continued to live on for hundreds of years? We need to find the GUT of the atonement; an understanding which will unite the infallible word of God to Adam with the reality which we see today. God said “thou shalt surely die”. Why is there life? There seems to be a discontinuity in the spiritual space-time continuum. One rule applied before sin, but it appears to have been set aside at the moment that Adam sinned.

There is only one solution to this dilemma and we find it in close connection with the phrase which presents the problem. “The wages of sin *is* death; but . . .” (Romans 6:23, emphasis supplied). The text says “the wages of sin *is* death”. However, the verse does not end there. It continues with some good news, the astounding good news of the gospel. “The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Here, where we find the just demand of the law articulated, we also find the resolution of the dilemma. The wages of sin *is* death. That fact can not be changed. It is true for all time, because the law of God cannot be changed. But there is another fact that cannot be changed. God has given an “unspeakable gift” (see 2 Corinthians 9:15). “For God so loved the world, that He *gave* His only begotten Son” (John 3:16, emphasis supplied). And the good news does not end there. Not only did God give His Son, but the Son gave as well. He “gave Himself for our sins” (Galatians 1:4). To Paul this was something very personal. He speaks of Jesus as “the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Here once again we find the essence of the gospel. And it should be a very personal matter to us as well, the number one motivating factor of our lives.

For Who's Sins

For whose sins did Jesus really die? As we have seen above, some Christians (i.e. the Calvinists) would limit this good news, making it applicable to a favored group called “the elect”. The other group of Christians, called Arminians, unconsciously agree with the Calvinists. As we have seen above, they argue that Christ death was merely “provisional”. Before it becomes effective, it must be supplemented by a human response. Until and unless we respond appropriately, according to the Arminian, Christ’s death does us absolutely no good. In other words, the Arminian believes Christ really died *only* for the believer. Whether we call the favored group “the believers” or “the elect”, we still have a limited atonement.

“Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” Therefore we must go to Scripture to answer the question: For whose sins did Christ really die? We must look to the Scriptures to find the “limits” of the atonement. Looking at the Scriptures we find that Romans chapter five and verse six contradicts the Arminian position. In fact it states the exact opposite. “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). Verse eight of the same chapter reinforces the point. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Apparently, Jesus did *not* die for believers. In the book of Romans the apostle takes pains to emphasize the point: Jesus died for sinners!

Turning the Theologians Up-Side-Down

Even though Paul is writing to believers and he assures them that Jesus did die for them, he makes it very clear that Jesus did not die for them *because* they believed, nor did He wait *until* they believed. On the contrary, He died for them *before* they believed. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”. The gospel, which Paul preached, boldly stands Calvinism and

Arminianism on both of their heads. The good news is for sinners. Christ died for ours sins. Yes. But He did not die for us because we believe. He died for us, “while we were yet sinners”.

While ostensibly some believed in Christ before He died. Such is not absolutely true. For Christ is “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). This is the only reason why Adam did not die the day he sinned. Jesus stepped into the gap. He willingly took His place on “death row”. Long before Adam sinned, Christ had already volunteered to die for Adam if he should fall. That is why Adam continued to live. There was no rift in the spiritual space-time continuum.

A Legal Problem

As was implied above, sin produces a legal problem. “Sin is the transgression of the law” (1 John 3:4). That verse highlights legal ramifications. “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law” (1 Corinthians 15:56). This verse also highlights the legal ramifications of sin. It is the law of God that demands the death of the sinner. Thus when man sinned he came under the condemnation of the law. “For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation” (Romans 5:16). This is a legal condemnation. In order for man to be saved from the penalty of the law, which is the “second death” (Revelation 20:14), he must be saved from its legal condemnation. He needs to be legally justified. Romans says, “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Since sin results in a legal condemnation everyone has, or we should say *had*, a legal problem. Yet, once again we find the solution to the problem in the context of the verse which announces the problem. “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Roman 3:23 – 24).

Who has been “justified” “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”? The phrase presented in verse twenty-four has no subject. The subject which is the object of the

“justification” is found in the preceding verse. “All have sinned” and “all” are “justified freely”. This is exactly how the verse reads in the New English Version (NEV) of the Bible. “For all alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendor, and *all are justified* by God’s free grace alone . . .” (Romans 3:23 – 24 NEV emphasis supplied). This is a legal justification which precedes faith on the part of the one who is justified.

Implications of Justification

This justification, albeit “legal justification”, which does not include justification by faith, carries far reaching ramifications. To be justified means to be set free of condemnation. It is a legal acquittal. It means sin is not “imputed” to the transgressor. Although he or she has in fact sinned, God does not regard him or her as “guilty”. See for example 2 Corinthians 5:19: “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them . . .” (2 Corinthians 5:19, NKJV). If sin is “not imputed” to us, to whom was it imputed? Clearly, it was imputed to Christ. In other words we, that is the whole human race, have been forgiven. This is why we live. This is the true significance of the death of Christ. This is the meaning of the gospel which proclaims that “Christ died for our sins”.

“To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:6, 7). Clearly “forgiveness of sins” is what came through the shedding of “His blood”. For whom did He shed His blood: Everyone. Who has been forgiven: Everyone. This is the meaning of legal justification, and it is applicable to every descendent of Adam. This is the primary reason that Christ is called “the last Adam” (1 Corinthians 15:45). Just as surely as Adam’s sin changed the legal status of the human race, Jesus’ death has also changed the legal status of the human race. We were all condemned because of the “first Adam” and we were all justified because of “the last Adam”. This is the meaning of the gospel.

Why Confess Your Sins?

In light of the forgiveness which is already ours through the cross of Jesus Christ, why do we confess our sins? Is it because we love the Saviour who died for them and we realize every sin augments His suffering? In other words, do we confess because of an understanding of the present reality of the cross, the continual sacrifice of costly and painful intercession? Or do we confess because we are afraid to sleep at night lest we should die with some unconfessed sin on the record and thereby be guaranteed a place in the “second resurrection”? Is our confession self-centered or Christ-centered? Is it motivated by the good news of the gospel, the amazing love revealed at the cross, or is it a legalistic attempt to win heaven simply by avoiding hell. We need to consider whether our understanding of the good news of the gospel really amounts to salvation by confession.

These are serious questions. And our answers could reveal a serious misunderstanding of the GUT of the atonement. One of the Arminian’s favorite texts is First John chapter one and verse nine. To him it is absolute proof that the death of Christ *was* merely provisional and no one was forgiven simply because Jesus died. “If we confess out sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). To the Arminian that little word “if” is huge. The logic is simple: If you confess, you are forgiven. If you don’t confess, you are not forgiven. The cross makes no difference unless you supplement the atonement with an appropriate response. Because of this line of reasoning, the Arminian reads into 2 Corinthians what is not there: “God was in Christ reconciling the *confessors* unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” We need to find the GUT of the atonement: An understanding which can reconcile Second Corinthians with First John.

The Meaning of First John

The error which many make in interpreting First John 1:9 is a common one. It is the mistake of ignoring the context. If we ignore the context, we will find the grossest contradictions throughout the Scriptures. By simply ignoring the context, one can easily prove that the Bible teaches atheism. It does after all say “There is no God”. But when this statement is taken in context, it does not teach atheism at all. It says: “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God” (Psalm 14:1). Similarly, when one examines the context of First John 1:9 (verses 5 through 10) he or she discovers the text is not speaking of confessing any one particular sin. The text is speaking of confessing that one is a sinner as opposed to claiming to be without sin. In other words: If one claims to be without sin, he is claiming to have no need of a Saviour. He is denying the gospel and deliberately rejecting the atonement. This is a most serious sin. As we shall soon see, the full understanding of this sin lies at the very heart of the GUT of the atonement.

Not All Have Faith

All have been forgiven. This is part and parcel of the legal justification accomplished by the cross. However, the Bible not only speaks of “legal justification” for “all” (Romans 3:23-24), it also speaks of “justification by faith”. But not everyone has faith. That thought may come as a surprise to some in light of the fact that “God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). Some actually believe that everyone has faith but faith is simply not enough. James is often quoted (“the devils believe and tremble” James 2:19) in an attempt to prove that everyone has faith and therefore faith is not enough. However, the Bible does not contradict itself on this point. All have been justified but not all have faith.

Yes, the Scripture do say, “God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith”. Nevertheless, the fact that God may have given the gift of faith to all does not necessarily mean

everyone has faith. If I were to give you a dollar today, would that mean you would have a dollar tomorrow? Of course not. You could spend your dollar. You could give away your dollar. You could even throw away your dollar. Thus it is clear that even if God gave the gift of faith to “every man”, it would not necessarily follow, that everyone has faith.

In second Thessalonians Paul articulated his prayer request. “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith” (2 Thessalonians 3:1 – 2 NKJV). The Bible is abundantly clear that “not all have faith.” Therefore “not all” have been justified by faith. One must have faith in order to be justified by faith. Yet the text under consideration clearly says “all are justified” (Romans 3:24). That is, all have been set free of legal condemnation. Legal justification *is* applicable to all.

The logic of this process is very simple. All sinned *in Adam* (Romans 5:12). Therefore, legal condemnation came upon all (Romans 5:16). The legal penalty for sin is death (1 Corinthians 15:56). Jesus died for all (2 Corinthians 5:14). Therefore, the legal penalty has been paid for all (1 Timothy 2:6). Thus the result is “all are justified”. That is legally justified, not justified by faith, for “not all have faith” (2 Thessalonians 3:1-2). This is the result of the gospel of Christ. This is the significance of the fact that “Christ died for our sins”. This is the meaning of the good news which is for “every creature” (Mark 16:15). But this is the very conclusion, that both the Arminian and the Calvinist struggles to avoid. This is the good news, the astounding good news of the gospel, which many resist.

Why Many Resist

The first reason that many resist is due to a misapprehension of both the definition and the significance of faith. Many see faith as a cause rather than a response. The Bible teaches that faith is a response to the good news as it is in Christ. In Romans chapter ten the apostle

concludes his argument with these words: “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). The *New Living Translation* puts it this way: “Yet faith comes from listening to this message of good news – the Good News about Christ.” Clearly faith is a response to the gospel. When we hear that Christ has given His life to save ours, and we believe that good news, faith springs up in our hearts. What is faith? Faith is a heart appreciation of the cost of salvation. And if our faith is appreciation, it is not the cause of salvation, but rather it is a response to salvation.

The Bible teaches we are saved by grace or because of grace. It does not teach we are saved because of our faith. Many have arrived at this conclusion through a misunderstanding of Ephesians 2:8. “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God”. A misunderstanding of this verse is another pillar of Arminianism. It should be pointed out however, that most Arminians are not entirely to blame for their misunderstanding. The King James Version and most other translations are partly to blame. If we look at this verse in the original language we discover one very important word has been left out. The definite article is missing before the word faith. The text should read: “By grace are ye saved through *the* faith” (emphasis supplied). The expression “the faith” refers to the faith of Jesus. His faith is meritorious. Ours is not. We are justified because of His faith, not because of ours (Galatians 2:16 KJV).

True faith is a response to the realization that we have already been legally justified by grace alone (Romans 3:24). This faith is what brings peace with God. Counterfeit faith, which consists of a self-centered grasping for security, can never bring true peace. We as Seventh-day Adventists believe there is a misplaced comma in Luke 23:43. It would appear there is also a misplaced comma in Romans 5:1. “Being justified, by faith we have peace with our Lord Jesus Christ.” The comma belongs after “justified”, not after “faith” as it appears in the King James

Version. It is when we have the faith which believes that we are already legally justified, set free from condemnation because of God's free grace alone, that we experience peace with God. As long as we believe that our faith must get good enough or pure enough or strong enough to justify us, we will never be sure that we have done enough, and thus we will never have peace. It is the faith which believe in the God who "justifies the ungodly", which brings peace with God (see Romans 4:5). This peace with God is essential. It is involved in the "new birth" which constitutes justification by faith. Therefore justification by faith, peace with God and the new life which follows, are the *fruit* of salvation, not the *root*. They are the results of salvation, not the cause.

Three Phases of Salvation

The thought that any individual was saved before he or she believed in Christ is difficult for some to grasp. And unfortunately, the thought that everyone has already been saved is almost blasphemous to the die-hard Arminian. This is because of a tendency to overlook the three phases of salvation.

The Bible speaks of salvation in all three tenses, the past, the present and the future. Let's look at a few examples.

Future Tense

And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved (Matt. 10:22).

And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that endures to the end shall be saved (Matt. 24:13).

He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved (Mark 16:16).

There are many more texts which refer to this phase of the plan of salvation. Indeed most of the verses in the Bible, which use the word "saved", are in the future tense. Perhaps because of this, many have generally failed to recognize the other two phases.

Present Tense

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18 NKJV).

This translation is somewhat surprising to those who are accustomed to using the King James Version. That version does not make it apparent that the term "save" is in the present continuous tense. However, a check of the original Greek text reveals that the New King James Version is accurate.

While 1 Corinthians 1:18 is the only verse in the King James Version which uses the word "saved" in the present tense, it is not the only text which refers to this phase of salvation.

There are others. For example:

Now unto him that is able to keep [save] you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy (Jude 1:24).

The Lord knoweth how to deliver [save] the godly out of temptations. . . (2 Peter 2:9).

Past Tense

Now we need to examine examples of the tense which has proven to be the most controversial. The Bible clearly teaches salvation in the past tense as an already accomplished reality. For example:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, 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 Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8-10).

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:5-6).

Even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) (Ephesians 2:5).

All three of these passages present very clearly that salvation is an already accomplished reality. The Greek tense is aorist. It refers to an event which happened once for all at a specific point in time, *in the past*. These passages apparently apply to the believer as well as the unbeliever. Note for example 2 Timothy says God "saved us" then it says he "called us". The salvation was accomplished for all and all are therefore "called". "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelation 22:17). The reason all are called to take "freely" is because all have already been saved.

Identifying the Three Phases

Salvation in the past is called "justification". That is *legal* justification which is applicable to all. All "have been saved". Salvation in the present is called "justification by faith". This is the process which produces sanctification. It is only applicable to those who have faith and are therefore "sanctified by faith" (Acts 26:10). Salvation in the future is called "glorification". This will only be applicable to those who "keep the faith". This is the final and irrevocable phase of salvation which most Arminians have in mind when they use the term "saved". The problem is the Bible uses the term "saved" in all three tenses. And once again the Bible turns Arminianism on its head.

It is absolutely imperative that one comes to grips with these three phases of salvation. It is essential to the GUT of the atonement. One must also understand that these are three phases of salvation, *not* three phases of the gospel. The gospel is the good news about what has already happened to the whole human race "in Christ". In Christ we "have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5). This is an historical fact. The good news of the gospel is about what has already happened in the past. The first phase of salvation, salvation history, that which God has already accomplished in Christ, constitutes the gospel. Salvation in the present, "justification by faith", which produces sanctification, is the *fruit* of the gospel. Paul called it "the fruit of the spirit" (Galatians 5:22).

Salvation in the future, “glorification”, is the *hope* of the gospel. Paul called that “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). So the whole plan of salvation involves three phases: the gospel, the fruit of the gospel, and the hope of the gospel. The Arminian generally has no problem with salvation in the present, sanctification. And he has no problem with salvation in the future, glorification. But there is strong objection to the salvation in the past, justification, which is the essence of the gospel. Therefore, the most unfortunate of all problems have developed: The Arminian is willing to preach any and everything except the true meaning of the gospel.

Salvation in the past is the most important phase. Without a clear understanding of the gospel, we cannot produce the genuine fruit of the gospel and we can not have a lively hope in Christ. Legal justification for all is the foundation of the plan of salvation and we cannot hope to get the house built on a sound and enduring basis unless the foundation is first well establish. It is indeed tragic to see valiant attempts at producing the fruit of the gospel without a correct understanding of the gospel itself. It is worse than attempting to grow apples without an apple tree. We must come to grips with the gospel and the GUT of the atonement if real progress is to be made.

Another Objection Comes into Focus

There is another reason that many have difficulty accepting the true meaning of the gospel. For many it seems to create genuine cognitive dissonance. The reasoning goes, if Jesus really died for my sins, then I shouldn’t have to die for them. If Jesus died for everyone’s sins, then nobody has to die for their sins. If nobody dies for their sins, then everyone will have to be eternally saved, the Universalist position. Immediately we know that is not the case. Therefore, some conclude, Jesus could not have paid the full price for everyone’s sins. This is what leads to the Arminian conclusion that the atonement must be supplemented with man’s response in order to be effective, or the Calvinist conclusion that Christ only died for the elect.

In Romans 3:25 the problem comes into focus. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Romans 3:25 KJV). This passage requires some careful study to understand it’s meaning correctly. As it is translated in the King James version, the meaning is somewhat obscure. Therefore we will cite a couple more translations:

“Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed” (Romans 3:25 NKJV).

“God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed before hand unpunished” (Romans 3:25 NIV).

Here we discover that all of the sins committed up until the cross had been “passed over”. In other words, God had forgiven them in mercy to the sinner, but this mercy was apparently at the expense of justice. He had left them “unpunished”. Up until the cross, God had not addressed the legal demands of the law: “The wages of sin is death”. However, at the cross, all of the sins of the world were punished in Christ. The legal penalty was fully paid. Thus God’s justice was “demonstrated”.

For some however, this demonstration of justice, as we have explained it above, appears to lead to injustice. The problem is: If God “punished” all of our sins, believer and unbeliever alike, in Christ, how can He punish anyone in hell? When the lost suffer the penalty for sin, will God be exacting a second penalty for the sins which were already paid for by the death of Christ? If Christ actually, not merely provisionally or selectively, “died for our sins”, why will the unbeliever die? If I already died for my sins “in Christ”, how can I die for the same sins again in hell? Does the plan of salvation really amount to double jeopardy? Is God’s system of justice actually unjust?

Now the dilemma has come into focus, thanks to Romans 3:25. We must admit, the Arminians and the Calvinists do have a point. Clearly the justice of God is at stake depending on the position one takes on this matter. The integrity of the plan of salvation is on the line. How can people believe Christ *actually* died for their sins, if we tell them, in the same breath, they can also potentially die for the same sins? Does hell nullify the gospel? Is the atonement incomplete? Must it be supplemented with a human response? Is the gospel really good news (i.e. believe *that* you have been saved) or merely good advice (i.e. believe *so that* you can be saved)? Is the Calvinist right after all? Did Jesus die for a select group?

Clearly we do need to find the GUT of the atonement in order to answer this dilemma.

No Respector of Persons

Peter articulated a far reaching and profound principle when he said “God is no respector of persons” (Acts 10:34). This truth underlies the entire plan of salvation. It is intuitively obvious, at least to the Arminian, that if God did respect persons (i.e. play favorites) He would be unjust. And the greatest injustice of all would have been, to have saved some folk, and left others to perish, when we were all equally, helplessly lost. Jesus came to earth “that He (God) might be just” (Romans 3:26). In a sense, Jesus died to justify God. Therefore, His sacrifice must be equally applicable to every human soul. Otherwise, God would still need to be justified. This is one of the most fundamental tenants of the gospel: “One died for all” (2 Corinthians 5:14). How then do we maintain the integrity of this fundamental principle while at the same time avoiding the unbiblical conclusion that all will ultimately be eternally saved? The solution must lie in the definition of the unpardonable sin. This must be an essential, indispensable, part of the GUT of the atonement.

The Unpardonable Sin

If there is one subject, which has brought fear to a multitude of hearts, it is the subject of the unpardonable sin. Many lie awake at night troubled and sincerely perplexed wondering if they have committed this sin. Because they do not understand what constitutes the unpardonable sin, they fear that perhaps any and every error, mistake or act of rebellion could constitute the sin which no one wants to commit. Interpreting the unpardonable sin in the light of the law, rather than the light of the gospel, has led some to unwarranted conclusions about the nature of this sin. Indeed there is an unpardonable sin. A sin which Jesus said “will not be forgiven . . . either in this age or the age to come” (Matthew 12:32). This must be the key to explaining why many will be lost in spite of the sacrifice of Christ.

There are several passages which mention the unpardonable sin. Matthew chapter twelve, Mark chapter three and Luke chapter twelve are among them. The unpardonable sin is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. That much is obvious. But what does it mean to blaspheme the Holy Spirit? Why is this sin “unpardonable”? And how does this sin relate to the good news of the gospel: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures”?

Toward answering these questions, let’s examine the office work of the Holy Spirit. In John chapter sixteen Jesus clearly described the mission and the work of the Holy Ghost. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7). These are rather strange expressions when one stops to think about them. Why did Jesus say “if I go not away the Comforter will not come”? Wasn’t the Spirit already here? There are many passages which tell us that He was already here. Then why did Jesus say He needed to leave so that the Spirit could come? Couldn’t they both be here together? And why did Jesus say it was expedient for us that He go away? Most of us would certainly rather have had Him stay. Our

initial thoughts say these are rather mysterious words and they most certainly were mysterious to the disciples.

What if Jesus Were Here?

Yet it all becomes rather logical if we stopped to think of what would happen, if Jesus were here. Yes, the Holy Spirit *was* here while Christ was here. Jesus said the Father gave Him the Spirit without measure (see John 3:34). But the question is: What would we do if Jesus were still here on earth today? Wouldn't we want to see Jesus? Of course we would. Everyone would need to "see" Jesus, whether they realized that need or not. And many multitudes of people would *want* to see Him. Therein lies the problem. With millions, perhaps billions of people on the waiting list to see Jesus, we could not have the access that we need.

Jesus is forever one with the human family. Before He ascended He made this fact very clear. He said to Mary "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17). He is still "God with us". And that means He can only be in one place at a time. He can only converse with one person at a time. And even if only one million people wanted to see Him for one hour each, if you were the last person on the waiting list it would take 114 years before you could see him. And that is assuming He never slept, or stopped to eat, or took a break.

It *was* expedient for Him to go away. If Jesus were here, who would avail themselves of the Holy Spirit? Our one desire would be to see Jesus face to face, when we could have access to the Spirit, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Could the Holy Spirit really work with power while the whole world waited in line to see Jesus? His office would have been ignored and neglected even more than it is today while Jesus is in heaven. This is why Jesus said the Spirit would not come unless He went away.

The Spirit's Primary Work

Now that the Comforter has come, what is His office work? We must understand His work if we are to understand what it means to sin against Him. Jesus said "And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment" (John 16:8). Notice that Jesus said the Comforter, will "reprove" (i.e. convince) the world concerning three subjects, "sin", "righteousness" and "judgment". Every Bible student thinks he or she knows what sin, righteousness and judgment are about. But the definitions that we have in mind might not coincide with the definitions Jesus had in mind. If we are going to understand the work of the Holy Ghost, we must accept the definitions which Jesus gave for these terms in the context in which the description of the Holy Spirit's work appears.

Jesus continued: "Of sin, because they believe not on me". First John 3:4 says: "Sin is the transgression of the law." But this is *not* the definition of sin which Jesus gives in the context of His description of the work of the Holy Spirit. He says the world will be convinced of sin by the Holy Ghost, "because they believe not on me".

Next He defines righteousness: "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more" (John 16:10). At first glance one must wonder what Jesus going to the Father has to do with the definition of righteousness.

Finally Jesus defines judgment: "Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11).

We must understand the descriptions that Jesus gave for "sin", "righteousness" and "judgment" if we are to understand the work of the Comforter and what it means to commit the unpardonable sin. First Jesus says the world will be convinced of sin "because they believe not on me". Here we have the most important description of the work of the Holy Spirit. We will examine this one last.

Let's look at righteousness first. Jesus said of righteousness "because I go to the Father". What does Jesus going to the Father have to do with righteousness?

Defining "Righteousness"

In Romans 3:10 we are told "There is none righteous, no not one." This is why we need a Savior, because we are not righteous. Righteousness is perfect obedience to God's law from the day of birth. None of us has this to offer. Jesus came to earth to be our righteousness. When John the Baptist initially refused to baptize Jesus, Jesus said to him, "Suffer *it to be so* now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him" (Matthew 3:15). Jesus came to earth to "fulfill all righteousness". He had to do this in order that He could be our righteousness. "This *is* the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness *is* of me, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 54:17). "And this *is* His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jeremiah 23:6).

One of Christ's primary missions was to "fulfill all righteousness". He could not go back to the Father until He had accomplished His mission. This is why He said "I must work the works of him that sent me . . ." (John 9:4). When He came to the end of His life on earth He said to His Father, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:4). And finally upon the cross He cried "It is finished and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost" (John 19:30). At that moment, the righteousness which He came to "fulfill" was perfect and complete. Jesus did not die, and He could not go back to the Father, until His mission, to fulfill all righteousness, was "finished". This is why He said the Spirit of truth will convince the world of righteousness "because I go to the Father" (John 16:10). The fact that He returned to the Father means "all righteousness" has been "fulfilled".

Defining “Judgment”

Now concerning judgment, Jesus said "of judgment because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:11). Who is "the prince of this world"? Satan is the prince of this world (see Eph. 2:2). What did Jesus mean when He said "the prince of this world is judged"? We find a similar passage in John 12:31. "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out." The next two verses explain clearly what Jesus meant by "the judgment of this world". "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me. This He said, signifying what death He should die" (John 12:32-33).

Clearly Jesus was saying that the prince of this world would be judged at the cross. It was then that Satan was "cast out". It was then that Jesus redeemed the world. As a result, Satan is no longer the prince of this world. He has no legal right to that claim. Jesus has conquered him and Jesus is the rightful, Prince of this world.

Defining “Sin”

Thus far we have seen that the work of the Holy Spirit is to convince the world of righteousness as it relates to Jesus. He is also to convince the world of judgment as it relates to Jesus. Now we return to the first aspect of the Spirit's work. It also obviously relates to Christ. For Jesus said the Comforter would convince the world of sin "because they believe not on me".

The Bible defines two broad categories of sin, sins which can be forgiven, and a sin which can not be forgiven. This is explicitly stated in First John: "If any man see his brother sin a sin *which* is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death" (1 John 5:16-17).

The question is: Which sin did Jesus have in mind when He said "of sin, because they believe not in me"? What is the sin which results in damnation? In Mark chapter sixteen Jesus

spelled it out clearly. "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:15-16). Here Jesus identified the sin which causes people to be lost, the sin "which leads to death". "He that believeth not shall be damned." It is the sin of refusing to believe that leads to death. Refusing to believe what? Jesus did not speak those words in a vacuum. He prefaced His statement with the command to "Go . . . and preach the gospel". Therefore He was clearly saying whoever hears the gospel and then refuses to believe it, that person "shall be damned".

Defining the Gospel

What is "the gospel"? We saw the "essence" of the gospel above. That is, "Christ died for our sins". In Romans chapter one Paul more explicitly defines the gospel. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called *to be* an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God". (The next verse of the King James version is enclosed in parenthesis and we can remove a parenthetical clause from a statement without changing the meaning of the statement, therefore we now skip to verse three.) "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared *to be* the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:1-4). Here we have the gospel explicitly defined. It "concerns" Jesus Christ our Lord. Jesus' incarnation, life, death, resurrection and divinity are the essential elements of the gospel. In other words Jesus is the Gospel. Therefore to refuse to believe the gospel means simply to refuse to believe in Jesus. "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). This is the sin which is unto death, the unpardonable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit's primary purpose is to convince the world concerning sin as *it relates to Jesus*, of righteousness as *it relates to Jesus* and of judgment as *it relates to Jesus*. In other words, the

Holy Spirit's work is to convince the world concerning Jesus. Jesus is the "truth". This is why He said: "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself . . . He shall glorify me" (John 16:13-15). Thus to reject Jesus, who is "the truth", is to sin against the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of Truth. His main work is to convince us concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. Now we must consider the question: How does a refusal to believe in Jesus result in a charge of blasphemy?

What is Blasphemy?

There are several passages of the Bible which mention blasphemy. It is described in terms which suggest a terrible sin, a great calamity, an enormous disaster. For example when Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked Israel and sent a message defying the God of Israel and demanding immediate surrender, Hezekiah described that terrible day in these words: "This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and blasphemy: for the children are come to the birth, and there is not strength to bring forth" (2 Kings 19:3). Here the king of Israel describes a great reversal of fortunes, a day of great potential turned completely upside down. An opportunity not only lost but replaced with the greatest possible loss. Can one think of a greater calamity, before the age of modern medicine and C-sections, than for the children to have "come to the birth" when "there is not strength to bring forth"? Such is the nature of the sin of blasphemy. It is taking that which is most sacred, most precious, and most highly esteemed, and treating it with the greatest possible disdain, resulting in the greatest possible loss. To blaspheme an entity means to treat it with scorn, reproach, violent contempt, absolute disrespect. In the Old Testament times the penalty for blaspheming the name of God was death (see Leviticus 24:16).

In the New Testament Jesus replaced the Old Testament penalties with grace. For example He said "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek,

turn to him the other also” (Matthew 5:38-39). However it is interesting to note that although “the law was given by Moses” and “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (see John 1:17), Jesus did not suggest that one who is guilty of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost should receive grace. Jesus made it clear that the penalty for blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is the most severe that could possibly be suffered. He said “blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. . . . whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matthew 12:31-32). Even in the New Testament, where the grace of God is most fully revealed, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost is unpardonable. It results in the irrevocable curse of God. Why?

As we have seen above, the Holy Spirit is the One who convicts us concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. Salvation comes only through Christ. We cannot understand or even perceive the truth of the gospel apart from the work of the Holy Ghost because “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14). We are completely dependant upon the Holy Spirit to reveal to us every spiritual truth. If we refused to believe in Christ, we are showing violent contempt and utter disrespect to the third Person of the Godhead. His primary mission is to convict us concerning Christ. Therefore we are ignoring and disrespecting His chief office work. This type of violent contempt and utter disrespect of that which deserves the highest respect is the essence of “blasphemy”. The Holy Ghost is the one who communicates to us every spiritual blessing. Therefore, to disregard and reject that which the Spirit offers is to invoke the greatest possible reversal of fortunes. It is to nullify the great salvation, which is already accomplished in Christ, and to bring upon one’s self a *second* condemnation. As was noted above, we were all condemned in Adam. We were all justified in Christ. But we can be condemned again. “He that believeth not *shall* be condemned” (Mark 16:16, emphasis supplied).

In this verse, Jesus is not referring to the condemnation which came upon the whole human race in Adam. Adam did not commit the unpardonable sin. Therefore, the condemnation which resulted from Adam's sin has been reversed through the justification that came in Christ. This verse refers to a future condemnation, which results from blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. This condemnation can never be reversed.

Other Examples of Blasphemy

John records that Jesus said to the Jews "I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shown you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered Him, saying, for a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (John 10:30 – 33). Why did the Jews accuse Christ of blasphemy? He had only told them the truth. He is God. However, they did not believe that He was divine. For anyone to claim to be God (other than Christ) is to show the highest possible disrespect for God. It is tantamount to saying "the true God does not exist". No greater insult is possible. Therefore it constitutes violent contempt and utter disrespect. In other words it is blasphemy.

In Matthew chapter twelve Jesus cast a devil out of a man and the Pharisees accused Him of casting out devils by the prince of devils. They were attributing this mighty miracle of God to the devil. This was violent contempt and utter disrespect for that which should have commanded the highest respect. Therefore, this was also blasphemy. And since it was the power of the Holy Ghost that had performed the miracle, for the purpose of authenticating the claims of Jesus, and it was for the purpose of rejecting Jesus, that the Pharisees rejected the miracle, this was a clear case of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. That is why Jesus responded "I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men" (Matthew 12:31).

Did Jesus Die for This?

Most people who are of a non-Calvinist background, assume that Jesus died for all people and for all sins. But if you ask them if rejecting Jesus is a sin they will immediately answer, “yes”. If you follow that question with the question: “Did Jesus die for *that* sin.” They usually will immediately answer, “no”. It seems intuitively obvious to almost everyone that Christ did not die for the sin of rejecting Him. But “without shedding of blood is no remission” of sins (Hebrews 9:22). There must be an atonement made by blood in order for a sin to be forgiven. And since “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins”, only the blood of Christ will suffice (see Hebrews 10:4). Therefore, this sin cannot be forgiven, because Jesus did not die for it. Now that is a logical argument. We need to see it in the Scriptures.

In Hebrews chapter ten we are warned that to do “despite” to the “Spirit” is a “sin” and for that sin there is “no sacrifice”.

“For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” (Hebrews 10:26-29).

Here the sin against the Spirit is clearly defined. It is a “willful” sin, not an accident. It is an intelligent sin, not a sin of ignorance. It can only be committed “after” having “received the knowledge of the truth”. It involves deliberately trampling “under foot the Son of God”. It includes a rejection of the atonement, “the blood of the covenant”. And ultimately it involves disrespect or contempt for the Holy Ghost who enables us to “discern” all of these spiritual realities. In other words doing “despite unto the Spirit”. And for that sin “there remaineth no more sacrifice.” The sacrifice of Christ does not extend to this sin. Jesus died for all the sins

against the law. But He did not die for the sin against grace. Therefore this sin “shall not be forgiven unto men.” Indeed it cannot be forgiven.

It should be made clear that blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is a deliberate, intelligent, persistent and ultimate, rejection of the gospel. It is not just any or every “willful” sin. We have all sinned “willfully” and perhaps presumptuously, as did Adam in the Garden of Eden. But we have not all “willfully” rejected the gospel. This is a unique sin.

Why Different Punishments?

Now we can see that the reason people will be lost is *not* because they were never saved. It is *not* because Jesus did not pay the full penalty for their sins. It is *not* because Christ’s death was merely provisional. The reason people will be punished in hell and suffer the second death is because they committed a sin for which Jesus did not die. They intelligently and deliberately rejected the gift of salvation in Christ. They blasphemed the Holy Ghost. When one accepts this understanding of the atonement as the essential element of the GUT, the question then becomes, why differing lengths of suffering in hell before the sinner dies. If all are dying for one and the same sin, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, why don’t they all suffer for the same period of time and die at the same time?

There is no such thing as a “little” sin. No sin could ever be forgiven apart from the blood of Jesus. Yet there are differing degrees of guilt. Jesus said:

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more (Luke 12:47, 48).

Here we see clearly enunciated the principle of differing degrees of guilt. In times of ignorance God “winks” (see Acts 17:30). God does not impute sin to those who are ignorant. But when

one sins against light and knowledge guilt is incurred or it is aggravated. The more light one has, the more guilty he or she can potentially become.

The Scriptures are clear that all will be judged “according to their works” (Revelation 20:12, 13). And all will be “rewarded” “according” to works (see Revelation 22:12). This would appear to contradict the understanding that they are punished because of the sin of unbelief, the one sin for which Jesus did not make atonement. We should note that they are punished “according to” works, not *for* their works. However the two, faith and works, are directly related. Do you remember Paul’s prayer request?

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith (2 Thessalonians 3:1, 2).

Paul prayed for deliverance from “wicked men” but notice that it is those who “have not faith” who are “unreasonable and wicked”. We are “sanctified by faith”. Therefore the greater our lack of faith, the greater our unbelief, the harder our hearts, the greater will be our lack of sanctification. In other words the more “wicked” we will be. The more wicked we are the more wicked works we will commit, thus the greater the punishment. The punishment will be “according to works”, but the reason is not because we are saved or lost by works. It is because our faith determines the nature of our works. Romans brings this out a little more clearly:

And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Romans 2:3 – 5).

Notice the unbeliever is treasuring up “wrath against the day of wrath”. But this is done “after” or according to the “hardness” of an “impenitent heart”. “Hardness of heart” is a euphemism which means “unbelief”. In other words, the wrath will be according to the depth of unbelief.

“He that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). He that believeth not will also suffer “wrath” in proportion to his or her unbelief which happens to be in proportion to his wicked works. This is why the next verse of Romans speaks of God as the one “Who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Romans 2:6). Clearly, the deeds and the “impenitent heart” are directly related.

Limits of the Atonement

There is not a man, woman, boy or girl, who was ever conceived on earth, for whom Christ did not die. Over and over the Bible assures us that Christ “died for all”. “God is no respecter of persons.” Therefore, there is not a person for whom Christ did not die. Nevertheless there *is* a sin for which Christ did not die, the sin of unrelenting unbelief in Christ, which is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. Thus we must conclude that the atonement *is* limited. It is not limited with respect to persons, but it *is* limited with respect to sin. Jesus himself clearly articulated the limitation:

Wherefore I say unto you, all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come (Matthew 12:31, 32).

Jesus said “All manner of sin and blasphemy *shall* be forgiven” (emphasis supplied). Again the Arminian reads into the text what is not there. Jesus did *not* say all manner of sin *can* be forgiven. What He said was, all sin “*shall* be forgiven”. When He said this, He was looking forward to the cross where He would suffer the full legal penalty for “all manner of sin and blasphemy”. When the penalty was paid, the sin of the world was legally. “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Colossians 2:13, see also 1:14 and Ephesians 1:7). Every sin was forgiven, every sin that is except for one. There is a limit to the atonement. Christ made

it abundantly clear, that at the cross, there would be no atonement made for the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

First John in the Light of the GUT

Having come to grips with the nature of the unpardonable sin, the heart of the GUT, we are prepared to understand the significance of 1 John 1:9 clearly. As noted above, an isolated reading of the verse seems to contradict the GUT of the atonement as we have defined it above, but the Scriptures cannot contradict themselves. The fundamental principle of the GUT is: All men have been forgiven for all of their sins except for one. The sin of rejecting the gospel cannot be forgiven. Could this be what 1 John 1:9 is really all about? The verse preceding it says “if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). “If we say we have no sin . . .”, is that not the same as saying we need no Saviour? To deny that one is a sinner is to deny the need for the atonement. One of the fundamental tenets of the gospel is: “All have sinned”. Thus to “say we have no sin” inevitably involves a rejection of the gospel, and that is blasphemy against the Holy Ghost.

Thus reading First John 1:9 in its context, we find that the term “if” does have the meaning which the Armenian gives it, but the meaning derives from an entirely different perspective. It is in harmony with the GUT. If we claim to have no sin, we thereby commit a sin which cannot be forgiven. While on the other hand, if we confess that we are sinners, the justice of God which was demonstrated at the cross, is already effective in accomplishing our forgiveness and cleansing us from all sins (see Hebrews 1:3). We were “cleansed”, by virtue of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world, long before we “confessed”. Thus we see First John does not contradict the GUT of the atonement. It actually supports it. It is far from teaching “salvation by confession” as the Arminian would construe it. It is *not* teaching that we

are forgiven *because* we confess. And it is in harmony with the truth of the gospel which says we are forgiven because Jesus died.

As with all Scripture, First John 1:9 must be interpreted in harmony with the preponderance of Biblical evidence. It is a fundamental principle of hermeneutics, that any text which appears to give a minority, conflicting view point, must be interpreted in light of the majority of texts which give a clear harmonious view. We should never interpret the majority in the light of an isolated or unclear minority. This is the mistake which the Arminian inevitably makes in interpreting 1 John 1:9 because, as we have seen, Arminianism does not comprehend the gospel. We have seen many texts, which support the view that all men were forgiven and saved at the cross. (See for example: 2 Corinthians 5:19; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Romans 3:23 – 24; Romans 5:6, 8, 18; Hebrews 1:3; 1 Timothy 4:10; Ephesians 2:5; Titus 2:11; and there are many more.) Therefore, it would be a gross violation of the principles of Biblical interpretation to use this one verse to veto the overwhelming testimony of Bible. Not only that, it would also be a violation of the context of the verse itself.

Why the Christian Confesses

Now that we have seen, that indeed our sins have already been forgiven, the question is: Does the Christian, who understands the gospel, need to confess his or her sins, if so, why? We know that we do not earn forgiveness by our confession. We know that God is not imputing our sins to us. Do we need to confess at all? We opened this discussion above. Now we need some concrete answers.

If we truly believe the gospel, we know that forgiveness did not come cheap. God could not legally forgive us apart from the shed blood of His dear Son. Thus every sin was directly implicated at Calvary. And more than that, Jesus continues to intercede on our behalf because of our sins. Consider how He must feel. Consider what Satan must say. Can you imagine the

conversation? Every time we sin the adversary is there to “rub it in”. “Look at them”, he says, “You gave up heaven for them. They must really appreciate it.” “Just look at how they behave. You stooped to take their nature and live as a man among men. Now, just look at them. You were willing to die forever, that they might be saved. Yet they continue to sin. I told you they weren’t worth it.” The Bible says he accuses us before God “day and night” (Revelation 12:10).

How does Jesus feel, every time we sin? Do you suppose He is embarrassed, not only before Satan, but before the heavenly angels? He is embarrassed, not only before the heavenly hosts but before all the unfallen worlds. Hebrews says “we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Hebrews 4:15). Do you suppose He is hurt? Do you suppose His experience is like being “crucified afresh”?

“What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bare.” His love is incomprehensible. His grace is indeed amazing. He did not deserve the cross. And He certainly does not deserve to ever be hurt again. So when we sin, if we truly understand the gospel, we should go on our knees and ask for forgiveness. We do not ask because we want to be saved. Christ has already taken care of that. But we do ask, because we are genuinely sorry for hurting the One who loves us most. “If we confess our sins”, we give evidence that we believe the gospel and we have the assurance, that all of our sins have been purged.

In other words, our confession does not change God’s attitude. It changes ours. It does not cause Him to forgive us, but it enables us to recognize to some degree, just how much we have already been forgiven.

Why Preach the Gospel?

If the world has already been forgiven of all their sins and everyone has already been saved, why preach the gospel? On the surface it might appear that preaching the gospel can only be counter-productive. After all we would only be providing people who have already been

saved an opportunity to reject the good news and be lost. Wouldn't it be better to keep everyone in ignorance and have them all eternally saved by default? Do those who hear the gospel have everything to lose and nothing to gain? Is the preaching of the gospel tantamount to introducing a dangerous and unnecessary liability? Surely this is not the case. Jesus, the One who loved us and gave Himself for us would never have said "go ye therefore and preach the gospel", if the preaching could only produce negative results. What then is the purpose of the proclamation of the good news in the light of the GUT?

Although all men "have been saved" (Ephesians 2:5), most do not know it. Therefore they cannot believe it. And since the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation" (Romans 1:16), in the present tense, to "everyone that believeth", those who do not know the gospel are not experiencing the full power of the gospel in the present tense. They have been saved from the penalty of sin but they are not being saved from the power of sin. In other words they are saved but they do not know it therefore they do not live like it. Jesus said "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). God, our loving Father, deserves all the glory that we can give Him as gratitude for the great salvation which He has given us at infinite cost. Therefore one reason for preaching the gospel is because it brings glory to God through the changes which are produced in the lives of the believers. Glorifying God in the "hour of His judgment" is of the utmost importance.

Another reason we should preach the gospel is because most of those who do not know the gospel are drifting toward committing the unpardonable sin. Because of the world, the flesh and the devil, with which all humanity must contend, the unbeliever is drifting toward perdition. The gospel is to arrest this downward drift before it is too late. It is possible for a person to harden their heart against the gospel before they ever hear it articulated clearly. And according

to Romans it is possible for people to be lost without hearing the gospel in explicit form (see Romans 2:12-16). Nature preaches the gospel (see Romans 10:11-18). To reject the gospel when it is preached under the power of the Holy Ghost through the voice of nature, is just as much unpardonable as it is unpardonable to reject it when it is more explicitly preached by a human voice using the words of Scripture. The cross of Christ is the clearest proclamation of the gospel and therefore it is the most powerful. Those who may have overlooked the gospel lessons revealed in nature may respond if it is preached more clearly from the word of God. Therefore we must preach.

Finally we come to the ultimate reason for preaching the gospel. While it is possible for people to be saved or lost without ever hearing the gospel in any explicit form, it is *not* possible for the final generation of Christians, who stand for Christ through the time of trouble and vindicate the plan of salvation, to be developed apart from a full and clear understanding of the gospel. The gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth” (Romans 1:16). Jesus came to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21) not in their sins. Until the one hundred-forty four thousands stand “without fault” (Revelation 14:5) and demonstrate the corporate victory of the church over the power of sin and Satan, the integrity of the plan of salvation, the justice of God, the wisdom of His mercy and the efficacy of the blood of Christ, all stand in question. These essential elements of the atonement must be demonstrated to be effective before the entire universe beyond all controversy before Jesus can come to earth the second time. Before the final crisis can come upon the world and the final evidence can be placed before the jury of the universe, the gospel must be “preached in all the world as a witness” (Matthew 24:14). By the way the word “witness” is a legal term. Our Great High Priest is also the Judge (John 5:22). The verdict rendered in the hour of judgment must be consistent with the testimony of the witnesses. The Lord said “ye are my witnesses” (Isaiah

43:10). Therefore, the gospel must be preached by the transformations that it produces in the lives of the believers, “for a witness” in all nations. Then and only “then shall the end come”. Thus we see the preaching of the gospel is essential. The primary issue at stake in this final proclamation is *not* the salvation of souls. It is the vindication of God, with respect to His justice in relationship to His mercy, His wisdom both in allowing sin and His method of eradicating it and the integrity of His plan of redemption. All of this and perhaps more must be clearly understood in the hour of “His judgment” (Revelation 14:7). The stakes are much higher than some have dared to imagine.

God’s Covenant Illuminated

Before the world was made, the Father and the Son entered into a solemn covenant. The Father pledged to give His only Son and the Son pledged to give His life, to redeem the human race should that become necessary. In the strictest sense, this is “the everlasting covenant”. In relationship to man the covenant is simply God’s unilateral, unconditional promise to redeem not only man but the whole world which was placed under his dominion. In other words the Father covenant with the earth is His promise to keep His covenant with the Son. And Christ’s covenant with the earth is His promise to keep His covenant with the Father. This covenant is a two way contract between the Father and the Son but the outflow of that is a one way promise between God and the earth. Man, the earth and all that is in it, have no part in God’s covenant. So far as they are concerned it is a completely one sided proposition.

God staked His own existence in the pledge to fulfill the covenant. Its fulfillment could not therefore be dependant upon anything that man in his weakness and helplessness would or would not do. The unilateral nature of God’s covenant with the earth is most clearly expressed in Genesis chapter nine.

Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying: “And as for Me, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your descendants after

you, and with every living creature that is with you: the birds, the cattle and every beast of the earth with you, of all that go out of the ark, every beast of the earth. . . and I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth” (Genesis 9:8-10, 15, 16, NKJV).

Arminians have suggested that God’s covenant is a two way contract between Him and His people. The fundamental principle of Arminianism precludes unilateral action on God’s part. Therefore the Arminian can not see a clear distinction between the old and the new covenants. Some even argue there is only one covenant and others simply ignore and boldly contradict the clear statements in Galatians regarding the “two covenants” (see Galatians 4:24). Since Arminianism can not tolerate an unconditional atonement, the conclusion is God’s covenant must be a two sided agreement or contract. However, Genesis chapter nine makes it clear that such is not the case.

God’s “everlasting covenant” is His unilateral promise to redeem the earth and all that is in it. God said “I set My rainbow in the cloud and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth” (Genesis 9:13 NKJV). Obviously the soil and rock and waters of planet earth made no promise in return. Yet the curse which was pronounced upon the ground when Adam sinned will be removed only because of the redemption which was promised in God’s covenant. The “birds, the cattle and every beast of the earth” never made a promise to God and could not enter into an agreement with Him, yet the “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock” (Isaiah 65:25) because of the atonement which was accomplished on the cross. “Things” do not fulfill contracts yet Jesus died to make “peace through the blood of His cross” and “to reconcile all *things* unto Himself” (Colossians 1:20, emphasis supplied).

Thus we should see and understand that God's covenant is quite different from man's covenant. We enter into two-way agreements and call them covenants but when God covenants with created entities He does so on the basis of the fact that they can do nothing except receive the blessing which He so graciously gives. God's "everlasting covenant" is simply the promise of all that has been given in the "everlasting gospel". The everlasting covenant looks forward to salvation. The everlasting gospel looks backward to salvation. Nothing is received through the gospel which is not promised in the covenant. And the most essential blessing which is promised in the everlasting covenant is the forgiveness of sin.

When God first expressed His covenant with Abraham He said:

Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3, NKJV).

Later God said:

And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you (Genesis 17:7).

Here God identified His covenant with Abraham using the same expression, "everlasting covenant", He had used to identify His covenant with Noah. They are one and the same covenant expressed in different terms.

God always speaks to us in terms which we can appreciate. He does not speak to Englishmen in French or Frenchmen in German or Germans in Spanish. Nor does He use symbols and references which are foreign to our background and experience. When He expressed the everlasting covenant to Adam He spoke in terms of what would happen to the serpent. And the token of the covenant for Adam was that snake upon the ground which used to fly through the air. When He expressed the covenant to Noah He did not talk about snakes.

Noah had no experience with snakes. It would have been a foreign point of reference. But Noah did know something about floods which overwhelmed the whole earth. So when God promised “no more universal floods” He was giving Noah the same covenant, but He gave it in his language. Thus the token of the covenant for Noah was a rainbow.

Now we come to Abraham. Abraham knows nothing about snakes or floods. But he knows something about wishing for a son and having none. Therefore God expresses the same covenant of unconditional grace and mercy in terms which Abraham can relate to easily. He promises him a son. And since Abraham has sought to fulfill God’s promise through the “works of the flesh”, the cutting off of the flesh became the token of the covenant for him. Every time Abraham would see the mark in his flesh, he would remember the futility of trying to contribute to God’s covenant and the unilateral nature of God’s promise. For him circumcision was a fitting symbol or token of the covenant.

But what was the ultimate object to be accomplished through the everlasting covenant? The covenant with Adam emphasized the defeat of the enemy who brought sin to the world. The covenant with Noah emphasized the redemption of all that was lost through sin. The covenant with Abraham emphasized the blessing which was to come to “all the families of the earth”. These are all elements of the plan of redemption. But what is “the blessing” that was promised to “all the families of the earth”?

Romans chapter four sheds light on this question.

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin (Romans 4:1-8).

Clearly, the “blessing” is the forgiveness of sins. But whose sins are we talking about? Is it only the believer as the Arminian would construe it? Is it only the elect as the Calvinist would argue? As we have already seen, neither Arminianism or Calvinism provide a satisfactory GUT for the atonement. Therefore neither can comprehend the true import of the covenant from which the atonement proceeds. We are not talking about a limited group. We are talking about “all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3). Even “the ungodly” have been forgiven by the God who “justifieth the ungodly”. We must transcend both Calvinism and Arminianism and believe in the God who justifieth the ungodly if our faith is to be “counted for righteousness”. A faith which is tethered to the subtle legalism of Arminianism is not sufficient for the final generation. We cannot retreat to Arminianism in order to explain the covenant. The “everlasting covenant” is at the heart of the Grand Unifying Theory of the Atonement. The GUT clearly reveals the unilateral, unconditional nature of the forgiveness of God which was promised in the everlasting covenant. Therefore the covenant can only be God’s unilateral promise of redemption, forgiveness and salvation for all mankind, which was unconditionally fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Therefore we conclude that all men have been forgiven, redeemed and saved. All men have been “blessed”. This is the correct meaning of 2 Corinthians 5:19: “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them”. God has never imputed our sins to us. And “us” refers to the whole “world”. If He had, we would be dead. Therefore, the whole world has been forgiven of all of their sins, except for one. Whoever blasphemes the Holy Ghost “shall not be forgiven”. This is why many will be lost. It is not because Jesus did not save them. He has saved them as surely as He saved the people out of Egypt (see Jude 5). He “is the Saviour of all men” (see 1 Timothy 4:10).

“Christ died for our sins.” The good news of the gospel is for everyone. He died for everyone’s sins, “all the families of the earth”. Yet the plan of salvation stands free of logical contradictions and unjust machinations. The death of Christ for the sins of the world is actual and not merely provisional. “We have now received the atonement” (Romans 5:11). It is complete and effective for all. “All alike are justified”. Nevertheless, the plan of salvation does *not* result in double jeopardy. There is a sin for which Jesus did not die. A clear understanding of the unpardonable sin resolves all the difficulty. This is the GUT of the atonement, for which many are searching.

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Appendix

One Apparent Objection

In the writings of Ellen White we find a powerful statement which appears to be a double-edged sword. It does proclaim good news but at the same time it appears to spell doom for the entire theory which we have just painstakingly hammered out. Let's take a look.

No sin can be committed by man for which satisfaction has not been met on Calvary. Thus the cross, in earnest appeals, continually proffers to the sinner a thorough expiation (Selected Messages, Vol. 1, pg. 343).

The passage appears to say that there is no sin for which Jesus did not die. I think I hear the Arminians shouting: "See, I knew this could not be true!" But let's take a closer look. The mistake which we often make is taking texts out of their contexts. This is very often done with various Bible verses. It should be remembered that the Bible and the writings of Ellen White are both inspired by the same Holy Spirit. That is not to say her writings are on a par with Scripture, but the source is the same. Therefore the method of analysis must be the same. Let's back up, and get a fuller view of the context.

Let no one take the limited, narrow position that any of the works of man can help in the least possible way to liquidate the debt of his transgression. This is a fatal deception. If you would understand it, you must cease haggling over your pet ideas, and with humble hearts survey the atonement. This matter is so dimly comprehended that thousands upon thousands claiming to be sons of God are children of the wicked one, because they will depend on their own works. God always demanded good works, the law demands it, but because man placed himself in sin where his good works were valueless, Jesus' righteousness alone can avail. Christ is able to save to the uttermost because He ever liveth to make intercession for us. All that man can possibly do toward his own salvation is to accept the invitation, "Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Rev. 22:17). No sin can be committed by man for which satisfaction has not been met on Calvary. Thus the cross, in earnest appeals, continually proffers to the sinner a thorough expiation (Selected Messages, vol. 1, pg. 343).

Looking at the context we find that the primary concern is to refute legalism, salvation by works. Thus the point is: The full price for salvation was paid at Calvary. However, as we look a little closer we find that this passage actually supports the GUT which we have been exploring. The sentence immediately before the one initially cited above says: "All that man can possibly do toward his own salvation is to accept the invitation, "Whosoever will, let him take the water

of life freely” (Revelation 22:17). Now in that context, the context which assumes that one accepts the free gift of salvation, we read “No sin can be committed by man for which satisfaction has not been met on Calvary.” In other words every sin has been paid for *IF* you do not reject gift. The sin of rejecting the gift was not paid for at Calvary. The Spirit of Prophecy does not contradict the GUT of the atonement. It was given by the same Person who gave us the Bible and it teaches the same truth.