

INTERPRETATION OF BUNYAN'S QUOTE AND A BRIEF RESPONSE TO TONY BYRNE'S NEO-AMYRALDISM

by Daniel H. Chew

The Neo-Amyraldian¹ Tony Byrne has quoted John Bunyan in one of his blog posts² in asserting that Bunyan believes in the well-meant offer of the Gospel. I have refuted Byrne's eisegesis of Bunyan and came up with an alternative interpretation³. In reply, Byrne attempted a proper response to prove that his interpretation is correct, or at least highly probable. In this paper, I would address the issue of God's desires, interpret Bunyan's quote in context, and refute Byrne's interpretation of Bunyan as being acontextual and thus reading of foreign concepts into the text.

Here is Byrne's attempted defense of his interpretation⁴:

Earlier, I [quoted Bunyan](#) saying the following:

"That **God is willing to save even those that perish for ever**, is apparent, both from the consideration of the goodness of his nature (Psa. 145:9), of man's being his creature, and indeed in a miserable state (Job. 14:15, 3:16)."

What is my *actual* claim? It is that Bunyan thinks that God is in fact willing to save the non-elect ("those that perish for ever"), but NOT that God purposes to effect their salvation. Bunyan continues by saying the following:

"But I say, as I have also said already, there is a great difference between his being willing to save them, through their complying with these his reasonable terms, and his being resolved to save them, whether they, as men, will close therewith, or no; so only he saveth the elect themselves, even 'according to the riches of his grace' (Eph. 1: 7). Even 'according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus' (Php. 4:19). Working effectually in them, what the gospel, as a condition, calleth for from them. And hence it is that he is said to give faith (Php. 1:29), yea the most holy faith, for that is the faith of God's elect, to give repentance (Act. 5:31), to give a new heart, to give his fear, even that fear that may keep them for ever from everlasting ruin (Eph. 1: 4); still engaging his mercy and goodness to follow them all the days of their lives (Jer. 32:40; Eze. 36:26, 27), that they may dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (Psa. 23: 6), and as another scripture saith, 'Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing, is God' (2Co. 5: 5; Rom. 8:26, &c.).

Observe what Bunyan is saying above. Even though it is true that God is willing to save the reprobates *by means of compliance to gospel commands*, it is not the case that he is resolved to save them apart from their closing with Christ (i.e. repentance and faith, or the means of salvation). Bunyan goes on to show that God only effectually wills the salvation of the elect since he works in them so as to give them the condition of faith, a new heart, the fear of God, and persevering grace. No one should misconstrue Bunyan's teaching to mean that 1) God is not willing to save the non-elect in the revealed will of the gospel or 2) that he thinks God is willing to do this apart from compliance with its conditions. He continues:

"But I say, his denying to do thus for every man in the world, cannot properly be said to be because he is not **heartily willing they should close with the tenders of the grace held forth in the gospel, and live**. Wherefore you must consider that there is a distinction to be put between God's denying grace on reasonable terms, and denying it absolutely; and also that there is a difference between his withholding further grace, and of hindering men from closing with the grace at present offered; also that God may withhold much, when he taketh away nothing; yea, take away much, when once abused, and yet be just and righteous still. Further, God

¹ Neo-Amyraldism is the name given to the beliefs of David Ponter and Tony Byrne who believe in unlimited expiation and an "unlimited limited atonement", which is very similar to the historical position known in church history as Amyraldism.

² Appendix 1

³ Appendix 2

⁴ Robert Gonzales, *Gerety's Hammer missed the mark*, <http://blog.rbseminary.org/2009/06/geretys-hammer-misses-the-mark/#comment-2464>) and (<http://blog.rbseminary.org/2009/06/geretys-hammer-misses-the-mark/#comment-2466>, (accessed: June 23rd 2009)

may deny to do this or that absolutely, when yet he hath promised to do, not only that, but more, conditionally. Which things considered, you may with ease conclude, that he may be willing to save those not elect, upon reasonable terms, though not without them.” John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan* (London: Blackie & Sons, 1862), 2:353. Also in John Bunyan, “Reprobation Asserted,” in *The Works of John Bunyan* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 2:353.

Notice again that Bunyan is repeating his point, i.e. that there is a sense in which God is “heartily willing” that the reprobates “should close with the tenders of the grace held forth in the gospel.” If that doesn’t describe the well-meant offer, then nothing does! God is HEARTILY WILLING that those who finally perish should close with the gospel. God doesn’t deny them grace without a cause. They persist in their disobedience, so he does not owe them enabling grace. They are abusing the grace already given them. Bunyan’s point here is the same as W. G. T. Shedd’s:

“The fact that God does not in the case of the nonelect bestow special grace to overcome the resisting self-will that renders the gifts of providence and common grace ineffectual does not prove that he is insincere in **his desire that man would believe under the influence of common grace** any more than the fact that a benevolent man declines to double the amount of his gift, after the gift already offered has been spurned, proves that he did not sincerely desire that the person would take the sum first offered.” W. G. T. Shedd, [*Dogmatic Theology* \(Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing, 2003\), 349](#). Also in W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1888), 1:457.

Now, notice what Daniel Chew says:

“...does Bunyan actually believe in ‘common salvific grace’? I contend not.”

One has to be careful because Chew uses loaded language to describe what he means by “common salvific grace.” He says, “Bunyan does not believe in God having any form of *intent* of saving the reprobate (‘common salvific grace’).” As one suffering from theological cyclopsis, he can only think of God willing something *in the sense of* a purpose to effect (intent in that sense), so he packs the idea of “common salvific grace” with that very notion, and then denies that it is in Bunyan. We’re only claiming that Bunyan thinks God is willing to save the reprobates ineffectually according to the revealed will, NOT that we’re claiming that Bunyan thinks God has an intent or purpose to effect their salvation.

Chew continues:

“The entire quotation by Bunyan proves **only** that the offer of the Gospel is not proffered only to the elect but to all, such that even the reprobates could take it if they are able to (but of course they are unable to).”

This is clearly false. The quote proves MORE THAN the fact that he believes the gospel is to be proffered to all. It proves that God is HEARTILY WILLING THAT THOSE WHO PERISH SHOULD CLOSE WITH THE GOSPEL CONDITIONS. In other words, as Dr. Gonzales has been repeating in many posts now, God is seeking their compliance to his commands with a view to their ultimate well-being.

Chew continues:

“As Bunyan states later, he says that “there is a difference between his withholding further grace, and of hindering men from closing with the grace at present offered”. In this sense therefore, Bunyan states that for God’s interaction with the reprobate, he withholds further grace, which is obviously referring to salvific grace.”

Again, be careful with Chew’s terms. He’s packing “salvific grace” with the notion of effectual grace or with God’s purpose to effect salvation. He misrepresents our claims again. Of course God is withholding effectual grace from those who finally perish (Bunyan agrees), otherwise they would be saved. What God does, however, is express a willingness to save the reprobate means of the kind of grace they are already receiving through the gospel offer itself (where Chew disagrees). Since they abuse this non-effectual grace, God cannot be blamed for not granting “further grace” (Bunyan’s own terms) to overcome their resisting self-will.

Chew continues:

“However, God does not “hinder men from closing with the grace at present offered”, which just means that with the grace given to even the reprobates, God would not prevent them from being saved if they are able to use this grace to bring themselves unto salvation (but of course they are unable to).”

Chew calls us “hypothetical universalists,” or “Neo-Amyraldians,” and yet he’s the one making Bunyan’s teaching totally hypothetically here. Bunyan said that God “*is willing* to save those that finally perish,” and Chew completely distorts that to mean that “God would not prevent them from being saved *if* they were able to use this grace to bring themselves unto salvation.” How in the world does one leap from Bunyan’s “God *is willing* to save those that perish,” and that He is “*heartily willing* they should close with the tenders of the grace held forth in the gospel,” to Chew’s hypothetical “God would not prevent them from being saved if they were able...”? After all of these contortions, he actually has the nerve to accuse us of “eisegesis”! I trust that the readers of this blog can see what is happening with the primary sources. Chew should just say that Bunyan is wrong in what he says about God’s will, instead of twisting his statements to express some mere hypothetical notion that God would not prevent them, were they able to comply.

Chew would never speak like Bunyan and say that God is in fact “heartily willing” that “those who perish forever” “should close with the tenders of the grace held forth in the gospel, and live.” He should be honest with this fact and just say that he thinks Bunyan was wrong.

Chew said:

What is damaging to the Neo-Amyraldian case is this following quote from Bunyan:

But I say, as I have also said already, there is a great difference between his being willing to save them, through their complying with these his reasonable terms, and his being resolved to save them, whether they, as men, will close therewith, or no; so only he saveth the elect themselves, ... (Bold added)

As it can be seen, Bunyan here states that if God resolves (wills) to save them, then the proper objects of such a resolve must be only the elect. So therefore, Bunyan DOES not believe in God having any form of intent of saving the reprobate (‘common salvific grace’).”

Here is the straw man. None of us think that Bunyan is teaching that God “resolves” to effect (or intends in that sense) the salvation of those who finally perish. Again, Chew, unlike Bunyan, can only think of God willing something that necessarily comes to pass. If it does not come to pass, then God cannot be said to will it. Bunyan, on the other hand, can speak of God as “heartily willing” that “those who finally perish” “should close with the tenders of grace held forth in the gospel.” So, just because Bunyan goes on to teach that God only resolves to effect the salvation of the elect, it does not follow that Bunyan did not say that God is truly “willing to save those that finally perish for ever.” Consequently, Bunyan’s statement above is not damaging to our position at all. He can speak of God’s will in a similar way as the Puritan John Preston:

Object. 2.
It may be objected, is it possible that the same will should be carried upon the same object in different respects, as if God should will the damnation and Salvation of *Judas* both at the same time?
Answ.
To this I answer, that it is most possible for a man to will and to nill one and the same thing upon the same object if it be in different respects; as for example, a man may will his friend’s departure from him, and yet not will it, he wills his departure out of a desire he has of his friends good, and yet will it not out of a love he has of his friend’s company, and so God here he wills that all men should be saved, and therefore he beseeches men to believe, because it is agreeing to him, and it is so, neither can it be otherwise because of the conformity the thing itself has with his will; yet he will not use all means to bring this to pass. A father will not have his son drunk, if he will tie him up in a chamber he will not be drunk, yet he will not take such a course, though he has a will his son should not be drunk, so God though he do will that men should be believe and repent and be saved, yet he will not be said to use all the means for the effecting of it in all men, because he will glorify his justice as well as his mercy. John Preston, *Riches of Mercy to Men in Misery* (London: Printed by J.T. and are to be sold by John Alen at the rising sun in Saint Pauls Church Yard), 422.

Or, Bunyan can speak in a similar way as [William Perkins](#) (but with more force):

“There is but one will in God: yet doth it not equally will all things, but in divers respects it doth will and nill the same thing. He willet the conversion of Jerusalem, in that he approveth it as a good thing in itself: in that he commands it, and exhorts men to it: in that he gives them all outward means of their conversion. He wills it not, in that he did not decree to effectually work their conversion.”

Chew cannot allow for God to truly will what He nills to effect. Such an idea is “irrational.”

Chew finally says:

“All of the talk about offer to the reprobate, grace given to them etc. are Bunyan using theological imprecise (even incorrect) terms to express something very true, which is that God will NOT hinder the reprobates from saving themselves IF they are able to do so. In more theological precise terms, God does not actively reprobate sinners, nor does He prohibit them from being offered the Gospel.”

I have already treated this above. Chew is changing Bunyan’s “God *is willing* to save those that perish,” and that He *is heartily willing* they should close with the tenders of the grace held forth in the gospel,” to a hypothetical “God would not prevent them from being saved if they were able...” Chew should not only be critical of Bunyan’s terminology of grace and offers being given to the reprobate, but he should also be critical of Bunyan’s clear teaching that God heartily wills their salvation. Instead, he converts Bunyan’s statements as if he is getting into other logically possible worlds, i.e. in another logically possible and hypothetical world, God would not prevent them from being saved if they were able to comply, etc. Just acknowledge what Bunyan is really saying and reject it as something you think is unbiblical. That’s the honest thing to do.

Again, Chew would never want to speak like Bunyan does here:

Thy stubbornness affects, afflicts the heart of **thy Saviour**. Carest thou not for this? Of old, ‘he beheld the city, and wept over it.’ Canst thou hear this, and not be concerned? (Luk. 19:41, 42). Shall **Christ weep to see thy soul going on to destruction**, and will though sport thyself in that way? Yea, shall Christ, that can be eternally happy without thee, be **more afflicted at the thoughts of the loss of thy soul, than thyself**, who art certainly eternally miserable if thou neglectest to come to him. Those things that keep thee and **thy Saviour**, on thy part, asunder, are but bubbles; the least prick of an affliction will let out, as to thee, what now thou thinkest is worth the venture of heaven to enjoy.

Hast thou not reason? Canst thou not so much as once soberly think of thy dying hour, or of whither thy sinful life will drive thee then? Hast thou no conscience? or having one, is it rocked so fast asleep by sin, or made so weary with an unsuccessful calling upon thee, that it is laid down, and cares for thee no more? Poor man! thy state is to be lamented. Hast no judgment? Art not able to conclude, that to be saved is better than to burn in hell? and that eternal life with God’s favour, is better than a temporal life in God’s displeasure? Hast no affection but what is brutish? what, none at all? No affection for the God that made thee? What! none for **his loving Son that has showed his love, and died for thee**? Is not heaven worth thy affection? O poor man! which is strongest, thinkest thou, God or thee? If thou art not able to overcome him, thou art a fool for standing out against him (Mat. 5:25, 26). ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God’ (Heb. 10:29-31). He will gripe hard; his fist is stronger than a lion’s paw; take heed of him, he will be angry if you despise his Son; and will you stand guilty in your trespasses, when **he offereth you his grace and favour**? (Exo. 34: 6, 7).” John Bunyan, “The Jerusalem Sinner Saved, or, Good News for the Vilest of Men” in *The Whole Works of John Bunyan* (London: Blackie and Son, 1862), 1:90.

Bunyan is clearly talking to lost individuals and affirms that:

- 1) Christ is their Saviour.
- 2) Christ weeps to see their souls going on to destruction.
- 3) Christ is more afflicted at the thought of the loss of their souls than they are.
- 4) Christ is a loving Son that should his love and died for them.
- 5) These lost sinners are being offered His grace and favour.

Are we to really think that Christ their Saviour weeps at the thought of their destruction, is afflicted by their loss, died for them, offers His grace and favour to them, but is NOT giving them a well-meant offer of salvation?! Frankly, only deliberate blindness can miss this in Bunyan. Reject his teaching as unbiblical, rather than try to suggest that he is not teaching that God heartily wills the salvation of those who finally perish. Or, *at the very least*, show *some degree of respect* for our interpretation of Bunyan. After all, it is the very same interpretation that [Dr. Richard Muller gave in his](#)

[lectures at Mid-America Reformed Theological Seminary](#). He even acknowledges that Bunyan (along with Musculus, Zanchi, Ursinus, Kimedoncius, Bullinger, Twisse, Ussher, Davenant (and others in the British delegation to Dort), Calamy, Seaman, Vines, Harris, Marshall and Arrowsmith) taught a **non-Amyraldian** form of “Hypothetical Universalism” (his label for it) in [Reprobation Asserted](#).

...

As it can be seen, Byrne is all over the place. His comment not only deals with historical theology and the utilization of Bunyan’s quote, but also on various doctrinal matters which we must clear up first. As such, my rebuttal of Byrne’s answer would be broken down into two sections: Biblical teachings and logical errors, and Interpretation of historical sources

I. Biblical teachings and logical errors

I.1.1 On God’s desire

What exactly IS God’s desire? According to Dictionary.com based on the Random House Dictionary⁵, ‘Desire’ is “a strong feeling, worthy or unworthy, that impels to the attainment or possession of something that is (in reality or imagination) within reach”. Desire therefore has the connotation of something that involved the emotions of the person involved, and non-fulfillment of that desire would negatively impact the feelings of the person who has that desire.

What does the Scriptures therefore teaches us about God’s desires?

The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations. (Ps. 33:10-11)

Whatever the Lord pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. (Ps. 135:6)

For the Lord of hosts has purposed, and who will annul it? His hand is stretched out, and who will turn it back? (Is. 14:27)

remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’ (Is. 46:9-10)

[Nebuchadnezzar:] all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, “What have you done?” (Dan. 4:35)

First of all, it can be seen from these verses that God’s absolute sovereignty over all things is asserted, and that God does whatsoever he pleases to do, and absolutely **nothing** and **no one** can stop Him or even ask of Him an account. If God does not want to do something, it is not done, and if He wants to do it, it will be done.

Before we look into this idea of God’s plans and purposes with regards to His desires, it may be instrumental to look at how the Bible uses the word ‘desire’ when predicated of God⁶.

⁵ desire. Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/desire> (accessed: June 22, 2009).

⁶ The Greek word that can be translated desire, ‘*thelo*’ (θελω), has a broader range of meaning as a glance at Strong’s Concordance shows. Nevertheless, a cursory look does not indicate many instances whereby it is predicated of God’s desires, except 1 Tim. 2:4 where the context makes it very clear it is talking about classes of men – all men without

For the Lord has chosen Zion; he has desired it for his dwelling place: (Ps. 132:13)

But he is unchangeable, and who can turn him back? What he desires, that he does (Job 23:13)

In both of these texts, the word ‘desire’ when predicated of God is based on the Hebrew word ‘*avah*, which carries the connotation of desire/craving/ longing. As Job 23:13 states, whatever God desires, that **HE DOES**. Certainly, it seems therefore that there is nothing in God’s desire that He doesn’t do.

I.1.2 Non-decretive desires?

To propound the idea of the well-meant offer, the idea of God having non-decretive desires⁷ is postulated. However, is this phrase even a coherent concept? We have seen that the Bible portrays a God who does all He desires. All that God wills to do is theologically referred to as God’s decretive will. So therefore, logically, all of God’s desires must fall into the category of God’s decretive will⁸. The idea of non-decretive desires therefore is a contradiction in terms, reducing itself to the nonsensical phrase “non-desire desires” or “non-decretive decrees”.

Much has been made about passages like Deut. 5:29⁹, which states:

Oh that they had such a mind as this always, to fear me and to keep all my commandments, that it might go well with them and with their descendants forever! (Deut. 5:29)

This and other passages like Ex. 32:14, which mention God relenting (literally repenting) of what He wanted to do, in order to prop up the idea of God having non-decretive desires. However, the Scriptures themselves do not allow for such an explanation. One basic hermeneutical principle is that of the *Analogia Scriptura* or the Analogy of Scripture: that more obscure verses are to be interpreted by those with greater clarity. Another principle is that the didactic portions of Scripture take precedence over the narrative portions of Scripture. The various verses where it is said of God’s wishes like in Deut. 5:29 and of God’s “repentance” in Ex. 32:14 are found in the narrative, and therefore the senses and meaning of these verses are to be interpreted in light of the more didactic passages like those found in the Psalms and Is. 46:9-10 (we can exclude Dan. 4:35 from consideration since it can be argued that Nebuchadnezzar was being poetic here). When we do so, such passages can be seen to be a form of language called anthropathism, in which truths regarding God and His attitude towards what He commands are couched in human emotive language in accommodation to our finite understanding¹⁰.

distinction and not all men without exception. For exegesis of this verse and others like it, check out James R. White, *The Potter’s Freedom* (Merrick, New York, USA: Calvary Press, 2000), pp. 139-145.

⁷ Comment #14 in Robert Gonzales, *Gerety’s Hammer misses the mark* (<http://blog.rbseminary.org/2009/06/geretyvs-hammer-misses-the-mark/#comment-2381>), accessed: June 26th 2009.

⁸ If all God desires He does (Job 23:13), then the subset of “God’s desires” [R] is within the subset of “God’s decrees” [C] ($R \subseteq S$). Since the Scriptures teaches that God does all He desires and does not anywhere teaches God decreeing what He does not desires, by exhaustive induction based on *Sola Scriptura*, $R \equiv S$

⁹ Robert Gonzales, *God makes a wish: That each and every sinner might be saved* (<http://blog.rbseminary.org/2009/05/god-makes-a-wish-that-each-and-every-sinner-might-be-saved/>), accessed: June 26th 2009

¹⁰ It is a far cry from denying that God has mutable emotions to stating that He has no [real] emotions. Yet Dr. Robert Gonzales in *“There Is No Pain, You Are Misreading”: Is God “Comfortably Numb”?* (<http://blog.rbseminary.org/2009/02/there-is-no-pain-you-are-misreading-is-god-comfortably-numb/>), (accessed: June 26th 2009) commits this non sequitur logical fallacy. Furthermore, the direction of reasoning should be from what Scripture **teaches**, THEN to have it transform our philosophical framework, not choosing an interpretation of Scripture that conforms to a particular *a priori* philosophical framework.

So what are verses like Deut. 5:29 supposed to teach us? They are written to teach us more regarding God's precepts and the attitude of God towards their fulfillment as precepts qua precepts, which brings us to the next point.

I.1.3 Deducing intentions from imperatives?

God's commands and laws are normally termed God's "preceptive will", which refers to what God commands of men, both individually and generally. Verses like 1 Thess. 4:3 uses the word 'will' in this sense, and tells us what God wants of us in His commands.

Is it possible to deduce God's desires from His 'preceptive will'? Is it possible to deduce God's intentions at all from His commands? No, for such is logically fallacious! Certainly, in real life, we can possibly discern the intention and the desire of the person giving commands, but that is because we have a context and environment where hints are given so that we can make educated guesses of the desires and intentions behind the giving of such commands. Therefore, the claim that intentions can never be deduced from imperatives seems counter-intuitive. However, it need not be so. Even in human relations, a parent may "command" their child to study hard to score 90% or higher for his exam, but he may actually intend the command to be meant for pushing the child to study hard with the high grade being a good thing which is not absolutely necessary. And in the case of God, we do not have any "environment" and the only context we have is Scripture, which therefore in its totality must inform our view¹¹.

Without even discussing the issues of God's intentions with regards to the well-meant offer, a more basic idea in theology is the issue of Law and Gospel, and it is here that we already see God's principle differentiating His desires and intentions from His commands. As it is written:

The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. (Rom. 7:10-12)

Notice that it is written that the Law, the commandment, **promised** life. This is what is revealed in God's preceptive will. Yet we can see in passages like Gal. 3:19-24 that the **intention** of God in giving the Law was so that it would function as a guardian leading Man to Christ, and also as a guide for Christian living (Gal. 5:14, Jas. 2:8)! God's intention in giving the Law therefore is **different** from what is stated explicitly in the Law, thereby proving that even in the most foundation area of Law and Gospel, God's intention and God's commands are not necessarily linked.

Scripture therefore shows us at least one example showing the error of deducing intention from imperatives. God's preceptive will therefore cannot be used to deduce or infer anything about God's intentions at all. Not only it is logically invalid, it has been shown to be biblically in error even and therefore any reasoning from imperatives to intentions or desires is illogical and unbiblical.

I.1.4 Illogicity runs amok

Christ is the *Logos* of Scripture (Jn. 1:1)¹². He is thus always logical. While God is not logic, logic is the manner in which God thinks. Ontologically, God precedes Logic, yet Logic precedes God

¹¹ I find it supremely ironic that those who like to teach about the incomprehensibility of God; that He is "Totally Other", are nevertheless so sure of what God intends when He gives His commands.

¹² For a better understanding of the word *logos* as used in Jn. 1:1, check out Gordon H. Clark, *The Johannine Logos* (Jefferson, Maryland, USA: The Trinity Foundation, 1972 [1989])

epistemologically¹³. The Scriptures even makes it clear that those in rebellion against God are irrational (Gr. *aloga*) (2 Peter 2:12) – without *logos*. Therefore, God is supremely rational and one aspect of rebellion against God is irrationality. To the extent that we are still irrational in our thoughts, we have not loved God with all our minds (Mt. 22:37) and are therefore still sinning in this regard.

Ignorance and irrationality is tolerable, in the sense that that is the natural state of fallen Man. Christians who have been regenerated will grow progressively in godliness which include (but is not limited merely to) rationality, and therefore will be more knowledgeable about the things of God and think more rationally on spiritual issues as a consequence. Celebration of ignorance and irrationality in the name of “mystery” however is a different ball-game altogether; an exhibition of false piety in mystifying what God makes clear in Scripture, and a celebration of this act as something to be celebrated instead of grieved over.

Having made and proved the previous points according to Scripture, it is now time for us to evaluate Byrne’s response in light of the biblical principles we have deduced from Scripture.

Byrne in his response commits the error of deducing intentions from imperatives, as this statement shows:

We’re only claiming that Bunyan thinks God is willing to save the reprobates inefficaciously according to the revealed will ...

This is logically nonsense statement, as a rephrase of that statement according to its logical equivalence would show

We’re only claiming that Bunyan thinks God [desires] to save the reprobates [in a manner that does not reflect His desire] according to the revealed will ...

Byrne could very well talk about a “round square” and a “quadrilateral triangle”, and it would have the same meaning as the sentence he wrote above – absolutely zero! Logically contradictory sentences or [real] oxymorons as opposed to reconcilable paradoxes have zero knowledge content at all, and are not even worth arguing in the same way as it is ridiculous to argue about the existence of a “non-Christian Christian”. Unless such sentences can be shown to be a real paradox in the sense that both are referring to two different non-contradictory senses, appeal to mystery is basically appeal to ignorance. If a person is ignorant about the subject, then he should keep quiet and not celebrate his ignorance, much less arrogantly think that his ignorance means that no one else can solve the problem he cannot solve.

The problem with Byrne here is that his statements and beliefs in this regard flatly contradict the Scriptures. Only the Bible is the norming norm that is not normed (*norma normans non normata*), not even the Creeds and Confessions and most definitely not what Christian theologians and pastors have written. Failure of Byrne to ever exegete the texts properly (quoting **men**’s interpretation of scriptural texts do not count) means that **even if** the Reformed giants truly taught what Byrne and his fellow Neo-Amyraldians teach, Byrne is nowhere nearer the Truth. However, even Byrne’s interpretations of historical sources are in error, as we shall see in the case of John Bunyan later. We will take a detour over to the issue of Covenant Theology with its idea of the Collective or Federal representation and the Visible and Invisible Church concept, for the backbone of interpreting Bunyan and other historical writers alright.

¹³ C. Matthew McMahon, *The Two Wills of God* (New Lenox, IL, USA: Puritan Publications, 2005), p. 24

I.2.1 Distinction between the Visible and Invisible Church

For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel (Rom. 9:6ff)

The distinction between the concept of the Visible and Invisible Church is an old one going back to the time of the Apostle Paul. In his day, the issue of the Covenant people of Israel, the Old Testament Church, has been raised. For if nothing is “able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:39), then why are the Israelites apostatizing from the faith? Are we to believe, as the Arminians do, that nothing is able to separate us, **except** ourselves? Are we to believe that Jesus can save all His people and that none would be lost (Jn. 6:37-39), *with the exception of those who “opt-out” of being saved*? Last I checked, Jn. 6:37-39 and the context of Rom. 8:35-39 do not contain such exception clauses!

The Apostle Paul was faced with this conundrum. If nothing can separate us from God and His love, why is it that those within the Church, the Israelites, are indeed separated from God and His love? Has God’s promises and His word failed? (Rom. 9:6) NO! God’s Word has not failed, and the reason why this is so is given by Paul himself: Not all Israel are indeed Israel! Not all who belong visibly to the Church are actually of the Church. The Visible Church comprises of all those who *profess* the name of God and Christ and the Gospel unto salvation, while the Invisible Church comprises all those who not only profess but *actually believe* God and the Gospel. In Paul’s case, most of Israel were professing believers in God but when Christ and the Gospel is manifested in their midst, they rejected God in Christ. Thus, before Christ came, they were of the Visible Church but are not in the Invisible Church, as their subsequent visible apostasy from God proved.

In many Baptist circles it seems, seen especially in those who desire a pure church of true believers¹⁴, the differentiation between the Visible and Invisible Church is minimized. While of course we should not have manifest unbelievers within the Visible Church, neither should we attempt to come up with all manner of schemes to discern whether a professing Christian is indeed a true Christian or not, and treat them as “guilty unless proven innocent”. Rather, unless there is evidence to the contrary (i.e. gross heresy and/or immorality), professing Christians should be taken at their word and treated as believers (“innocent until proven guilty”). Regardless of whether such a scheme is enacted, it will always be the case that there is always a possibility of unbelievers and reprobates within the Visible Church. For if Judas Iscariot could not be discerned to be an unbeliever even by the Apostles, and Jesus knew about it only because He was God, why should we think any assembly of believers can have absolute certainty that all within her are truly saved?

I.2.2 What applies to the collective may not be applicable to the individual; the logical fallacy of division

With this stated, we can now look into the manner in which Scripture itself addresses believers as seen in the concepts of the Visible and Invisible Church. When we look at the way the Church is addressed in Scripture, most of them seem not to make any differentiation in the way commands and exhortations are given to the Church at all. However, when we arrive at the book of Revelation, such language can be seen in the letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2-3), as can be seen in these words to the Church at Thyatira:

¹⁴ Found especially in adherents of New Covenant Theology. See Greg Gibson, *All Old Testament Laws Canceled – 24 Reasons Why All Old Testaments Laws Are Cancelled And All New Testament Laws Are for Our Obedience* (JesusSaidFollowMe Publishing, USA, 2009), p. 7

But to the rest of you in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not learned what some call the deep things of Satan, to you I say, I do not lay on you any other burden. (Rev. 2:24)

And to the Church at Sardis:

Yet you have still a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. (Rev. 3:4)

The letters to Thyatira and Sardis are to individuals within churches wherein there is significant presence of error within them, such that these churches have within them manifest unbelievers. Otherwise, there is no differentiation in the way commands and exhortations are given to the churches as found in the Scriptures.

In a true church therefore, there may still be unbelievers within her like Judas Iscariot but no one except God will know who they are. Yet despite that, the church is exhorted as if all within her are saints, because that is what they corporately are. The Church submits to Christ (Eph. 5:24), yet most definitely the individual unregenerate within her do not submit to Christ. The church is the pillar and buttress of the truth, yet that cannot even be said of individual believers (since we do not believe in bishoprics and popes), what more individual unbelievers?

The fact of the matter is that what is said of the Church corporately cannot necessarily be said of the individual Christian individually, for that is the logical fallacy of division. To put it philosophically, what is true of the collective and legitimately applied to them may not necessarily be true to and applied to the individual. Or in the context of the Visible and Invisible Church, since the concepts are different also, what is true of one collective is not necessarily true of the other collective. Failure to realize this is to fall for the logical fallacies of division (and of the converse fallacy of composition), and thus embrace irrationality.

Therefore, since what is true and applicable to the collective is not necessarily true and applicable to the individual, it is therefore fallacious to infer that desires predicated of God towards the Church thereby applies to every single individual in the Church, including the reprobates within her¹⁵. Similarly, it is fallacious to think that a general call to Man of salvation means that God therefore has a well-meant offer (fallacy of inferring intention from an imperative) towards any single individual (fallacy of division). A look at the “offer” verses shows this to be the case¹⁶.

Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live? (Ez. 18:23)

For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live.” (Ez. 18:32)

In these two verses, the object refers to the ‘wicked’ or ‘anyone’ as a class of people. Regardless of whether the object refers to those within Israel or to men in general, the fact of the matter is that it refers to a class of people and not to individuals per se. What these verses teaches, the universal

¹⁵ This is the issue at hand with the Neo-Amyraldian interpretation of Rom. 2:1-5, as can be seen in Tony Byrne, *The Force of “agei” in Rom. 2:4 and Common Grace* (<http://theologicalmeditations.blogspot.com/2006/01/force-of-agei-in-romans-24-and-common.html>), accessed: June 28th 2009, whereby God’s desire for the salvation of those within the Visible Church is made to apply to individuals not only within the Visible Church but also all men.

¹⁶ As quoted in John Murray and Ned B. Stonehouse, *The Free Offer of the Gospel* (n.d.). Accessed online at <http://www.wscal.edu/clark/freeoffer.php> . accessed: June 27th 2009

offer, is something we would look at later, but suffice it is to say for now that they do not teach anything regarding God's intentions or desires of individual persons per se.

Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? (Ez. 33:11)

In this verse, the same reasoning applies as the previous two verses. The wicked as a class is what God has in mind. This verse does not therefore logically imply anything about God's intentions or desires of individual persons per se.

Oh, that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways! (Ps. 81:13)

This commits the same fallacy as the interpretation of Deut. 5:29, namely the interpretation of optative expressions apart from the proper use of the *Analogia Fide* or the Analogy of Faith. It is surely very revealing when verses like these and others like Is. 48:18 are used to undermine the clear teachings of Scriptures elsewhere in more didactic passages.

“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. (Is. 45:22)

This is an imperative statement, and as such nothing of God's intentions and desires can be known from it directly.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance (2 Peter 3:9)

This verse is a usual proof-text for Arminians out to prove that God desires all Man without exception to be saved. Yet the context of 2 Peter, written as it is to believers (2 Peter 1:1), also show that the context is eschatology and not soteriology (2 Peter 3:4). Therefore, the context makes it clear that the 'you' in 2 Peter 3:9 refers to God's people, and therefore a proper interpretation is that God desires all that would become His people to repent; not all Man without exception but the full number of God's elect. As Matthew Henry states regarding this passage:

We are here told that the Lord is not slack—he does not delay beyond the appointed time; as God kept the time that he had appointed for the delivering of Israel out of Egypt, to a day (Exod. xii. 41), so he will keep to the time appointed in coming to judge the world. What a difference is there between the account which God makes and that which men make! Good men are apt to think God stays beyond the appointed time, that is, the time which they have set for their own and the church's deliverance; but they set one time and God sets another, and he will not fail to keep the day which he has appointed. Ungodly men dare charge a culpable slackness upon God, as if he had slipped the time, and laid aside the thoughts of coming. But the apostle assures us,

I. That what men count slackness is truly long-suffering, and that to **us-ward**; it is giving more time to his own people, whom he has chosen before the foundation of the world, many of whom **are not as yet converted**; and those who are in a state of grace and favour with God are to advance in knowledge and holiness, and in the exercise of faith and patience, to abound in good works, doing and suffering what they are called to, that they may bring glory to God,

and improve in a meetness for heaven; for God is not willing that any of these should perish, but that all of them should come to repentance. ... (Bold added)¹⁷

So, it can be seen that the context restricts the ‘you’ to God’s people in all ages, many of whom are not yet converted¹⁸. Even if one were to take Calvin’s position on this verse as referring to all men¹⁹ [which is not properly supported exegetically], Calvin very explicitly states that this is only of God’s preceptive will and not His intentions at all. Of God’s intentions, Calvin mentioned:

... of the hidden purpose of God, according to which the **reprobate are doomed** to their own ruin, but only of his will as made known to us in the gospel. For God there stretches forth his hand without a difference to all, but lays hold **only** of those, to lead them to himself, whom he has chosen before the foundation of the world²⁰. (Bold added)

With this done, let us therefore look to the biblical idea of the universal offer, over and against the idea of the “well-meant offer”.

1.2.4 Understanding Covenant Theology and its idea of the universal offer

Covenant Theology is the superstructure of theology and a biblical understanding of the entirety of Scripture. Through the covenant motif which spans across the entire Bible, Covenant Theology links the Bible together into a systematic whole which opens the whole counsel of God up to further understanding of God’s truth, and functions as the framework for the theological enterprise.

Covenant Theology sees God relating to Man primarily in terms of covenants²¹. An important aspect of that is the idea of federal or covenant headship. So in Adam, all men are considered to have sinned (original sin) and have died in him (Rom. 5:17a). Adam is thus the federal head representing the entire race. Conversely, Christ is the new federal head of the covenant of grace, and all who believe are embraced within His covenant and live in Him (Rom. 5:16-17). Adam as the federal head brought condemnation and death to all he represents – all men, while Christ as the federal head brought salvation and life to all He represents – all the elect of God.

It is within this context in which the doctrine of the universal offer is best stated and expressed. The doctrine of the universal offer states that God offers salvation and life to all men (hence universal). Unlike the well-meant offer, this doctrine does not arrogantly and fallaciously presume to know God’s intention in the offer, but follows the Scriptures in describing the offer of the Gospel. It seeks to avoid the error of the well-meant offer in avoiding these two primary logical fallacies: (1) the fallacy of inferring intention from imperatives, and (2) the fallacy of division and composition in assigning what is true of the collective to the individual. The first error is to be overcome by restricting the doctrine of the offer to be one purely according to God’s preceptive will without resorting to peer into God’s secret decrees and intentions. The second error is to be overcome by understanding the offer in light of the perspective of Covenant Theology.

¹⁷ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible Volume VI (Acts to Revelation)*. Accessed online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc6.iiPet.iv.html> . accessed: June 27th 2009

¹⁸ For a good exegesis of 2 Peter 3:9 and rebuttal of the Arminian interpretation, check out James R. White, p. 145-150

¹⁹ John Calvin, *John Calvin’s Commentary on the Catholic Epistles*. Accessed online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom45.vii.iv.iii.html> . accessed June 27th 2009.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ For more on God’s covenants with Man, see O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ, USA: P&R Publishing, 1980), and Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker, 2006).

In removing the first error, the doctrine of the universal offer states that God's offer of salvation is "sincere" and "unfeigned" in the sense that God anthropomorphically speaking is making the way of salvation available to all. God does not prohibit anyone from partaking of this offer of salvation if they so wish to (Jn. 7:37ff). Not only does God not prohibit anyone from partaking of the offer of salvation, God calls upon all to partake of this offer of salvation, even in entreating sinners to repent and be saved (Is. 1:18, 55:1-3). Such an active call however is still merely that: a call. It says nothing about God's intentions at all. Being part of God's **preceptive** will, it is a part of God's precepts – actions which God demands to be done because these actions qua actions are pleasing to Him; being in conformity with his character. So therefore, God's active call in the Gospel offer shows forth how repentance and faith in Christ qua actions are indeed pleasing to God because they are more in line with His character and thus such actions bring glory to His name. In this sense therefore, the universal offer of the Gospel is the publication of Man's **duty** toward God, in the same way as the publication of God's Law is Man's obligation to obey God's commandments.

In avoiding the second group of fallacies, Covenant Theology with its idea of federal headship comes into play. God's command and offer of salvation is made to all Man federally. Just as all Man are sinners by virtue of Adam, God offer of salvation is made also to sinners by virtue of Adam. What this means is that the offer is made to sinners because they are sinners (Lk. 5:32), not because they are for example Mr. Smith or whoever else they might be. Although Mr. Smith is a sinner, the offer is made to him because he is a sinner and not because of whatever else he may be (i.e. a father, brother, farmer, American, Caucasian etc). This means that the offer is made with Man qua sinners, not Man qua nationality or any other categories. Technically, it can be said to be made with elect qua sinners and reprobates qua sinners, but never with elect qua elect or reprobates qua reprobates. Therefore, it is an error to say that God desires the salvation of reprobates and offers them salvation, for God offered no such things. God offered **sinners** qua sinners salvation, and them only. The converse that God desires the salvation of the elect and offers them salvation however is true, but not because of the doctrine of the universal offer. Such is true because of the doctrine of election, for it is not deducible to be true from the doctrine of the universal offer at all.

How does the doctrine of the universal offer works out then in evangelism? Reformed scholar and continental theologian Francis Turretin shows us how this doctrine of the universal offer works itself out in the task of evangelism

Christ is not revealed in the Gospel as having died for me in particular, but only as having died in general for those who believe and repent. Hence I reason from that faith and repentance which I find actually to exist in my heart, that Christ has, indeed, died for me in particular. I know that He died for all who fly to Him, I find that I have fled to Him, hence I can and should infer that He died for me. (p. 138)

To express it in a word, the faith which the Gospel demands of those who hear it is, the flying of the sinner for refuge to God as the fountain of grace, and to Christ as the ark of safety which is opened in the Gospel. If I am conscious to myself that I have done this, which is the formal act of faith, then I can and ought to exercise the other act by which I believe, that for me, who repent and fly to Him, Christ hath died. (p. 140)

And although I cannot yet assure myself that Christ has died for me [based upon the fact that Christ died for those who believe], it does not follow that I must always remain in a state of doubt and anxiety, and that my faith must be weak and unstable. My faith may firmly rest upon the general promises of the Gospel to every believing and penitent sinner. Hence by certain consequence, when I find that I possess faith and repentance, I may assure myself that these promises belong to me. (p. 143)

For the Gospel which is preached to those who are called, does not declare that, in the eternal decree of God, it has been ordained that in Christ redemption has been procured for each and every man, It rather announced to sinners a divine command, with a promise annexed, and teaches what is the duty of those who wish to be made partakers of salvation. (p. 146)²²

As it can be seen, Turretin states that the Gospel message is to be applied by the hearer of the Gospel message. We proclaim Christ crucified and His death for sinners, and it is up to sinners to come up with the minor premise themselves in this valid Gospel syllogism:

Major premise: Christ died for sinners

Minor premise: I am a sinner

Conclusion: Christ died for me

The Gospel message is not meant to be proclaimed that Christ died for anyone in particular, but the universal offer is to be preached in a way that it will impress upon the hearts of its listeners that Christ died for sinners. It is up to each individual sinner to have faith (which only those who are regenerated by the Holy Spirit will have (Jn. 3:3, 5-8)) in the Gospel message. When these individuals who are the elect believe in the Gospel message, then they will provide the minor premise as one of the symptoms of repentance and manifest faith through believing in the conclusion of the Gospel syllogism.

Major premise: Christ died for sinners [Gospel proclamation]

Minor premise: I am a sinner [Personal Repentance]

Conclusion: Christ died for me [Personal faith]

In concluding this section, what exactly then is the doctrine of the Universal Offer? The doctrine of the universal offer is the teaching that the offer of salvation made to sinners tells sinners that accepting this offer is glorifying to God and it is their duty to do so. It also teaches that the offer of salvation is made to sinners collectively, and is to be proclaimed in the Gospel to invite the response of repentance and faith from those in whom the Holy Spirit is working. Such an offer, unlike the well-meant offer, aids in evangelism and gives impetus for preachers to plead for men to repent and believe in the Gospel, while escaping the irrationality which is dishonoring to God. Lastly, it does not make God's offer a liar, by proclaiming what should be the response of faith (and thus not the Evangel) to all and sundry including reprobates.

With that said, we can finally delve into the writings of John Bunyan.

II. Interpretation of historical sources

II.1.1 Context of John Bunyan and his writings

The first thing in interpreting the writings of John Bunyan is to understand his person. John Bunyan is a street preacher who was persecuted for preaching without a license. He was not a theologian at all and as such his writings tend to be more heartfelt and devotional rather than doctrinal, precise and consistent. While most certainly Bunyan does not denigrate doctrine and preaches the Scripture, yet his background would mean that systematizing theological truths and using proper and consistent terminology would not be his forte, as we shall see when interpreting the passage under contention.

II.1.2 The context and proper interpretation of his work

²² Francis Turretin, *The Atonement*, trans by James R. Wilson, ed. by C. Matthew McMahon (New Lenox, IL, USA: Puritan Publications, 2005)

The article of John Bunyan in his works where the quotation was taken is entitled *Reprobation asserted*²³. In this article of his, Bunyan wrote about the doctrine of reprobation: what it is and how it operates. One common theme running through this work of his is how he as an evangelist can still proclaim the Gospel and offer salvation to his listeners despite the doctrine of reprobation, in which Bunyan took the prevailing Reformed position of primary passive reprobation²⁴. Early on, this concern manifest itself in Bunyan's rather interesting take on the relation of reprobation with regards to men.

First, Generally, As it concerneth persons **temporarily and visibly reprobate**, thus: To be reprobate is to be disapproved, void of judgment, and rejected, &c. To be disapproved, that is, when the word condemns them, either as touching the faith or the holiness of the gospel ; the which they must needs be, that are void of spiritual and heavenly judgment in the mysteries of the kingdom ; a manifest token [that] they are rejected. And hence it is that they are said to be reprobate or void of judgment concerning the faith; reprobate or void of judgment touching every good work; having a reprobate mind, to do those things that are not convenient, either as to faith or manners. And hence it is again, that they are also said to be rejected of God, cast away, and the like. 2 Co. xiii. 8, 7; 2 Ti. iii. 8; Tit. i. 16; Ro. i. 28; Je. vi. 80; 1 Co. ix. 27.

I call this **temporary visible reprobation**, because these appear, and are detected by the word as such that are found under the above-named errors, and so adjudged without the grace of God. Yet it is possible for some of these, however for the present disapproved, through the blessed acts and dispensations of grace, not only to become visible saints, but also saved for ever. Who doubts but that he who now by examining himself, concerning faith, doth find himself, though under profession, graceless, may after that, he seeing his woeful state, not only cry to God for mercy, but find grace, and obtain mercy to help in time of need? though it is true, that for the most part the contrary is fulfilled on them.

Second, But to pass this, and more particularly to touch the **eternal invisible reprobation**, which I shall thus hold forth: It is to passed by in, or left out of, God's election; yet so, as considered upright. In which position you have these four things considerable: 1. The act of God's election. 2. The negative of that act. 3. The persons reached by that negative. And, 4. Their qualification when thus reached by it²⁵.

As it can be seen, Bunyan's idea of "temporary visible reprobation" is a terminology he himself creates out of thin air, mainly for the purpose of evangelism so that the visibly wicked, who behaved as how reprobates are thought to behave, are not therefore to be regarded as beyond the reach of the Gospel. Along this train of thought, Bunyan further writes:

Second, As it hindereth not in itself, so it hindereth not by its doctrine: for, all that this doctrine saith is, that some are left out of God's election, as considered upright. Now this doctrine cannot hinder any man. For,

1. No man still stands upright.
2. Though it saith some are left, yet it points at no man, it nameth no man, it binds all faces in secret. So then, if it hinder, it hindereth all, even the elect as well as reprobate; **for the reprobate hath as much ground to judge himself elect**, as the very elect himself hath,

²³ John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan* (London, UK: Blackie & Sons, 1862), 2:335-357. Available online at <http://books.google.com/books?id=VNgGAAAYAAJ&printsec=titlepage#PRA1-PA353.M1> . accessed: June 28th 2009.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 338

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 337. Bold added

before he be converted, being both alike in a state of nature and unbelief, and both alike visibly liable to the curse, for the breach of the commandment. Again, As they are equals here, so also have they ground alike to close in with Christ and live; even the open, free, and full invitation of the gospel, and promise of life and salvation, by the faith of Jesus Christ. Ep. ii. 1,2, Ro. iii. 9, Jn. iii. 16, 2 Co. v. 19—21, Re xxi. 6; xxii. 17²⁶.

It can be seen in Bunyan's words that he is trying to relate the doctrine of reprobation to the task of evangelism, and failing spectacularly in the theological sense. However, if one ignores his improper use of terminology, what Bunyan teaches is surely correct, and his use of terminology internally consistent.

Bunyan thus uses the term 'reprobation' in two different senses: the theological sense (which he terms eternal invisible reprobation), and the visible appearance of reprobate-like behavior in the wicked (which he terms temporary visible reprobation). The practical slant in evangelism therefore works itself out in Bunyan focusing on the "temporary visible reprobation" angle, and it is in this context that Bunyan's statements as misquoted by Byrne²⁷ are to be interpreted.

When interpreted in this light, Bunyan's statements make perfect sense and do not lend themselves to the acontextual spin put on them by Tony Byrne. Bunyan throughout this chapter mentions the act of reaching out to all men **even though** they seem to be reprobate ("temporary visible reprobation"), and thus it is in this light that we are to interpret his view of God "desiring to save the reprobate" as actually teaching, in proper theological parlance, of God offering to all mankind even the wicked the way of salvation and calling on them to come; that the atoning death of Christ is sufficient to save the worst of sinners. In other words, even though it may seem that you are the worst of sinners, yet you are called to come, as Christ's death is sufficient to save even one so wicked such as yourself. As stated,

He saith not to his ministers, Go preach to the elect, because they are elect; and shut out others, because they are not so: But, Go preach the gospel to sinners as sinners; and as they are such, go bid them come to me and live. And it must needs be so, otherwise the preacher could neither speak in faith, nor the people hear in faith. First, the preacher could not speak in faith, because he knoweth not the elect from the reprobate; nor they again hear in faith, because, as unconverted, they would be always ignorant of that also. So then, the minister neither knowing whom he should offer life unto, nor yet the people which of them are to receive it; how could the word now be preached in faith with power? And how could the people believe and embrace it? But now the preacher offering mercy in the **gospel to sinners, as they are sinners**, here is way made for the word to be spoke in faith, because his hearers are sinners; yea, and encouragement also for the people to receive and close therewith, they understanding they are sinners: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners 1 Ti. 1:15, Lk. xxiv. 46, 47²⁸

This should conclusively prove to all that Bunyan is thinking of Christ desiring the salvation of sinners qua sinners, to the extent of reprobates qua sinners even, and not the Neo-Amyraldian teaching that Christ desires the salvation of reprobates per se.

II.1.3 Rebuttal of Byrne's interpretive fallacies

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 347. Bold added.

²⁷ Appendix 1

²⁸ Bunyan, p. 348-349. Bold added.

The main interpretive fallacy committed over and over again by Byrne is his constant refusal to interact with the actual definitions of terms as utilized by Bunyan, and instead continues to read his meaning of what is meant by God “is willing to save those that perish” and that He is “heartily willing they should close with the tenders of the grace held forth in the gospel”, instead of letting Bunyan and the context of Bunyan’s writings define how and in what sense these phrases are used. This is a classic case of eisegesis – of reading one’s definition of terms and phrases into the text instead of allowing the original writer and his writings to determine the senses and meanings of the terms and phrases the writer himself intends! We have previously looked through the contexts even to the beginning of the article in order to understand the entirety of Bunyan’s article and the flow of his arguments throughout the piece, quoting relevant portions showing how Bunyan himself defines the term and concept of “reprobation”. Byrne on the other hand is content to play word games and falsely claim that

How in the world does one leap from Bunyan’s “God *is willing* to save those that perish,” and that He is “*heartily willing* they should close with the tenders of the grace held forth in the gospel,” to Chew’s hypothetical “God would not prevent them from being saved if they were able...”?

While seemingly correct if taken out of its original context, Byrne’s false claim fall apart when we read the **entire** article for ourselves and understand Bunyan’s dual definition of the concept of reprobation. The only legitimate quibble Byrne can find if he so desires to nitpick is that my hypothetical statement would not have the same force of command, urgency and persuasion as Bunyan’s one would have.

III. Conclusive rebuttal and practical concerns

III.1 The logical fallacy of quote-mining

Byrne as well as his Neo-Amyraldian compatriots routinely engage in the practice of quote-mining; finding and posting snippets from the writings of dead theologians and giants of the Faith which seem to support their theory. However, the entire methodology is logically fallacious, as we shall see here in more detail.

The typical argument of the quote-miners can be condensed into the following argument format:

Assuming p = [Neo-Amyraldism is biblical]
and q = [X famous theologian/pastor taught it]

then the argument runs as follows:

If p , then q
 q

Therefore, p

Of course typically, their argument would sound more along the lines of

If q , then p
 q

Therefore, p

So therefore, they would bombard quotes upon quotes to prove q [X famous theologian/pastor taught Neo-Amyraldism], with the goal of convincing their audience of p [that Neo-Amyraldism is biblical]. However, unless Byrne and his fellow Neo-Amyraldians want to base the truth of their theory on the words of Man and not the Scriptures, they could not use this argument (which follows the logically valid form of *modus ponens*) but must instead revert to the first example, so that the final authority on what is correct would be the Scriptures, which is once again shown as follows:

If [Neo-Amyraldism is biblical], then [X famous theologian/pastor taught it]
[X famous theologian/pastor taught it]
Therefore, [Neo-Amyraldism is biblical]

If p , then q ; q , therefore p
($p > q$), $q \rightarrow p$

This line of argument however commits the logical fallacy of affirming the consequent. It commits the same error as empiricism (of which quote-mining is a form of empiricism anyway) and as such is in error.

One possible way to get out of this dilemma is by attaching the word “and only if” to the major premise, as follows:

If and only if p , then q
 q
Therefore p

This would certainly make the argument logically valid. However, what does the altered proposition of the major premise entail? It would mean that a theory being biblical would be a necessary and sufficient condition for a pastor to preach on it. However, is that really true? Unless we elevate all theologians and pastors to the status of pope with *ex cathedra* authority, then a theory being biblical is not a sufficient **condition** for pastors to preach on it²⁹, for pastors have the freedom and ability to, and do sometimes preach unbiblical stuff.

However, even if we concede this point, a larger and more fundamental problem remains. We have previously conceded that q is right – that the quotes given do reflect that X famous theologian/pastor taught it. However, that in itself is not proven, and is undergirded by the following unspoken reasoning process

If X , then Q
 Q
Therefore X

whereby X = [one’s interpretation X famous theologian/pastor is q]
 Q = [the words and phrases that X famous theologian/pastor utilizes]

We can concede for the sake of argument that if these famous theologian/pastors would teach that Neo-Amyraldism is biblical (q), then they would use the words that are being quoted (Q), and thus the major premise ($X < Q$) is true. However, even then, the reasoning process commits the same logical fallacy of affirming the consequent. For there may possibly be different interpretations of

²⁹ Not a sufficient **condition** = not necessary. That is to say, for a pastor to be able to preach on something, it is not necessary to be biblical. Of course he should, but he can choose not to.

the words (Q) of X famous theologian/pastor. Unless it can be proven that there be only one interpretation of Q , which is q , the entire enterprise of quote-mining cannot even begin to take off.

The enterprise of quote-mining as proof of truth therefore suffers at two stages: it must and cannot prove that the interpretation given to the quote is the correct one (such must be argued for, not merely asserted), and it must prove that the person teaching it is infallible at that very instance (which is false). Therefore, the entire enterprise is doomed from the beginning, and all who are swayed by such arguments are thinking irrationally.

III.2 Conclusive rebuttal of Byrne's fanciful theories

We have seen in the last two sections Byrne's irrationality and prove through proper interpretation of Bunyan's text Byrne's continual eisegesis of his work. Instances of the first are abundant throughout the work, and it is not enough for Byrne to merely claim that I think it is irrational while he doesn't. Rather, since the Scriptures use these terms a certain way and taught contrary to what Byrne claims, as well as Scripture's claim to ultimate rationality, the onus is on Byrne to prove his Neo-Amyraldian concepts to be biblical and non-contradictory instead of assuming it and reading it into the writings of giants of the Christian faith. As it has been said, logical contradictory statements, like their basic counterparts of "square circle", "non-Christian Christian" or what have you, have zero information content whatsoever. Therefore, whenever such sentences are encountered in Byrne's writings, they should be thrown out as being utterly vacuous and meaningless in the same sense that nobody would treat the phrase "square circle" with any seriousness³⁰. Byrne's unbiblical notion of the nature of God's desire and God's intention, and his logically contradictory notion of God willing to do what He does not wills to do should be dismissed by all serious Bible students as notions worthy of unregenerate rebels (2 Peter 2:12) but unworthy of the supremely rational God (Jn. 1:1).

Moving ahead, we would look at Byrne's continual penchant to distort historical writings even while quoting them, showing forth the strength of deception gripping him and his inability to think of anything outside his theory, thus imposing his theory on the writings of others.

In his quotation of the Puritan John Preston, Byrne overlooks the fact that Preston uses the phrase "in different respects", thus overlooking the possible nuance that Preston may have used to qualify his expression. Further down, Preston utilizes the phrase "because of the conformity the thing [not persons] itself has with his will". While these two phrases do not prove Byrne's interpretation wrong, it neither proves it correct. As I have logically proven, unless Byrne proves that any and every alternative interpretation of the quote which does not make it teach Neo-Amyraldism is wrong, this quote is useless in proving his Neo-Amyraldism. Even a look at the Preston quote does not say anything about God's desires and/or intentions, and to assume that the phrase "in differing respects" does not mean that Preston did not have in mind the strict dichotomy between command/precept and desire/decreed has not been shown to be supportable by any other evidence whatsoever³¹. Contrary to Byrne's false assertion, therefore, God can truly wills [preceptively] what He [decretively] wills to effect, with the understanding that the preceptive will does not indicate God's desires or intentions in any sense whatsoever.

In the last Bunyan quote from *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved, or, God News for the Vilest of Men*, as quoted by Byrne, Byrne once again resorts to eisegesis of the highest order. Yes, Bunyan says that "Christ is their Savior". But what does Bunyan mean by that statement? Does he mean that "Christ

³⁰ Obviously, I am assuming Cartesian geometry here.

³¹ It has been pointed out that Preston may indeed be an Amyradian. Even if this is so, the one paragraph quote given by Byrne cannot by itself prove Preston believes in a form of "hypothetical universalism".

is their Savior head for head”, or “Christ is their Savior federally”? In his work *Reprobation Asserted*, we have previously seen one of Bunyan’s strange definition of the reprobate as the “temporarily and visible reprobate”, and also of his grasp of the biblical idea of Christ dying federally or collectively for sinners qua sinners. Being written by the same author, Bunyan probably has this in mind and thus he believes in the latter option. Ditto for the other 4 points Byrne lists there. Who is actually indicated by the word “thy”, “thysself”, “you”? Certainly, Bunyan doesn’t use the correct precise terminology he should have used, but when interpreted within his own context allowing him to define his own terms, he is most definitely teaching the idea of Christ dying **federally** for sinners, not individually for them.

Lastly, Byrne resorts to the logical fallacy of appealing to authority, stating that this interpretation of Bunyan is the same one given by Dr. Richard Muller in his address at Mid-America Reformed Theological Seminary. First of all, even if Dr. Muller did in fact give this interpretation, he is not infallible and he may be wrong in his interpretation. Scholarship with integrity requires that one read and understand the writings of any author using their own context and allowing them to define the terms they use, even though their definitions may be weird or even wrong. If the point here is to argue that what Bunyan may have taught in the federal aspect of the atonement is a form of “hypothetical universalism”, or that applying this federal aspect of the atonement to individuals is a form of “hypothetical universalism”, then that would be fine since it is consistent with Bunyan’s context and writings³². However, it is patently absurd to state that Bunyan believes in the universal expiation idea of the Neo-Amyraldians, a concept nowhere articulated in his writings when interpreted in context.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, it has been shown that Tony Byrne’s argument fails on all counts. It is unbiblical, irrational, based upon misquotation and eisegesis of the source texts, and largely based upon a faulty invalid methodology. Any one of this especially the first is enough to destroy his position. Combined together, they produce an argument for why Tony Byrne and his fellow Neo-Amyraldians are always wrong as long as they continue promoting their unbiblical and irrational position utilizing that same faulty methodology. May we therefore return to God and His Word, and embrace the Truth of the Gospel of Christ’s **propitiation** (not merely expiation) by His blood on our behalf (Rom. 3:25), and of the Universal Offer made to sinners calling them to repentance as the impetus for our evangelism. Amen!

³² However, I would argue that such is a misnomer, for the concept of “federal representation” has no linkage whatsoever to the concept of “hypothetical universalism”, if words have any meaning at all. Are we to say that since Christ died for sinners federally, therefore it is hypothetical that all Man can be saved? NO!

APPENDIX 1

John Bunyan (1628-1688) on God's Grace, Goodness, Offers and Saving Will³³

God also sheweth by this, that **the reprobate do not perish for want of the offers of salvation**, though he hath offended God, and that upon most righteous terms; according to what is written,

‘As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live’ (Eze. 33:11, 18:31, 32).

‘Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn unto you, saith the Lord of Hosts’ (Zec. 1: 3). So then, here lieth the point between God and the reprobate, I mean the reprobate since he hath sinned, **God is willing to save him upon reasonable terms**, but not upon terms above reason; but not reasonable terms will [go] down with the reprobate, therefore he must perish for his unreasonableness.

That God is willing to save even those that perish for ever, is apparent, both from the consideration of the goodness of his nature (Psa. 145:9), of man’s being his creature, and indeed in a miserable state (Job. 14:15, 3:16). But I say, as I have also said already, there is a great difference between his being willing to save them, through their complying with these his reasonable terms, and his being resolved to save them, whether they, as men, will close therewith, or no; so only he saveth the elect themselves, even ‘according to the riches of his grace’ (Eph. 1: 7). Even ‘according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus’ (Php. 4:19). Working effectually in them, what the gospel, as a condition, calleth for from them. And hence it is that he is said to give faith (Php. 1:29), yea the most holy faith, for that is the faith of God’s elect, to give repentance (Act. 5:31), to give a new heart, to give his fear, even that fear that may keep them for ever from everlasting ruin (Eph. 1: 4); still engaging his mercy and goodness to follow them all the days of their lives (Jer. 32:40; Eze. 36:26, 27), that they may dwell in the house of the Lord for ever (Psa. 23: 6), and as another scripture saith, ‘Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing, is God’ (2Co. 5: 5; Rom. 8:26, &c.).

But I say, his denying to do thus for every man in the world, cannot properly be said to be because he is not heartily willing they should close with the tenders of the grace held forth in the gospel, and live. Wherefore you must consider that there is a distinction to be put between God’s denying grace on reasonable terms, and denying it absolutely; and also that there is a difference between **his withholding further grace**, and of hindering men from closing with **the grace at present offered**; also that God may withhold much, when he taketh away nothing; yea, take away much, when once abused, and yet be just and righteous still. Further, God may deny to do this or that absolutely, when yet **he hath promised to do, not only that, but more, conditionally**. Which things considered, you may with ease conclude, that **he may be willing to save those not elect, upon reasonable terms, though not without them.**

It is no unrighteousness in God to offer grace unto the world, though but on these terms only, that they are also foreseen by him infallibly to reject; both because to reject it is unreasonable, especially the terms being so reasonable, as to believe the truth and live; and also **because it is grace and mercy in God, so much as once to offer means of reconciliation to a sinner, he being the offender**; but the Lord, the God offended; they being but dust and ashes, he the

³³ *John Bunyan (1628-1688) on God's Grace, Goodness, Offers and Saving Will*, <http://theologicalmeditations.blogspot.com/2008/01/john-bunyan-1628-1688-on-gods-grace.html>, (accessed: June 23rd 2009)

heavenly Majesty. If God, when man had broke the law, had yet with all severity kept the world to the utmost condition of it, had he then been unjust? Had he injured man at all? Was not every tittle of the law reasonable, both in the first and second table? **How much more then is he merciful and gracious, even in but mentioning terms of reconciliation?** especially seeing he is also willing so to condescend, if they will believe his word, and receive the love of the truth. Though the reprobate then doth voluntarily, and against all strength of reason, run himself upon the rocks of eternal misery, and split himself thereon, he perisheth in his own corruption, by rejecting terms of life (2Th. 2:10; 2Pe. 2:12, 13)."

John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan* (London: Blackie & Sons, 1862), 2:353. Also in John Bunyan, "Reprobation Asserted," in *The Works of John Bunyan* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), 2:353. Bold added.

APPENDIX 2

Excerpt from *The Anachronisms of the Neo-Amyraldians*³⁴

The next post to look at is one entitled *John Bunyan (1628-1688) on God's Grace, Goodness, Offers and Saving Will*. As per his norm, Byrne highlighted all the words that he thinks promotes 'common salvific grace' or the 'well-meant offer' in yellow. However, looking at the context of the quote from Bunyan, does Bunyan actually believes in 'common salvific grace'? I contend not. All the highlighted parts should be read together in their contexts to establish what Bunyan means by what he says, not just isolated as phrases and infused with established modern meanings. The entire quotation by Bunyan proves only that the offer of the Gospel is not proffered only to the elect but to all, such that even the reprobates could take it if they are able to (but of course they are unable to). As Bunyan states later, he says that "there is a difference between his withholding further grace, and of hindering men from closing with the grace at present offered". In this sense therefore, Bunyan states that for God's interaction with the reprobate, he withholds further grace, which is obviously referring to salvific grace. However, God does not "hinder men from closing with the grace at present offered", which just means that with the grace given to even the reprobates, God would not prevent them from being saved if they are able to use this grace to bring themselves unto salvation (but of course they are unable to). What is damaging to the Neo-Amyraldian case is this following quote from Bunyan:

But I say, as I have also said already, there is a great difference between his being willing to save them, through their complying with these his reasonable terms, and his **being resolved** to save them, whether they, as men, will close therewith, or no; **so only he saveth** the elect themselves, ... (Bold added)³⁵

As it can be seen, Bunyan here states that if God resolves (wills) to save them, then the proper objects of such a resolve must be only the elect. So therefore, Bunyan DOES not believe in God having any form of intent of saving the reprobate ('common salvific grace'). All of the talk about offer to the reprobate, grace given to them etc. are Bunyan using theological imprecise (even incorrect) terms to express something very true, which is that God will NOT hinder the reprobates from saving themselves IF they are able to do so. In more theological precise terms, God does not actively reprobate sinners, nor does He prohibit them from being offered the Gospel.

³⁴ *The Anachronisms of the Neo-Amyraldians*, <http://puritanreformed.blogspot.com/2008/02/anachronisms-of-neo-amyraldians.html> (accessed: June 23rd 2009)

³⁵ Bunyan, p. 353