

Unlimited Inclusion
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[The following is a portion of a recent---and possibly continuing---dialogue with a brother in Christ, a dialogue that mostly centered on the question of whether or not the Reformation paradigm as generally and presently understood, provides an adequate framework within which a mature grasp of all the implications of God's work in Christ on behalf of all men.] _____

Well, dear brother, this recent exchange has, for me, re-clarified a very fundamental difference of perspective that has become, as it were, the contemporary equivalent of the Calvinism/Arminianism debate, but removing from the debate that most repugnant element from the Calvinistic side, namely, limited atonement.

I can't remember now, just how long ago it was, but it's been many years since I began to be informed by what I see to be an inviolable principle revealed to Paul as he expressed it in 2Cor. 5: 14. The kJV is the least clear in its translation of the Greek there, so I'll quote from the NAS and Amplified versions, translations well accepted in the evangelical community.

The NAS has the text in question as: "For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;..." And the Amplified has it as: "For the love of Christ controls and urges and impels us, because we are of the opinion and conviction that [if] One died for all, then all died;"...." The Concordant Literal Translation clearly supports these in its rendering.

So this begs the question, how is it that because of Christ's death all died---the "all" being all for whom He died? I'm pretty sure that the Calvinistic element within the Reformation paradigm that affirmed limited atonement, that is, that the atoning death of Christ was only for the elect---God delivering up His Son only for a few, is an element within that paradigm that you repudiate.

So what comes across clearly from Paul's very seminal conviction, is that all on behalf of whom Christ died, died with Him. That is, all for whom Christ died---and that would be all men---share in identification

with Him in death. The truth of being together-crucified with Christ, according to Paul, is not reserved only for the believer.

St. John joins Paul in this insight in respect to God's propitiatory work in Christ; that though there is the sense of the particularity of Christ's propitiatory accomplishment for the believer, that particularity does not disannul that His propitiation was for the whole world also---"He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world."

The full orbed "for" of God's finished work in Christ is for reconciliation and for co-crucifixion. The two benefits cannot be separated, and it is not our "act of faith" that is the basis of inclusion in the death of Christ. When He became flesh, assuming in Himself all humanity, all that He is, and all that the Father accomplished in Him accrues to every man by universal Christ-inclusion.

In a word, I did not get into Christ by my act of faith, He was inclusive of me when I was still an enemy of His.

The Greek is even more emphatic, according to my Greek-student friend, Ed Browne, in that it brings out that God was reconciling me while I was still BEING an enemy. We can't affirm the reconciling benefit of Christ's death for all men, while denying the co-crucifixion benefit; they are inseparable. By Him, God both reconciled me, i.e., He changed me from a state of alienation from Him, to adoration of Him, AND co-crucified me with/in Christ, and did that, not for me alone, but for all men.

From that place in Him, by irresistible regenerating grace grounded in His resurrection---an element of the Reformation paradigm I would retain---I am brought to "believe into Christ" (as the Greek has it in several places), that is, I believe into Him from within Him.

From within Him, my blindness is healed, I begin to see what is my abode, and I begin the journey into the breadth, length, height and depth of Him---that is, into the depths of the love of God. My abode is Christ, the True Human embodiment and personification of the kingdom of God. As I am enlightened to see Him from within Him, I see and enter the kingdom.

The other fundamental point of difference in our respective perspectives, of course, has to do with whether our Primal Origin (to quote Barth) is traceable to our being created out of nothing, or is our Primal Origin in the eternal Being of God, in whom we all, as the offspring of God, have our Being.

I contend that the idea that we were merely in God's thought before creation, compromises the force of Paul's statement. My understanding of the wonder of being called the children of God (and indeed we are) is that we were/are included in the eternally begotten Son---sons in the Son, sons as the extension of the single SEED of the only/single begotten of the Father. I would most emphatically retain the affirmation of Christ's eternal begottenness as most clearly defended by Athanasius in opposition to the claim that Christ was not eternal, but had His origin as a created being.

That is, there is only one generic Sonship, that of the only/one/single begotten of the Father, but in him we all share His relationship to the Father. (Though our conventional translations render John 3:16 as "His only-begotten Son," the word translated "only" conveys "one" and/or "single.") The biblical illustration would be the fact that those Hebrews generations removed from Abraham are children of Abraham through the child of promise, Isaac. Paul wanted the Jews to realize that their inclusion in the anti-type of Isaac (Christ) was not exclusive, but universally inclusive. In the single Seed of promise, Christ, all humanity are children of God.

His and yours,
John