

THE ATONEMENT – PART 2

INTRODUCTION

- Definition of Atonement: work of God in Christ by which he cancelled the debt of our sin and won for us salvation
- The question is: For whom did Christ offer himself in sacrifice? Did he die for all mankind or just the elect?
- The question in this issue is not the sufficiency of the death of Christ. All agree that Christ's death was of sufficient value for the sins of the whole world.
- The question concerns the intention or design of God in the death of Christ and whether or not Christ did make a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of all.
- At stake in this question is not the nature of the atonement but the extent of the atonement
- There are two main positions:
 - **Limited Atonement (or Definite/Particular Atonement)**
 - The atonement was for the elect only, not for all men.
 - This position limits the atonement in design (only for elect)
 - **Unlimited Atonement**
 - The atonement was for all men in order to make them savable, but only the elect are saved, therefore Christ died for all men.
 - This position limits the atonement in grace & election
- Possible options with these positions:
 1. Atonement Provided for All; Atonement Obtained for All (only unlimited) [Accept or Reject?]
 2. Atonement Provided for All; Atonement Obtained for the Elect (unlimited/limited) [Accept or Reject?]
 3. Atonement Provided for the Elect; Atonement Obtained for the Elect (only limited) [Accept or Reject?]
 4. Atonement Sufficient for All; Atonement Efficient for the Elect (primarily limited) [Accept or Reject?]

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THIS DEBATE

- The controversy between Arminianism and Calvinism arose in Holland in the early 1600's. The founder of the Arminian party, Jacob Arminius, studied under a strict Calvinist and he was professor of theology at the University of Leyden (1603).
- Gradually, Arminius came to reject certain Calvinistic teachings and eventually, the controversy spread all over Holland. The Arminians drew up their creed in Five Articles under the name *Remonstrance*.
- The Calvinists met at the Synod of Dort (Nov. 1618 to May 1619) and responded with what is known as "the Canons of Dort." The Five Points were in response to the Five Articles of the Arminian Remonstrance.
- These Five Points of the Canons of Dort are commonly referred to as "the Five Points of Calvinism." This was not a summary of their teaching, but a response to the Arminians who had chosen to oppose these five aspects of Calvinism.
- Along the way, these five points came to be summarized under the acronym TULIP:
 - Total Depravity
 - Unconditional Election
 - Limited Atonement
 - Irresistible Grace
 - Perseverance of the Saints

UNLIMITED ATONEMENT

Statement of the Position

- Christ's death made atonement for all but its application is limited to the elect. Christ did, however, in His death make whatever atonement is necessary for all men.

Arguments for Unlimited Atonement

The Biblical Evidence

- 📖 **Isaiah 53:6** ~ All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity **of us all** To fall on Him.
 - 📖 **John 1:29** ~ The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away **the sin of the world!**
 - 📖 **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** ~ For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that **one died for all, therefore all died**; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.
 - 📖 **2 Corinthians 5:19** ~ namely, that God was in Christ **reconciling the world to Himself**, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation
 - 📖 **1 Timothy 2:5-6** ~ For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as **a ransom for all**
 - 📖 **1 Timothy 4:10** ~ For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living **God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.**
 - 📖 **Titus 2:11** ~ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to **all men**,
 - 📖 **Hebrews 2:9** ~ But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God **He might taste death for everyone.**
 - 📖 **2 Peter 2:1** ~ But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master **who bought them**, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.
 - 📖 **1 John 2:2** ~ and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for **those of the whole world**
 - 📖 **1 John 4:14** ~ We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be **the Savior of the world.**
- These key verses speak of Christ's death for the entire world of humanity, not merely for the elect
 - Also, the word *all*, or an equivalent term, is used to denote everyone. Christ died for the ungodly – everyone is ungodly (Rom. 5:6); Christ died for all, suggesting everyone

The Universal Offer of Salvation

- If the gospel is to go to every creature, there must be a gospel to offer them.

- 📖 **John 3:16** ~ For God so loved **the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him** shall not perish, but have eternal life.
- 📖 **Acts 10:43** ~ Of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name **everyone who believes in Him** receives forgiveness of sins.
- 📖 **Acts 17:30** ~ Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring **to men that all people everywhere should repent**,
- The word “whosoever” is used at least 110 times in the N.T. with reference to the offer of salvation, therefore there is a call for all men to repent.
 - Many unlimited proponents argue that the universal call of the gospel to all men demands that the payment of sins be available to all men, or else the offer is not genuine. If the sins Christ paid for are limited, then the offer cannot be made to all of mankind.

LIMITED ATONEMENT

Statement of the Position

- Christ’s death was *limited* to only the elect, therefore He died to redeem the elect only.
- Limited atonement is more precisely called “definite atonement” or “particular redemption.” These other terms are better because both sides “limit” the atonement to a degree.

Arguments for Limited Atonement

There are Specific Verses in the Bible which Teach that Christ Died for the Elect

- 📖 **Matthew 20:28/Mark 10:45** ~ The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom **for many** [not all].
- 📖 **John 10:15** ~ even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and **I lay down My life for the sheep**
- The sheep for whom Christ died are the ones chosen by the Father.
 - Verse 14 makes it clear that the sheep are the elect because “they know” Christ.
- 📖 **John 11:52** ~ and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one **the children of God who are scattered abroad**
- These are children of God scattered throughout the world. Jesus will gather these people into one.
 - The logic of the verses are clear: Jesus’ death was going to affect the elect, not the entire world of men.
- 📖 **John 15:13** ~ Greater love has no one than this, **that one lay down his life for his friends**
- The term “friends” is used consistently throughout the Bible to describe the elect.
- 📖 **Acts 20:28** ~ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd **the church of God which He purchased** with His own blood
- This is a very explicit verse that speaks of the purchase of God for the elect.
- 📖 **Romans 5:8-10** ~ But God demonstrates **His own love toward us**, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for us**.
- This verse is explicitly clear that Christ died for “us,” not for “all men.”
 - The death of Christ was specifically for those who believe, the elect (vv. 9-10).

- 📖 **Romans 8:32-33** ~ He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over **for us all**, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? **Who will bring a charge against God's elect?**
- Paul bases the certainty of our inheritance on the death of Christ. He says, "God will certainly give you all things because He did not spare His own Son."
 - What becomes of this argument if Christ is given for those who do not in fact receive all things, but instead are lost?
 - This is impossible because verse 33 identifies those for whom Christ died for, "God's elect."
- 📖 **1 Corinthians 15:3** ~ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for **our sins** according to the Scriptures,
- The death of Christ was specifically for "our" sins (those who believe), not those of whole world
- 📖 **Ephesians 5:25** ~ Husbands, love your wives, just as **Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her**
- In this verse, Paul not only says that the object of Christ's atonement was the elect, but also the intended effect of His death was for the elect.
- 📖 **Titus 2:14** ~ who gave Himself for **us** to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself **a people for His own possession**, zealous for good deeds.
- If Paul held to unlimited atonement, he would he have said, "who gave Himself to redeem all men from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself all men"
- 📖 **Revelation 5:9** ~ And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood **men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.**"
- John did not write, "purchased for God with Your blood *every tribe and tongue*"
- Christ's work on the Cross of Calvary did not merely make salvation possible, it actually saved. He came not to make men redeemable but to effectually redeem them. On the cross, Christ actually redeemed the elect.
 - "If some of those for whom atonement was made and redemption wrought perish eternally, then the atonement is not itself efficacious." (Murray)

All Those for Whom Christ Died Died with Him (Not True of Non-Elect)

- 📖 **Romans 6:3-11, esp. v. 8** ~ Now **if we have died with Christ**, we believe that we shall also live with Him,
- 📖 **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** ~ For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that **one died for all, therefore all died**; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.
- 📖 **Ephesians 2:5** ~ even when we were dead in our transgressions, **made us alive together with Christ** (by grace you have been saved),
- 📖 **Colossians 3:3** ~ For **you have died** and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
- Those who have died with Christ are genuinely saved based on these Scriptures. The verses are clear in that the "all" can refer to the elect only, not to "all mankind."
 - Based on these verses, we can see that the nature of the atonement did not make men savable, but actually saved them.

Salvation Blessings were Secured Through Christ

- 📖 **Ephesians 1:3-4** ~ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with **every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly *places in Christ*,
- 📖 **Ephesians 2:8** ~ For by grace you have been saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the **gift of God**,
- 📖 **Philippians 1:29** ~ For to you **it has been granted** for Christ's sake, not only **to believe in Him**, but also to suffer for His sake
- 📖 **2 Timothy 2:25** ~ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps **God may grant them repentance** leading to the knowledge of the truth
- Each of these verses speak of the spiritual blessings of redemption such as faith, repentance, forgiveness of sin. These were secured by the death of Christ for His people, not for everyone.
 - If Christ's death is applied to all men, then all men would also be the beneficiaries of these blessings as well, yet not all men are saved.
 - This is why the salvation blessings can only be applied to the elect, and therefore, the death of Christ was only for them.
 - Arminians don't believe that God purchased the gift of faith/repentance; you must perform the gift of faith in order to get into the benefit of the atonement
 - Because the atonement is for everybody; you exercise the faith/repentance, then you qualify to be in the saving effects of the atonement;
 - The atonement is a general offer to everyone in the same way and faith/repentance are the qualifications you meet to get into the benefit of the atonement
 - Arminians deny that the divine grace that it takes to overcome our hardness of heart and become a believer was also obtained by the blood of Jesus.
 - Calvinists believe that faith/repentance were purchased by the atonement (as well as everything else)
 - They believe that God really means to accomplish through the atonement the conversion of a definite group of people, not just hold out the opportunity to all people to believe
 - Calvinists believe that Christ is a redeemer who really does redeem, not just make men redeemable
 - What is true? ➔ The exercise of faith/repentance is what qualifies me to share in the atonement (what the Arminians affirm); but that very faith/repentance necessary for being saved was purchased for me through the atonement such that it is not my own (what the Calvinists affirm)
 - It is true: God gave his only begotten Son to die for sin so that if you believe on him you may have eternal life (Arminians and Calvinists both believe this)
 - But Calvinists believe that the free gift of faith/repentance was purchased on the cross
 - Therefore, God has designed the cross for everybody in a universal proclamation of the Gospel, and also for the real purchase of total salvation including the prerequisites of salvation for his elect (i.e. faith and repentance)

God's Love is Particular Toward the Elect

- 📖 **Romans 1:7** ~ to all who are **beloved of God** in Rome, called *as* saints
- 📖 **Romans 9:13** ~ Just as it is written, "**JACOB I LOVED**, BUT ESAU I HATED."
- 📖 **Colossians 3:12** ~ So, as those who have been **chosen of God, holy and beloved...**
- 📖 **1 Thessalonians 1:4** ~ knowing, brethren **beloved by God, His choice of you**

📖 **2 Thessalonians 2:13** ~ But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren ***beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you*** from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.

- God does not love everyone with the same kind of love, just as He is not gracious to all in the same way (*common grace vs. special grace*).
- Therefore, the elect are the special objects of His divine love by which He chose.
- The passages on God’s love should not be misconstrued as pillar texts for unlimited atonement, because there is a vast difference between God’s common love for all mankind and the design of His Son’s death.
- It is out of His love for humanity that God “desires that none perish” (2 Pet. 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). God has compassion of those who are lost within His moral will. Yet in His sovereign will, God does not choose all to be saved

Answers Against the Arguments

Key Biblical Passages

📖 **2 Corinthians 5:14-15** ~ For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that ***one died for all***, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that ***they who live*** might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

- The “all” of vs. 14-15 must be qualified to mean those that actually live – true believers

📖 **2 Corinthians 5:19** ~ namely, that God was in Christ ***reconciling the world to Himself***, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation

- The “world” (*kosmos*) does not mean the absolute, universal world of mankind. Other Scriptures clearly point out this distinction (cf. Rom. 11:15).
- Obviously, Paul was not saying that Christ reconciled the entire world (i.e. every individual) to Himself, because that would indicate universalism.
- The word “world” should be translated in the general sense for “sinners,” namely those who will be saved.

📖 **1 Timothy 2:5-6** ~ For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as ***a ransom for all***

- The word “all” here *can* mean “all kinds of men” because the context of verse 2 describes kings and those in positions of authority. This is not out of line with the context.
- We can also understand this verse to mean that the ransom (gospel) is available to all men as in a general universal call...Obviously not all sinners are saved... Therefore, this ransom must be restricted to the elect only.

📖 **1 Timothy 4:10** ~ For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

- Here, the reference is to God being the “Savior” of all men, not Christ
- Paul is obviously not teaching universalism, that all men will be saved in the spiritual and eternal sense, since the rest of Scripture clearly teaches that God will not save everyone. Most will reject Him and spend eternity in hell
- Yet, all men enjoy God’s salvation in some way like the elect enjoy His salvation.
- The simple explanation is that God is the Savior of all men, only in a temporal sense, while of believers in an eternal sense.

- Paul's point is that while God graciously delivers believers from sin's condemnation and penalty because He was their substitute (2 Cor. 5:21), all men experience some earthly benefits from the goodness of God. Those benefits are:
 1. **Common grace** ~ a term that describes God's goodness shown to all mankind universally (Ps. 145:9) in restraining sin (Rom. 2:15) and judgment (Rom. 2:3–6), maintaining order in society through government (Rom. 13:1–5), enabling man to appreciate beauty and goodness (Ps. 50:2), and showering him with temporal blessings (Matt. 5:45; Acts 14:15–17; 17:25)
 2. **Compassion** ~ the broken-hearted love God shows to all undeserving sinners (Ex. 34:6,7; Ps. 86:5; Dan. 9:9; Matt. 23:37; Luke 19:41–44)
 3. **Admonition to repent** ~ God constantly warns sinners of their fate, demonstrating the heart of a compassionate Creator who has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:30–32; 33:11)
 4. **The gospel invitation** ~ salvation in Christ is indiscriminately offered to all (Matt. 11:28,29; 22:2–14; John 6:35–40; Rev. 22:17; cf. John 5:39–40). God is, by nature, a saving God.
- These are 4 temporal ways how the Cross benefits “all men.”
- Yet for believers, the death of Christ actually saves from all evil those for whom Christ died specifically.

📖 **Hebrews 2:9** ~ But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God ***He might taste death for everyone.***

- The “everyone” of verse 9 is described in the following verses. They are “sons” in verse 10 and “those who are sanctified...brethren” in verse 11 (terms only used of believers)

📖 **2 Peter 2:1** ~ But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

- The terms that Peter used here are speaking of a human master over a household. The master bought slaves, and the slaves owed the master allegiance as their sovereign. The term “master” can refer to God the Father (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24)
- There is an OT parallel in Deut. 32:5–6, where God is said to have bought Israel, though they rejected Him.
- In alluding to the Master buying these false prophets, it can mean that they rejected their Master to whom they rightfully belonged.
- “bought” does not ultimately mean actually “bought” in a salvation way, but only that God is the rightful owner of these men though they deny Him
- Doctrinally, this analogy can be viewed as responsibility for submission to God which the false teachers had refused. Beyond this, they are probably claiming that they were Christians and, therefore, that the Lord had bought them actually and personally.
- With some sarcasm, Peter mocks such a claim by writing of their coming damnation. Thus, the passage is describing the sinister character of the false teachers who claim Christ, but deny His lordship over their lives.

📖 **1 John 2:2** ~ and ***He Himself is the propitiation for our sins;*** and not for ours only, but also for *those of the whole world*

- “The whole world” can only refer to the world of the elect because only those who are elect would benefit from the work of Christ
- The term “propitiation” is striking and cannot be applied to the unbeliever. Only the elect have God's wrath appeased from them.
- “If ‘world’ means ‘each and every person who ever lived or will live’ then everyone will be saved...no sin would be left unpaid for – including the sin of unbelief. No one who takes seriously the Bible's teachings on hell and judgment would ever affirm universalism, which means that John uses ‘world’ here

to mean something other than each and every person who will ever live...John's concern is to assert that Jesus is the only Savior the world has" (Thomas Ascol, Sept 2005 Tabletalk)

The Universal Call of the Gospel

- Responses to the unlimited proponents who say that the universal call demands a universal payment for sins:
- First, if Christ's death actually paid for the sins of all mankind, then there is no penalty left for anyone to pay, and it logically follows that all people will be saved without exception.
- Second, the universal call of God is given because in God's plan, He has called His people to proclaim the Gospel to the lost (cf. Acts 10; Rom. 10:14). Within this plan, God did not say to preach to the elect only because there is no way for a believer to know who the elect are.
- Therefore, the free offer of the gospel is freely proclaimed to all men knowing that whoever believes and repents will be saved because they were elected beforehand.
- This would be like a farmer who does not know the extent of his harvest, yet he sows his seeds willingly knowing that some will produce

SUMMARY

- Christ's death was sufficient to atone for sin but efficient only for those who believe, namely the elect
- Christ's redeeming work actually saved the elect and secured salvation for them
- Since Christ's death saves everybody that it was intended for, and yet many people are never saved, Christ's death did not pay for the sins of everybody. For if it had, then everybody would be saved.
- In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which united them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, thereby guaranteeing their salvation.
- Christ's death was successful. This means that Christ did not merely die to make salvation possible for people, but rather His death actually makes certain the salvation of everybody that He died for
- In other words, everybody that He died for will be saved.

Christ is a savior who really does save. You see, if you wish to affirm that Christ died for everybody, then you must deny that Christ's death secured salvation for anybody. That is because if Christ died for everybody, then people that Christ died for can perish (since not everybody is saved). But if people that Christ died for can perish, then Christ's death did not guarantee, or secure, anybody's salvation. That is, Christ's death wasn't enough to save us. So you see that, if He died for all, then He did not actually secure anybody's salvation when He died. He just made it possible for you to save yourself by believing. Therefore, on the view that He died for everybody, your salvation does not *ultimately* depend on what Christ did for you, but on what you did for yourself by believing.

John Piper

Christ died for the world - the Scripture talks about the world. But I think that the way you have to define that is to define it as humanity. The question is, "Whose sins, within humanity, did He actually atone for? Whose sins did He actually pay the price for? Whose sins did He actually expiate? Whose punishment did he actually bear, and thus eliminate them from ever being judged?" And the answer is, "Only those who believe." So Christ actually paid the penalty; suffered the wrath of God; expiated sin, and was a perfect and satisfactory atonement for the sins of all of who would ever believe. Some people want to say that He actually paid the penalty for the sins of all who ever lived. We have some problems with that. We have a number of passages in the New Testament that indicate that He died for His own, He purchased His own, with His own blood He purchased the Church. Those kinds of statements take the humanity or the world and narrow it down more specifically to who it is referring to. So in the end, if He died and paid the actual penalty for the sins of all people who ever lived, then Hell would be double jeopardy. Then how could you send people to Hell when their sins have been paid for? So you can't really have a complete expiation of the sins of everybody, or you are going to end up as a Universalist. So in reality Christ actually expiated the sins of those who believe. Now in the end, of course, as you study the elective and unfolding purposes of the decree of God, it is clear that those who believe believe because they were chosen before the foundation of the world. Their names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life and the Spirit of God came and regenerated them by the sovereign purposes of God.

John MacArthur