

Christ's Atonement: Its Purpose and Extent, Part 1 ¹

Paul Martin Henebury

Assistant Prof. Of Theology & Apologetics Tyndale Seminary

Abstract

Intimately entwined within the question as to the extent of Christ's death on the Cross is the discussion concerning what this event actually achieved. In other words, what was its purpose? The author proves, by means of logic and a proper exegesis of the relevant passages, that Jesus died for every individual, yet that does not inevitably lead to the conclusion that all will be saved.

Introduction

In any study of the extent of Christ's atoning work, one will quickly come to realize that in order to study the question correctly, one must come to terms with the issue of the purpose of the atonement. This, in turn, involves some understanding of a number of other crucial elements of theology (e.g. the Decrees, God's love, etc.). A proper understanding of the Biblical teaching on the purpose and extent of the atonement, and of the views of those limited redemptionists with whom we differ, depends, to a large extent upon our understanding of how the text of Scripture is approached. In my role as a teacher of theological students I have more than once encountered real misunderstanding and confusion, especially among some dispensationalists, of how the Reformed (5-Point) and Dispensational positions differ. In order to present an argument for the thesis that Christ's death made all men "savable," I shall be interfacing with the work of several teachers of the view called "Limited (or Definite) Atonement"¹ throughout this paper.

The Necessity of Atonement

A Pre-Planned Rescue

We know why the atonement was necessary. The Scriptures confront us with the doleful truth that mankind is a fallen creature, under the thrall of sin (Rom. 5:21), and that Adam's sin plunged the whole earth into a cursed estate (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12f). It is not hard to conclude that if we are to have any hope of escaping God's judgment on our sin, help must come from outside. The "Good News" is the truth that help has to come -from the Judge Himself (Rom. 3:26).

It would be a mistake to suppose that mankind's need for a Savior caught God by surprise. God, in His foreknowledge, knew that man would fall. That is why we read such statements as these in the New Testament: "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation ... But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: *Who verily was foreordained² before the foundation of the world...*" (1 Pet. 1:18–20. See also Rev. 13:8; Gal. 4:4–5). From Revelation 17:8 we are told that the names of the saints have been recorded "in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world." (cf. Eph. 1:4).

The reason God planned to rescue us from the consequences of sin was because of His nature as God. We must realize that God did not *have* to save us. That He did is owing to the exercise of His sovereignty, informed, as we may say, by His attributes. Yet, predetermined as it was, the fact of our salvation does not mean that those who have never, or, will never come to salvation, are ostracized from the claims of the Gospel. And it certainly does not mean that the "non-elect" are not sincerely beckoned by God to come to the salvation that is in His Son. The Gospel is not insincerely offered to the multitudes. It is true that if we had no information to the contrary, and were left to the ingenuity of

¹ Tyndale Theological Seminary. (2005; 2007). *Vol. 9: Conservative Theological Journal Volume 9* (26) (87–108). Tyndale Theological Seminary.

^{1 1} Throughout this study I shall be using the terms "Limited Atonement," "Particular Redemption," and "Definite Atonement"¹ interchangeably.

² This note added by Phillip D. Mosher: This verse is quoted from the KJV. The word is προγνωσις *prōgnōsis*, meaning to know beforehand, to have foreknowledge. The KJV was done by men in the Reformed churches.

our own logic, we might conclude that since Christ died for the elect, then the non-elect were never atoned for, and are, in fact, the objects of God's unending hatred.

It would then be natural to conclude that God has no interest in the salvation of the masses.² But the Bible provides us with no such warrant, and those who insist upon sticking with their system notwithstanding, must attempt to bamboozle the other saints who take the inspired text at face value, and who are by such means led to believe that Christ did not die for the elect only.

The Old Testament Sacrifice at Yom Kippur as a Type of Christ's Perfect Sacrifice

From the New Testament we discover that the transgressions of the Old Testament saints were forgiven in prospect of the Cross. Sins were forgiven on account of Christ's propitiatory sacrifice. The Book of Hebrews tells us that the Old Testament sacrifices could not take away sin (Heb. 10:1–4), but that they pointed to the final sacrifice of the Lamb of God that could and did remit sin (Heb. 10:9–14). Perhaps, then, it would be of help if we took a brief look at the principle Old Testament sacrifice, the Day of Atonement.

The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). On this one day in the year the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies with sacrificial blood, offered on behalf of "all the people." It was also on this day that the scapegoat (*azal* - "to lead away") was led into the wilderness and released, bearing the people's sins. However, it needs to be stressed that God required the people to "afflict themselves" on this day, as a show of genuine repentance. From this we can see that the actual sacrificial and substitutionary blood was sufficient for the whole congregation of Israel; - *the blood was shed for all the people*.

But the efficacy of the blood lay contingent upon the response of those who would humble themselves for their sin. Walter Kaiser writes: "[O]n the great day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), "all" the sins of "all" Israel of "all" who had truly repented ("afflicted their souls" [Lev. 16:16, 21, 29, 31] were forgiven."³

As one reads Leviticus 16 it is clear that the offering up of the first goat (as opposed to the scapegoat - w. 7–8, 21–22), was "for all the people of the congregation" (w. 33–34), and not just for the favored few (cf. Heb. 7:27; 9:7). Keil and Delitzsch remark on this in their commentary:

If the general atonement made on this day was not to pass into a dead formal service, the people must necessarily enter in spirit into the signification of the act of expiation, prepare their souls for it with penitential feelings, and manifest this penitential state by abstinence from the ordinary enjoyments of life. To "*afflict (bow, humble) the soul,*" by restraining the earthly appetites, which have their seat in the soul, is the early Mosaic expression for *fasting*.⁴

The chief items of interest to us are, 1) That the atonement was general; for all the people. 2) The atonement was substitutionary in nature. 3) The fasting of the people (which was mandatory - Lev. 16:31), was for the purpose of solemnizing the whole day. 4) So, although the blood of the sacrifice was shed on behalf of all the people, the efficacy of the blood was doubtless predicated upon the heart response of the individual.

The great annual sacrifice of Yom Kippur was a type of the Cross of Christ, and the sacrifice of Yom Kippur was for all the people, not for a restricted group within the nation. So far as this "day of covering" is concerned, the fact is that the atonement and its application were *not* coextensive.

Defining Our Terms

Moving on from the annual Old Testament Day of Atonement, it is necessary to examine some of the terms used in the Bible to describe atonement as such. These terms are essential to understand in order to gain a satisfactory understanding of the subject.

^{2 2} This is the position of Herman Hoeksema and David Engelsma. Engelsma believes, "The apostle Paul... did not believe, nor did he ever preach, that God loved all men, was gracious to all men, and desired the salvation of all men, i.e., he did not believe or teach the well-meant offer of the gospel" - David Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism And The Call Of The Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 53.

^{3 3} Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 117.

^{4 4} C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 2:405–406.

Atonement

We start with the word “atonement” itself. We use the word “atonement” in its more general sense to refer to the saving work of Christ. It is wise to continue to employ the term in this general way because that is its most common meaning today. The particular word is a translation of the Old Testament word *kephar*, which means “to cover.” However, the term takes on the appropriate sense of “ransom by means of a substitute.” The “covering” of sin by the blood of a sacrifice (Lev. 4:3; 8:20–28) in effect took the sin away, hence allowing for reconciliation. (The terms which follow describe the different related aspects of the atonement.⁵)

Reconciliation

Reconciliation describes the bringing together of parties who were once at variance with one another. In its New Testament usage, it refers to the sinner whose mind is at enmity with God (Rom. 8:8), and who must be brought into good relations with God if he is to avoid eternal ruin. Thus, the Gospel ministry is a ministry of reconciliation (*katallasso*, 2 Cor. 5:18–20). But note, it is *we* who need to be reconciled to God, not He to us.⁶ The death of God’s Son is the sacrificial means whereby sinners are brought to God (Rom. 5:10). Not only that, but God has also reconciled the rift between Jews and Gentiles by making them “one new man” in Christ (Eph. 2:14–18). The New Testament insists that Christ’s blood alone is the source of our reconciliation with God (Matt. 26:28; 1 John 1:7, 1 Peter 1:18–19; Heb. 9:14; Rev. 1:5; 7:14).

Remission

Remission describes the removal of guilt from the sinner by the work of Christ. In the Old Testament the forgiveness of sins was anticipated through faith in the sacrificial offerings. But “the blood of bulls and of goats could never take away [*i.e.* remit] sin.” Therefore full remission for repentant sinners was achieved forever at Calvary (see Acts 5:31; 10:43).

Expiation

This word is not normally found in English versions (though see the old RSV). The word means to remove or remit sins by payment of a penalty. As such, it is closely associated with remission and reconciliation. Thus, the guilt of sin is expiated (removed) by Christ’s payment for sin on the Cross.

Propitiation

This crucial term has been subjected to a great deal of attack over the past century or so. From scholars like R. C. H. Lenski, and, most notably, C. H. Dodd, the doctrine of propitiation has suffered strong objection. The reason for this isn’t hard to discover. To “propitiate” means to appease or avert the wrath of God, and that is conceived by some to be a problem. Dodd argued that pagans placated, that is, “propitiated” their false gods by their sacrifices.

Surely the true God is not to be pacified in the same way! And since Dodd was the Chairman of the RSV translation, he made sure that the word “expiation” replaced “propitiation” in verses like Romans 3:25 and 1 John 2:2; 4:10. Thanks to the scholarship of Leon Morris and others, “propitiation” has been shown to be an essential teaching in both testaments.⁷ In fact, Morton H. Smith has said:

To deny the propitiatory character of the sacrifice of Christ is to deny the essence of the atonement. For the atonement means that Christ bore our sins. ... How can we think of him carrying our sins, without bearing the judgment for those sins? Sin and judgment are inseparable in the Scriptures. Thus to bear the sin is to bear the judgment. ... The wages of sin is death, and he paid the wage.⁸

These passages from Paul and John teach that Christ did not simply remove our guilt (expiation), He actually bore the wrath of God which ought to be visited upon us (propitiation). Otherwise, God could not be “just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom. 3:26). Nevertheless, although the propitiation has been made, the condition of its efficacy is individual trust. Paul brings this

⁵ Incidentally, the word “atonement” was coined by William Tyndale in his translation of 1525.

⁶ This is an important point as many Limited Atonement proponents believe that God must be reconciled to man. What transpires, then, is a purposive moving towards the elect, and the elect only.

⁷ See especially, Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956). Morris holds to Unlimited Atonement.

⁸ Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology* (Greenville: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), Vol. 1,386.

out very clearly in Romans 3:25 when he states concerning Christ, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [*hilasterion*] through faith in His blood ...”

Notice how the propitiation who is Jesus Christ, is received “*through faith in His blood.*” This indicates that the propitiation is available but not applied until the person trusts Christ. This is how John employs the term in his First Epistle. In 1 John 2:2, Christ is called “the propitiation (*hilasmos*) for our sins: and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world.” Again, in 1 John 4:10, [14] we read, “[God] sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (see also Heb. 2:17 where *hilasterion* is translated “reconciliation”). Millard Erickson sums up:

The numerous passages that speak of the wrath of God against sin are evidence that Christ’s death was necessarily propitiatory. We read of the wrath of God against sin in Romans 1:18; 2:5, 8; 4:15; 5:9; 9:22; 12:19; 13:4–5; Ephesians 2:3; 5:6; Colossians 3:6; and 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:16; 5:9. So then, Paul’s idea of the atoning death ... is not simply that it covers sin and cleanses from its corruption (expiation), but that the sacrifice also appeases a God who hates sin and is radically opposed to it (propitiation).⁹

Redemption

In the Old Testament, both men and unclean animals could be redeemed, that is, bought back by the payment of a price¹⁰ (cf. Exod. 13:11–15; Num. 18:15ff). When applied to Christ’s work of atonement, the word signifies the ransom or purchase of sinners that His sacrifice accomplished (Matt. 20:28; Luke 24:21; 1 Peter 1:18; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15; 2 Peter 2:1; Gal. 3:13; 4:5, *etc.*).

We should also take note of the fact that the ransom was Christ Himself (Rev. 1:5), and thus it was *substitutionary* in nature. Therefore we speak of the “vicarious”, that is, the substitutionary atonement of Christ.¹¹

The Intent Behind The Atonement

In this section our concern is not so much to prove outright that God intended the atoning work of Christ to cover the transgressions of all mankind. That will be attempted next when the Scriptures are examined which pertain to the extent of Christ’s work on the Cross. What will be done here is the consideration of what might be called the “logic of the atonement.” Limited Redemptionists (LR’s) place a lot of weight on arguments from logic (“If this,... then that”).

In fact, it would not be saying too much to state that the main force of their position is based, not principally on the exegesis of Scripture, but upon logical deductions. Instead of going straight to the texts, these brethren must first “set-up” a framework of logic whereby they can reinterpret the many problem texts they encounter (“So then, this cannot mean this,... It must mean that”). Below we shall reproduce the “set-up” arguments of the Limited Redemptionists themselves. This procedure will also help us to answer the question as to whether the atonement was intended by God to be limited to the elect only, or whether it also comprehended the non-elect.

How Limited Redemptionists Argue From Logic

In every book teaching Limited Atonement this writer has seen, the proponent of the scheme has begun his work by appealing to the supposed illogic of the Unlimited Redemptionist (UR) position, and

⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), Second Edition, 811.

¹⁰ Those in the Limited Atonement camp try to make much from the fact that *agorazo* (lit., “to buy in the market-place”), is used in a soteric sense of *Christians* in five of its occurrences (1 Cor. 6:29; 7:23; Rev. 5:9; 14:3–4). Hence they refuse Peter to use it differently in 2 Peter 2:1. They also assert that the main meaning of *agorazo* is, “freedom ... by payment of a price.” In reply we would wish to point out that just because Paul and John restrict the term to Christians, does not bind Peter to the same narrow usage.

Whether Christian or not, the point is that Christ bought sinners. In the second place, it is not true that the main thing intended by *agorazo* is freedom. According to D. H. Field, “In 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23 (cf. Rev. 14:3) the main point of emphasis is not freedom of the redeemed ..., but their new status as slaves of God, bought with a price to do his will. Hence the sheer effrontery of heretics who “deny the Master who bought them” (2 Pet. 2:1).” - in Colin Brown, Editor, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), Vol. 1, 268.

¹¹ Because of the sustained attacks by 5-Point Calvinists upon the plain sense of those verses that refer to redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation, we shall have to consider their arguments further on.

the logical and theological necessity of Christ only having died for the elect.¹² Here are their main arguments:

- i. The atonement was part of the eternal redemptive plan of the Triune God. The Father sent the Son to die for those whom the Spirit would regenerate. For the Son to have died for any more than God intended to save would introduce incoherence into the divine plan of salvation.¹³

Response: This is only the case if one accepts the improvable schemes called supralapsarianism or infralapsarianism. In both these versions of the order of God's eternal plan, the decree to elect and save some individuals comes prior to the decree to actually provide for that salvation. If the alternative sublapsarian scheme is adopted, then God decreed the provision of the atonement before decreeing the election of certain people. That Christ died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 4:14) means that people cannot say to God on judgment day that no atonement was made for them.

We are not given any information on just why God chose to efficaciously call an elect group, but at least He provided grounds for the general call for all to believe, as well as grounds for condemnation for unbelief. This scheme seems more logical to many people, especially as the general call loses all relevance if Christ did not die for all men. But as the lapsarian schemes cannot be substantiated, neither can the inferences made from them, and, therefore, this argument fails as a proof.

- ii. "To say that Christ's sacrificial death, which is the highest expression of divine love to man, applies equally to all men, and then observe that a multitude of mankind has and is entering a Christless eternity certainly does not magnify God's love or His wisdom."¹⁴

Response: This confuses the atoning work with the application of the atonement. To pick up on the terminology of LR John Murray, "Just because the redemption is accomplished, it does not mean that it is applied." We are plainly told that Jesus "loved" the Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10:21), but the context (w. 22–25) provides us with little encouragement that he was elect. The Lord even called Judas "Friend" (Matt. 26:50)! And did He not teach us to love our enemies (Matt. 5:43–45)? Would He command us to do something which He Himself would not do? Also, if Christ's blood had infinite worth, then it hardly magnifies either "God's love or His wisdom" for Him to be so sparing in the use of it like LR's insist He was. Finally, this argument presupposes that regeneration precedes faith, which, we shall argue, is contrary both to Scripture and reason.

- iii. Christ's atonement did not merely make men hypothetically savable, but actually *accomplished* the salvation of all those whom the Father gave him.¹⁵

Response: There is no logical necessity attached to this. We have already seen that LR's confuse the atonement with its application. What is more, to say that the atonement *actually* saves the elect is to make saving faith obsolete - since they were saved before they believed. It would also imply that none of the elect were ever "in Adam" (1 Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:12ff.), since they were in reality saved at Calvary before they were born. If it be objected that the elect were potentially saved at the Cross but not really saved until they believed, we would agree.¹⁶ But this would separate the

¹² ¹² E. Y. Mullins charged particularists with working from a false premise (God's "mere will") and arriving at the false conclusion of Limited Atonement by employing "a rigid logic." He called this "a striking example of the abstract method." - Edgar Young Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, n.d.), 339. To put it another way, they come to conclusions prior to doing exegesis.

¹³ ¹³ Gary D. Long, *Definite Atonement* (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1977), 15, 49.

¹⁴ ¹⁴ Long, 9. In another place Long avers, "If the writer were asked: 'What is the strongest support for definite atonement?', he would unhesitatingly answer, 'the eternity and immutability of God's special distinguishing love.'" - Ibid. 59. Note how Long's best support is drawn from inferential arguments from other doctrines instead of exegesis of actual passages.

¹⁵ ¹⁵ O. Palmer Robertson, "Definite Atonement," - R. C. Sproul, Jr. (ed.), *After Darkness, Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology* (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 2003), 99–100. This book is a collection of "Essays in honor of R. C. Sproul."

¹⁶ ¹⁶ This seems to be Tom Wells' reasoning in his book, *A Price For A People* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1992), 45–47. Referring to Romans 8:29–30, he writes, "Once the price of redemption was paid, the redemption was as good as done.... In a sense we were saved at the cross - there our salvation was made certain. In another sense we were saved when we believed - then our salvation became real to us." But Romans 8:29–30 refers to God's eternal plan, which is supra-temporal, and not to a specific historical event. Wells reads more into the passage than is there. Also, unless one is prepared to teach that we are *actually glorified now*, his illustration fails. Paul's use of the aorist tense in the passage should be seen from God's eternal perspective, not our historical one. Moreover, the argument ignores the fact that we were in the world, and

atonement from its application, which would in turn mean that the atonement, in and of itself, did not actually save anyone, and so would destroy their argument.

- iv. The implication is that a person must first be regenerated before they exercise faith in Christ. For unless this is so, faith is something we do, and so is our contribution to salvation.¹⁷

Response: If a person is regenerated prior to believing, then how can a person be justified by or through faith? Faith becomes, not the condition of receiving eternal life (John 1:12; 3:16, 36), but the *result* of having already received it.¹⁸ Although the New Testament teaches that faith must be exercised, it does not do anything itself other than receive. And nobody receives a gift and then brags about giving it to themselves. The inference is insubstantial.

- v. This also means that saving faith is a gift of God subsequent (at least logically) to being born-again. It is incongruous to teach that faith is a gift and yet to affirm that Christ died to save all men without exception. If He died for all, then why is not faith given to all?

Response: If (iv) above is untrue, then this point becomes null and void. In addition, "faith is a gift," it could be given by the Holy Spirit prior to regeneration. Cornelius in Acts 10 might be a case in point. On the question as to why the condition of salvation (*i.e.* faith) is not revealed to all, we reply that God has His reasons. Perhaps, among other things, God had in view all the infants who were unable to believe but who were, nonetheless, saved. Perhaps not. We are not forced into laying down dogma where the Bible is silent. The point is, passages such as Acts 10 teach us to use care in the application of our logic.

For another thing, Reformed writers do not abide by their premise that before regeneration the sinner is a spiritual corpse totally unable to turn to God. The respected Reformed theologian J. I. Packer serves as a good example:

And to the further question still: how am I to go about believing on Christ and repenting, if I have no natural ability to do these things? [we answer]: look to Christ, speak to Christ, cry to Christ, just as you are; confess your sin, your impenitence, your unbelief, and cast yourself on His mercy; ask Him to give you a new heart, working in you true repentance and firm faith; ask Him to take away your evil heart of unbelief and to write His law within you,... Turn to Him and trust Him the best you can, and pray for grace to turn and trust more thoroughly; use the means of grace expectantly, looking to Christ to draw near to you as you draw near to Him;¹⁹ watch pray, read and hear God's Word, worship and commune with God's people, and so continue till you know in yourself beyond doubt that you are indeed a changed being, a penitent believer, and the new heart which you desired has been put within you.²⁰

"were by nature children of wrath, even as others." (Eph. 2:3). Nobody is actually saved until they receive Christ by faith (John 1:12; 3:36).

¹⁷ ¹⁷ Long, 40.

¹⁸ ¹⁸ It will be objected that the order of salvation is logical and not chronological. But this is open to question. For if it were true, there could be no objection to placing faith before regeneration, for there is nothing illogical about such an order. Acts 10 (the conversion of Cornelius) plainly shows that an individual can seek the true God (through the convicting agency of the Spirit) before being regenerated. Long, to his credit, admits that the *ordo salutis* may have a chronological aspect (Ibid., 54 n.6).

¹⁹ ¹⁹ In line with his doctrine of Limited Atonement, Packer ought to have added that this expectation will be futile for anybody other than for one of the elect. If any individual Packer is speaking to is not one of the elect for whom alone Christ died, then urging such a person to "use the means of grace expectantly" is to do none other than to raise within him or her a false hope.

²⁰ ²⁰ J. I. Packer, "Introductory Essay" to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 21. This is a typical statement by LR's. We feel like inquiring: "If it is not some kind of faith, then just what is it in unbelievers which enables them to follow Packer's exhortation?" Contrast James White's words concerning the will of the unregenerate: "... man is not *capable* of 'cooperating' anymore than a corpse is able to help in its own resurrection... Unregenerate man is fully capable of understanding the facts of the gospel: he is simply incapable, due to his corruption and enmity, to submit himself to that gospel. And he surely responds to God every day: negatively, in rebellion and self-serving sinfulness." - James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom* (Amityville: Calvary Press Publishing, 2000), 100, 101. (Emphasis his). Nearly all UR's will agree with White on much of the above. However, we are here dealing with the LR's claim that regeneration must come before faith (which White goes on to assert), and in the face of this teaching, it simply makes no sense at all to speak in the terms that Packer does.

vi. The atonement and the intercessory ministry of Christ must be co -extensive, which is how Scripture represents them.²¹

Response: Did not Christ intercede for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34)?²² Are we expected to believe that they all came to salvation? Is intercession to be confined solely to an actual sacrificial act? LR's must prove that it is for this argument to have any force. But if it is, then what is one to do with the LR's prize proof-text in John 17:9 ("I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours"), which was prayed before Christ's arrest? Besides, as Lightner points out, "Until the elect believe they do not enjoy the benefits that accrue from Christ's work in intercession. The extent and benefit of intercession is to the believer only."²³

vii. "[A] substitution which does not substitute is not a substitution. ... If the sins of those who die in unbelief were imputed to Christ as their substitute, why is their destiny eternal punishment?"²⁴

Response: A bone fide substitution may be offered without being accepted. Were not the children of Israel given the responsibility of applying the atoning blood of the Passover offering on the lintels and the side-posts of their own doors (Exod. 12:22–23)? God provided a substitute, but it was left up to the people to make proper use of it.²⁵ And we have seen that this was the case at the Day of Atonement. (See above)

viii. "Unless Christ recover what He comes to save (cf. Luke 19:10) He fails."²⁶

Response: True, but this ignores the context, where Zaccheus has just responded in faith to Christ. As Bock has said, "This passage again stresses Jesus' initiative to seek the lost and to proclaim salvation for those who respond with faith."²⁷ The truth is that no one who comes to Christ shall be lost (John 6:37). But Christ must see faith before He can save. Owen seems to forget that Zaccheus climbed a tree, so eager was he to see Christ. Many others did not believe on Him, though He warned them about their unbelief (cf. Luke 13:1–5). We see no argument here for Limited Atonement.

There are corollaries to these, but these are the kinds of arguments offered in support of a particular atonement. We believe they are founded upon unsubstantiated or false assumptions. In addition, there are a number of other objections worth listing:

- i. If Christ did not atone for the sins of the non-elect, then it follows that He does not love them (granting any definition of love worthy of the name).²⁸
- ii. If the atonement was limited, then surely the non-elect were fulfilling the will of God by not believing in Christ. How then, could they be held culpable for fulfilling God's immutable will?
- iii. Limited Redemptionists insist that even the elect's sin of unbelief was covered by the atonement.²⁹ But if the unbelief of the elect was actually dealt with at the Cross, wouldn't that mean that they need not believe on the Savior? Chafer put it very well: "... if Christ bore the sin of unbelief along with other sins of the elect, then no elect sinner in his unregenerate estate is

²¹ ²¹ "Most importantly, we have to see that the work of Christ on the cross is directly related to other elements of His divine work of redemption, especially to His work as Mediator and Intercessor." - James R. White, *The Potter's Freedom*, 235. See also Owen, who says, "He did not suffer for them, and then refuse to intercede for them," 64 (cf. 74–75).

²² ²² Owen tries to escape this by making Christ's prayer His prayer, "as a private person." - *op. cit.*, 84. It is hard for us to think of a prayer from the Savior on the Cross (!) the prayer of "a private person."

²³ ²³ Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, Revised Edition, 1998), 102.

²⁴ ²⁴ Long, 33.

²⁵ ²⁵ Owen, *op. cit.*, 88, ties in John 1:29 with the Paschal lamb, which was offered for the people of Israel - a type (says Owen) of the elect. He does not see that such a connection disproves his attempt to make the sacrifice and the actual substitution one and the same (see also vi above).

²⁶ ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁷ ²⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1523.

²⁸ ²⁸ It is true that some LR's speak of God having a temporal love for the non-elect (see John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 2002, 417-420). But it is difficult to take this seriously when back of it is an eternal plan of pretension. John Owen is more forthright: "We deny that all mankind are the object of that love of God which moved him to send his Son to die; God having 'made some for the day of evil,' Prov. xvi. 4; 'hated them before they were born,' Rom. ix. 11, 13; 'before of old ordained them to condemnation,' Jude 4; being 'fitted to destruction,' Rom. ix. 22; 'made to be taken and destroyed,' 2 Pet. 11.12; 'appointed to wrath,' 1 Thess. v. 9; to 'go to their own place,' Acts i. 25." - *The Death of Death*, 115. Owen teaches double predestination further on in the book (133).

²⁹ ²⁹ Long, 33–34, 49–50. See also Owen, 62.

subject to any condemnation, nor does he require to be forgiven or justified in the sight of God."³⁰

The Extent of the Atonement

Now we are ready to study the extent of the atonement, and the Bible passages used by both sides. We shall start this part of the discussion by reminding ourselves of what is taught by Five Point Calvinists.

Limited Atonement

The main thrust of adherents of this view, it seems to us, can be summed up in this statement: "Christ's saving work was limited in that it was designed to save some and not others, but it was not limited in value for it was of infinite worth and would have secured salvation for everyone if this had been God's intention."³¹

From this quotation we may make the following deductions:

- i) Christ came to save only a certain number of souls (the elect).
- ii) Therefore, His Blood was shed only for the elect, not for the non-elect.
- iii) Although Christ's sacrifice was of infinite worth, God chose not to save all souls by it.
- iv) His death secured salvation for the elect, it did not just make it possible. It was a "Definite Atonement."

This fourth point needs elaboration for it is the very crux of their argument. Limited Redemptionists believe that the Cross is the *only* means whereby the elect are saved. Listen to R. C. Sproul's objection:

If faith is a condition for God's justice to be satisfied, then the atonement, in itself, is not sufficient to satisfy the demands of God's justice. In itself, the atonement is not "sufficient" for anyone. ... Full satisfaction is not rendered until... a person adds to the atonement his faith...³²

We have deliberately chosen this quote in order to demonstrate how an adroit Limited Redemptionist argues. Again, we will unpack his meaning:

- i. Only Christ's atonement satisfied God's justice and so actually *secures* salvation.
- ii. If one adds faith in order to receive that atonement, then obviously Christ's death was not enough. Faith must be added (*i.e.* the Cross + Faith). This makes faith a work.
- iii. Therefore, faith is *not* a condition for *receiving* the benefits of Christ's death.

If the logic of this position is followed, it is not easy to see how an LR can hold to justification *by* faith.³³ The fact that they do shows up a problem with their theology at this point. Robert Lightner's comment is insightful: "The strict Calvinist position which insists that Christ's death of itself saved the elect makes faith, ... virtually unnecessary."³⁴ It needs to be emphasized that this position on saving faith, coupled with the belief that faith comes after regeneration, constitutes *the* assumption of all five-point Calvinists. Without it, their entire soteriology comes to pieces. Therefore, we shall be returning to the subject below.

^{30 30} Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1997 reprint in 4 volumes), 3:198. This being so, it is hard for those who hold to Definite Atonement to avoid the error of Eternal Justification, which contradicts the passages used by LR's to prove their scheme.

^{31 31} David N. Steele and Curtis C. Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism: Defined, Defended, Documented* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1963), 39. N.B. Later in this paper it will be necessary to show that the so-called "Four Point" Calvinists are not consistent when they retain the remaining definitions employed by the Five Point school. Five pointers are correct in saying that this is an untenable position both theologically and philosophically.

^{32 32} R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unlimited* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), 166.

^{33 33} Ferguson gives a good definition of justification. Justification "involves both a negative aspect (pardon for sins) and a positive aspect (being counted righteous by God)" A bit further on he writes that, "faith is the appropriate instrument of justification because in its very nature faith is *active in receiving* Christ, but noncontributory (in that sense 'passive' or, perhaps better, 'receptive') in relation to the justification we receive." - Sinclair B. Ferguson, "Sola Fide," in R. C. Sproul, Jr. (ed.), *After Darkness, Light: Distinctives of Reformed Theology* (Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 2003), 74, 83 (emphasis mine). The question arises, "If Christ is received by faith, how can it logically antecede regeneration? Surely the basis of regeneration is receiving Christ?" It seems absurd to say, as Ferguson does, that faith is the instrument of salvation. How can faith be the instrument of that which logically (or chronologically) precedes it? Regeneration causes faith according to LR's.

^{34 34} Robert P. Lightner, *Sin, The Savior, and Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1991), 113.

Scriptures Most Often Used to Support Limited Atonement

Foremost among the passages enlisted in support of Limited Atonement are those passages where Christ is specifically said to die for His people, *etc.* They are: Matthew 1:21; 20:28; 26:28; Mark 10:45; 14:24; John 10:11, 14–18; 15:13; 17:9; Acts 20:28; Romans 5:8–9; 8:32; Galatians 1:3–4; 2:20; Ephesians 5:25–26; Titus 2:14; Hebrews 7:25; 10:14; 1 Peter 2:24; 3:18, and others.

The common thread passing through all of these Scriptures is that Christ died for His elect e.g. “us”; “His sheep”; *the Church*”; “many”). *But it should not be missed that there is no text of Scripture that explicitly teaches Limited Atonement. The question is, are we to take these verses as implying that Jesus died only for “His Church,” “His sheep,” “us,” “the elect”?* There is no good reason to grant this assumption. We are convinced that to arrive at such an opinion one must bring to the text a pre-packaged theological system, and so a premeditated theological hermeneutic, with which to bend unwilling passages to fit the logic of Limited Atonement.

Before entering upon a critique of Limited Atonement we will outline the other position; that of Unlimited Atonement. This is the position held by moderate Calvinists and Arminians.

Unlimited Atonement

Those who hold to Unlimited Atonement³⁵ say that Scripture clearly teaches that Christ died for all humanity: Matthew 11:28; John 1:29; 3:16–17; Romans 5:6–8; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 19; 1 Timothy 1:15; 2:6; Titus 2:11; Hebrew 2:9; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:14; Revelation 22:17.

The Bible plainly says that Christ died for “sinners,” “the lost,” “the ungodly,” “the world,” *etc.* Unless only the elect qualify as belonging to this group (which none would sanction, otherwise Christ need not have died for them), these verses ought to be taken to mean that Christ died for *all* lost sinners. After all, Adam plunged the whole of his posterity into sin and judgment (Rom. 5:12, 18).

Chafer defines this position so: “Men of this group [*i.e.* Moderate Calvinists] believe that Christ died actually and fully for all men.... They contend that the death of Christ of itself saves no man, but that it does render all men savable; that salvation is wrought of God alone, and at the time the individual believes.”³⁶

Crucial to the UR view is the belief that the benefits of the atonement are not efficient until an individual believes. Lightner adds: “It is our conviction that... Christ died to provide a basis of salvation for all men. To those who are elect, and who therefore believe in Christ, this provision secures for them their eternal salvation *when they believe*. For those who do not believe ... the provisions exist as a basis of condemnation.”³⁷

Once more, let us break down these assertions:

- i. Christ’s death atoned for the sins of all men.³⁸
- ii. Nevertheless, His atonement actually does not *save* anyone, it renders them savable potentially.
- iii. The benefits of Christ’s death are only appropriated when one believes the Gospel.
- iv. For those who refuse to believe, the fact that their sins were atoned for is the basis on which God can *justly* condemn them.

The New Testament expresses these truths in the same way:

For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe (1 Tim. 4:10; cf. 1 John 2:2)

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between

³⁵ ³⁵ It ought to be unnecessary to say that just because something is believed by Arminians does not mean it is untrue.

Although the present writer has little sympathy with Arminianism as a whole, he believes that they are correct in holding to Unlimited Atonement, though he differs with their reasons for believing it.

³⁶ ³⁶ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3:184–185.

³⁷ ³⁷ Lightner, *Sin, The Savior, and Salvation*, 112. (italics mine)

³⁸ ³⁸ Lest it be thought that Unlimited Redemption leads to the doctrine that all mankind will be saved because Christ died for them, it should be repeated that a person is saved “through faith” (Eph. 2:8), not independently of it.

God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Tim. 2:3–6; cf. 2 Peter 3:9)

But to as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them who believe on his name (John 1:12; cf. Acts 16:30–31)

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:17–18; cf. 2 Peter 2:2)

The testimony of the Bible is unequivocal. Christ's atonement was for all mankind.

Redemption, Propitiation, Reconciliation: Do They Imply Definite Atonement?

A number of works by LR's try to make the case that the doctrines of Redemption, Propitiation, and Reconciliation, imply, or even necessitate, a Definite Atonement. Both Gary Long³⁹ and Tom Wells expend much paper on this. Although we have defined these and other terms above, we shall have to examine the main arguments of these writers before looking at the problems with their overall position.

Wells sums up the view of those who hold to Limited Atonement: "When I ask, 'For whom did Christ die?' I mean, 'For whom was His death a redemption and a reconciliation and a propitiation?'"⁴⁰ Wells gives his reader two choices. If "Christ did atone for the sins of each and every man who ever lived," it follows that:

- "1. All men will be saved by Christ's death, or
- "2. Christ redeemed and reconciled and turned the wrath of God away from men who will nevertheless be lost forever. In other words, His redemption will not redeem them, His reconciliation will not reconcile them to God, and His propitiation will not turn God's wrath away from men."⁴¹

Option 1 would be true if the atonement actually secured the salvation of all men, which is not the case. Option 2 is true of those men who reject the atoning work of Christ and who will not believe on Him. LR's cannot bring themselves to believe that Christ's crosswork can clear away the judicial obstacles to salvation but not actually save unless a person believes. But the uniform teaching of the New Testament is that for a person to be saved, they must believe *first* (e.g. John 1:12; 3:16–18, 36; 6:35, 40; 7:38–39; 11:25, etc). Do not the following verses make this certain?:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth (Rom. 1:16)

But these were written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name (John 20:31)

... whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins (Acts 10:43)

Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood ... that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:25–26)

... it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe (1 Cor. 1:21)

Limited Redemptionists would have us believe that redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation secured freedom, friendship, and the turning away of wrath for God's elect (we might call this Option 3). But if faith is the condition of receiving the benefits of eternal life (John 20:31), remission of sins (Acts 10:43), propitiation (Rom. 3:25–26; cf. John 8:24), and salvation (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:21), how,

³⁹ ³⁹ James White thinks that Long's arguments are compelling. See *The Potter's Freedom*, 250, 282.

⁴⁰ ⁴⁰ Wells, *A Price For A People*, 48.

⁴¹ ⁴¹ *Ibid.* Wells goes on to exclaim on page 50, "Christ's death did not 'create opportunities,' it established certainties." The truth is that God's Decree established certainties, while the Atonement is instrumental in the administering of the Decree to both the elect and the non-elect. That is why the atonement had to have the whole of humanity (elect and non-elect) as its referents.

we may ask, can faith *follow* these benefits, logically or otherwise? But that is exactly what has to happen for definite atonement to be true. That is why LR's cannot admit that faith is a condition of salvation. In that case, we should like to know how Paul can implore the Corinthians to, "be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20), when the elect among them already were?

Part 2, The Extent of the Atonement, By Paul Martin Henebury

Abstract

Intimately entwined within the question as to the extent of Christ's death on the Cross is the discussion concerning what this event actually achieved. In other words, what was its purpose? The author proves, by means of logic and a proper exegesis of the relevant passages, that Jesus died for every individual, yet that does not inevitably lead to the conclusion that all will be saved.

In the last issue of the *CTJ*, the author defined the terms, considered a few Bible passages, and explained Limited Atonement. In this article he examines some passages that defend Unlimited Atonement.

Letting God Speak Plainly

Reformed Theology has been rightly criticized for its forcing unwilling scriptures to say something quite other than what they appear to say. They revert to a theologically biased hermeneutic when it suits them to do so. Below we shall list some of the most straightforward verses pertaining to the atonement, verses which pose real difficulties for Limited Redemptionists (LR's) if they are allowed their normal meanings. Our method here will be to give the text, then give the plain sense, and then compare it with the novel interpretations offered by the limited redemptionists.

1 Timothy 4:10

"For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."

In this text we see that God is identified as the Savior of all men in a general sense, but of believers in particular. The only way this could be true is if *provision* was made for the salvation for every man, but the *application* comes only to them that believe.¹ This further shores up the thought of universal redemption taught throughout the Pastoral Epistles. Five-Point Calvinists must reject the plain sense of this and other verses in order that they may keep limited atonement: For instance, in 1 Timothy 4:10, Reformed interpreters have tended to construe the Greek word for "Savior" (*soter*) as meaning "Preserver." Not only does this seem like a forced interpretation at first sight, it becomes a very suspicious one when it is understood that the word never means "Preserver" elsewhere in the NT! It takes great skill and a fertile imagination to make this verse say anything other than what it says. But here is John Gill to show us how it is done:

To say that Christ is the Saviour of all men, with respect to the impetration [*i.e.* "procurement by entreaty"] of salvation for them, though not with respect to the application of it to them, is a distinction which must, in part, make the death of Christ in vain. ... The words are to be understood of providential goodness and temporal salvation; which all men have a share in...God the Father and not Christ, is here called... *the Saviour of all men*, that is, *the preserver of all men...and especially them that believe.*²

We submit that Gill's interpretation shows too clearly how LR's come to the Scriptures with their minds already made up as to what the Holy Spirit can and can not say.

¹ Erickson expresses our opinion well: "This is a particularly interesting and significant verse, since it brackets as being saved by God both believers and others, but indicates that a greater degree of salvation attaches to the former group." - *Christian Theology*, 846.

² John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, (Evansville: Sovereign Grace Book Club, Reprint, n.d.), 52. Italics in original.

2 Peter 2:1

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.”

In this verse the Lord is said to have “bought” false teachers. These people are lost, as the chapter makes clear. How then could Christ have bought [*agorazein*] them? Long answers that *agorazein* should here be forced to mean “created”³ instead of “bought.” He has persuaded himself that, “Peter intentionally alludes to the phrase “thy father that hath bought [created] thee” in Deuteronomy 32:17.”⁴ Long reasons:

Therefore, the point that Peter seems to be making in referring to Deuteronomy 32:6 in 2 Peter 2:1 is that just as God had sovereignly acquired Israel out of Egypt... in order to make her a covenant nation spiritually and nationally because He created her for this purpose, so Christ...acquired the false teachers...in order to make them a part of the covenant nation of God in the flesh [*i.e.* the Church] because He had created them...for the purpose of bringing glory to Himself through their foreordination unto condemnation ...”⁵

If Long is to be followed in his interpretation of the verse, then the same God who warns Christians about these false teachers (1 John 4:1–3; Jude 3–5), is the very one who is responsible for introducing them! Thus, God is set against Himself! We think we have a right to demur, and to agree with John Calvin, who simply comments: “They, then, who throw off the bridle, and give themselves up to all kinds of licentiousness, are not unjustly said to deny Christ by whom they have been redeemed.”⁶

2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

The verse could hardly exhibit more pristine clarity. God does not want any human being to go to hell. Hell was made for the devil and his angels (Matt. 25:41), not for men. But He will allow sinners to perish if they persist in their willful hatred of Him. There are very many things that happen that are not according to God’s perfect will, but He nonetheless permits them to occur (*e.g.* Jer. 19:5). For all that, the LR cannot let it stand. R. C. Sproul follows Owen in his handling of the text. His case rests upon the restrictive term “us” in the verse. The “us” are believers. So, “[since 2 Peter is written by a Christian believer to Christian believers and for Christian believers,”⁷ the true meaning (in our paraphrase), is that, “God is longsuffering to the elect, not willing that the elect should perish, but that all the elect come to repentance.” To put it another way, Peter was assuring his Christian readers that He did not wish those He had elected to perish. Instead, God wished all those whom He had already elected to come to repentance! That is, at the hands of a Five-Point Calvinist, 2 Peter 3:9 is turned into a tautology. Quite why such a non-profundity as this would be allowed entrance into the Canonical Scriptures is hard to conceive.⁸

Matthew 23:37

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!”

^{3 3} This writer could not find anyone who thought “created” was a proper translation of *agorazo*. Not BAGD, Kittel, Brown, Cremer, Spicq, *etc.*

^{4 4} Long, *Definite Atonement*, 76. We think the allusion to be a product of Long’s wishful thinking.

^{5 5} *Ibid.*, 77.

^{6 6} John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XXII: The Second Epistle of Peter*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, Reprint 1981), 393. There is scarcely any commentator, if any, who follows Long. In addition, one ought to give attention to Hebrews 10:29: “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?” In this verse the writer says that “the blood of the covenant” *sanctified* a person who goes to hell.

^{7 7} R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 170. Of course, this same thing could be said for basically the whole NT. What is this supposed to prove? Does Sproul honestly believe the NT was only written for Christians?

^{8 8} Calvin sides with unlimited redemptionists on the passage.

The meaning of this verse is as straightforward as anything could be. Christ is lamenting over Jerusalem - the city of the Great King, that should have known Him, but was to be the scene of His decease. The will of God for this city as expressed by Jesus Himself: "How often *would I...*, but ye would not." According to the Lord He wanted to save them. Yet He permitted their willful rejection of His Person. As such, this verse reinforces the natural reading of 2 Peter 3:9 (see above), and so shows the intent behind the atonement, at least unless one holds to limited atonement. In which case, the verse must be doctored. James White's efforts will suffice for an example:

Who, then, is "Jerusalem"? It is assumed by Arminian writers that "Jerusalem" represents individual Jews who are, therefore, capable of resisting the work and will of Christ. But upon what warrant do we leap from "Jerusalem" to "individual Jews"? The context would lead us to conclude that this is to be taken in a universal sense. Jesus is condemning the Jewish leaders, and it is to them that He refers here. ... A vitally important point here is that the ones the Lord desired to gather are *not* the ones who "were not willing"! ... The "children" of the leaders would be the Jews who were *hindered* by the Jewish leaders from hearing Christ.⁹

Is it true that the context demands that one understand "Jerusalem" to refer to the Jewish leadership? There are easily as many commentators who think that "Jerusalem" is a metonymy for the whole nation, as those who confine it to the religious leadership. Many of them notice the change in mood from excoriation to lamentation.¹⁰ This interpretation is enforced by the verses that follow. Jesus' prediction of coming doom best fits with the view of the city's inhabitants generally. LR's tend to ignore Matthew 23:38–39. For another thing, and citing John Gill with approval, White holds that the "children" (*i.e.*, the Jewish inhabitants minus their leaders) were, in fact, willing to come to Christ. But this causes a problem surely? For if they were willing to hear Christ, and He was willing to save them, then *why were not all of them saved*¹¹ Thus, the problem presented in the verse is only shifted, not avoided.

1 John 2:2

"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

John states that Christ is the propitiation for two groups of people, the believers, and "the whole world." (*kosmos*). The *kosmos* is the evil world system that has pitted itself against God and His revelation. This is how John uses this word five more times in the very same chapter (2:15–17). He continues to use "world" in this sense in 3:1, 13, and 17.

Actually, the fact is that this is uniformly how John uses *kosmos*, and the only reason it is objected to in 1 John 2:2 (and 4:14), is because it's normative meaning explodes limited atonement.¹² Space does not permit any interaction with LR interpretations. As usual, they have to boil the verse down into a trite statement of fact; that Christ is not just the propitiation for the Christians reading John's epistle, but also for Christians the world over. As if the Apostle would express himself in such a clumsy way!

1 John 4:14

"And we have seen and do testify that the father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world."

Notice how in the context John uses the term "world." In 4:1 he writes: "... because many false prophets are gone out into the world."; in verse 3 we read that, "this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world." In verse 4 John writes: "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." The fifth verse says: "They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them." In verse 17 it says: "because as he is, so are we in this world." On into chapter 5 and verses 4–5: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world,... Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?"

^{9 9} *The Potter's Freedom*, 137–138. White adds Matthew 23:13 as proof. Italics in original.

^{10 10} For example, Hagner agrees that the Pharisees and Scribes were in view, but thinks the verse "is directed primarily to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. Luke 19:41–44)." - Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 33b, 680. Hagner also thinks Jesus' lament includes these religious leaders.

^{11 11} "Gill says that only temporary protection was in Christ's mind. - *The Cause of God and Truth*, 28. Norman Geisler responds to this view by stating that, "it forces us to believe that God's concern for the temporal conditions of all men is greater than that of His concern for their eternal souls!" - Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 200. Some of Geisler's criticisms in this book are telling, even though we think the book has its fair share of problems.

^{12 12} Gary Long completely overlooks John's use of *kosmos* in 1, 2, and 3 John in his appendix dealing with this verse.

Finally, in 5:19: "And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." The only place that it cannot sustain the same meaning (according to people like Owen, Gill, Long, etc.) is in 4:14. There the meaning magically changes. We submit that unless limited atonement is first presupposed, or the contexts are ignored, nobody would interpret "the whole world" in 1 John 2:2, and "world" in 1 John 4:14 as synonyms for the elect only.

1 Timothy 2:4–6

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

The key word here is the meaning of the word "all." Three main interpretations have been given to it:

- A. All means everyone.
- B. All means all of the elect.
- C. All means all of every sphere (all classes).

Positions B and C are related. The latter is just a more nuanced view which better fits the context. B is too blunt and crude an interpretation to pass muster, although some still cling to it. C basically says that since the word "all" is used to mean "all kinds of in places (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:22), it can and does mean that here. But there is much that is wrong in this interpretation:

- i. The word "all" is used in a universalistic sense (i.e. "all without exception") in the context. Even the command to pray "for kings and for all in authority" (v. 1) is universalistic. Paul does not say "all elect kings and elect rulers."
- ii. The plain sense makes sense. And it matches other verses. But the LR interpretation again assails the perspicuity of Scripture by a limitation on the word "all."
- iii. As NT scholar I. Howard Marshall has pointed out, 1 Timothy 2:6 is a partial quotation of Mark 10:45 where Jesus says that He came "to give His life a ransom for many." In the 1 Timothy passage, Paul swaps all for many, a strange substitution if he believed in limited atonement. Further, the Hebrew word for many "often has the sense of a great many as opposed to a few. ... Thus "all" is the appropriate paraphrase."¹³ And since Jesus is citing Isaiah 53:11–12¹⁴ in Mark 10:45, Paul would naturally have that meaning in mind. Marshall shows this to be typical of Paul by comparing how he alternates "all" with "many" in Romans 5:12–19.¹⁵ (Interestingly, Calvin supports this interpretation of "many" in his commentaries).

We conclude with this opinion of Gordon Fee in his commentary:

There is ... a long history of theological urgency...that has been generated by this sentence [i.e. 2:3–401. Much of it stems from an Augustinian-Calvinist view of election that appears to be at odds with the plain sense of the text...Much of this discussion has been carried on quite apart from Paul's context... He suspects that sometimes, "an author's theology has been already in hand before approaching the text, and the discussion has been a kind of skirmish with it. All of this applies to v. 6 as well."¹⁶

Our conclusion is that these passages speak powerfully and unequivocally of unlimited atonement. The Reformed responses to these texts (where one can find them) usually require a pre-

¹³ I. Howard Marshall, "Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles," in Clark H. Pinnock, General editor, *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 59. We do not recommend this book! However, though Arminian (and sometimes Open Theist) in orientation, this book contains some trenchant criticisms of Five-Point Calvinism.

¹⁴ There is no room here to address Isaiah 53, but the key verse is verse 6. The verse is categorical. The "all we" of the first clause (which must refer to all Israel at least), is answered by the "us all" of the second clause. Thus, the prophecy proclaims that the iniquity of all people (or all Israel), was laid upon Him. Erickson thinks this verse is difficult to get around. He states, "It is difficult to this passage and not conclude that just as everyone sins, everyone is also atoned for." - *Christian Theology*, 847.

¹⁵ Long (16–19), tries to make the elect "the Seed of the woman," and the non-elect "the seed of the serpent." But the Seed of the woman is Christ, not Christians (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 3:16 cf. Gen. 22:17b). Besides, has he forgotten Ephesians 2:2–3; 5:8? In his zeal to defend his pet doctrine, he is veering dangerously close to eternal justification (the teaching that the elect were never really "in Adam").

¹⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), New International Biblical Commentary Series, 68.

acceptance of Definitive Atonement before they can be swallowed. In other words, the question is begged before the verse is examined. This amounts to deductive theologizing replacing inductive exegesis. The fact is that Unlimited Redemptionists (UR's) are not forced into fanciful re-interpretations of straightforward passages that don't fit their theory. Neither do they make "problem texts" out of plain language statements by the apostolic authors. They can comfortably include all of the passages enlisted by LR's into their broader system. The same definitely cannot be said for the LR's.¹⁷

Dispensationalism, Limited Atonement, and Hermeneutics

We hope that by this stage in the study we have shown how those who believe in Limited atonement must find recourse to a theologically charged hermeneutic so as to navigate around those texts which teach both that faith goes before regeneration and that Christ died for all mankind.¹⁸ It is this playing fast and loose with hermeneutics that ought to prevent every dispensationalist from becoming a Five-Point Calvinist. Gary Long admits that he employs theological approach (using the "covenant of grace") to these texts.¹⁹

For a dispensationalist to permit a grammatical-historical-*theological* hermeneutic in order to explain such passages is tantamount to denying the hermeneutical foundation upon which dispensationalism is built — and thus, amounts to nothing less than a tacit denial of the entire dispensationalist system of theology. As *Five-Point Calvinists define them*, the senses given to each individual part of TULIP (minus Limited atonement) cannot be swallowed whole. As Reformed theologians use Total depravity they have in mind the view that because the unregenerate is a spiritual corpse it is impossible for him to believe the Gospel *unless he is first regenerated?*²⁰ But if regeneration precedes faith then it stands to reason that particular redemption is true, for the atonement would only comprehend those to whom faith is given and are thus regenerated.²¹ John Owen would be right when he states, "Salvation, indeed, is bestowed conditionally; but faith, which is the condition, is absolutely procured."²² If Christ's death procured our faith we ought to see the logic and relinquish any belief that Christ died for the non-elect, for otherwise they would be saved; which is to say, elect!

Likewise is it the case with their definition of Unconditional election. Now, no member of the CTS will doubt that God elects certain individuals unconditionally to salvation (2 Thess. 2:13). But once depravity has been defined in such terms as the above, election becomes *the basis for definite atonement*. For example, regarding Rom. 8:31–34 one writer says: "These are *family* promises, given to those whom God chose on the basis of His own mercy and grace from all eternity. And from this we can see testimony to the particular redemption worked out in Christ."²³

White here reads particular redemption into particular election. And on the basis of his view of the atonement he is right to. This is why we had better get our definition of the atonement directly from the Scriptures and define unconditional election accordingly.

Again, we believe that God will infallibly bring to salvation His elect (John 6:37, 44), but we should not think that Irresistible grace demands that a person is born-again before he believes, either logically or any other wise.

¹⁷ ¹⁷ This does not stop them trying. For instance, Long boldly claims that, "there are scriptural statements ... which cannot, by any fair process of interpretation, be reconciled with the doctrine of universal redemption." - *Definite Atonement*, 32. Elsewhere he calls for "consistent principles of biblical interpretation." (60). But what he means by this is theological interpretation (cf. 68). Long approaches his "problem texts" (his name for 1 John 2:2; cf. 92), with definite atonement already lodged firmly in his mind. His "exegesis" can only be deductive *i.e. eisegesis*.

¹⁸ ¹⁸ The textbooks generally refer to this as grammatical-historical-theological interpretation. This very same hermeneutic is engaged when dealing with passages that teach a seven-year Tribulation and a Millennium.

¹⁹ ¹⁹ See, for example, Long, 10–25, 68. In the same way the respected Reformed theologian John Murray places theology before exegesis. This allows him to state that, "when we examine the Scripture we find that the glory of the cross is bound up with the effectiveness of its accomplishment." - John Murray, *Redemption - Accomplished and Applied*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 75.

²⁰ ²⁰ E. G. Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 141; White, *The Potter's Freedom*, 113.

²¹ ²¹ It is important to see how the idea of the Atonement as "definite" controls the definition of Total Depravity. We wish we had more space to expound upon this.

²² ²² Owen, 123.

²³ ²³ White, 237.

Lastly, dispensationalists should reject the Reformed doctrine of the Perseverance of the saints in favor of the exegetically sound doctrine of Eternal Security, or, if you like, the preservation of the saints. Although some five-pointers will draw no distinction between these terms, it is vital that the dispensationalist realize that what they mean by this term has ramifications for the doctrine of assurance. We hold that our salvation is secure because of the Bible's testimony. We *have* eternal life; we are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh; we have been adopted and in God's sight we are already glorified. But that is not where it ends for the Five-Point Calvinist.

For them the P signifies that *if you are elect you will persevere*. Hence, this leads to the creation of "check-lists" to give assurance that one is truly one of the elect, which finds its terminous in "Lordship Salvation." The Reformed doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, which constantly looks for proofs of regeneration, cannot logically lead to simple assurance. We may illustrate this by seeing what a Lordship teacher says is the difference between a true and a false assurance. Ernest Reisinger put the matter this way:

1. *True assurance* begets unfeigned humility.
False assurance begets spiritual pride.
2. *True assurance* leads to increased diligence in the pursuit of holiness.
False assurance leads to sloth and self-indulgence.
3. *True assurance* leads to candid self-examination and a desire to be searched and corrected by God.
False assurance leads to a disposition to be satisfied with appearance and avoid accurate self-examination.
4. *True assurance* leads to constant aspiration after more fellowship with God.
False assurance does not aspire after greater intimacy with God.

The author adds, "It is not the *strength* of one's convictions that proves the validity of his assurance, but the *character* of one's convictions."²⁴

I must leave the reader to draw his own conclusions. I hope that what has been said demonstrates why a consistent dispensationalist must define his own terms and not borrow blindly from the Reformed definitions. Put simply, Five-Pointers are right to point out that a "four point Calvinist" who sticks to the Reformed definitions excluding Limited Atonement has an irreconcilable tension in his theology, and that a consistent Five-Point Calvinist will NOT be a dispensationalist.²⁵ Many think that Limited Atonement is the weak link in the whole system. With respect I think this is a serious misreading of the position. Once accepted, Limited Atonement actually holds all the other points of TULIP together.

Does "World" Ever Mean "Elect"?

That the term "world" (*kosmos*) is used in both a universal sense and a restricted sense is admitted by all. The question is whether *kosmos* ever takes on a technical connotation signifying the elect. We often hear from our Reformed brethren that when the Bible says "God so loved the world" it really means "God so loved the elect in the world." Is that assertion true?

The Standard Reference Works

Surely the matter can be resolved by a look at the lexicons and theological dictionaries. These tools define the terms and give their usages in the Bible. The Greek word in question is "*Kosmos*." The present writer looked this word up in the *Dictionary of NT Theology* (ed. Colin Brown), and could not find any place where it meant anything even like "the world of believers" or "the church." And this came as no surprise. After all, according to a study done by Norman Douty, no major lexicon or theological dictionary reduces the term *kosmos* to a synonym for the elect. Douty goes on to say:

²⁴ ²⁴ "Ernest C. Reisinger, *Lord and Christ*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 115. That is, assurance is based upon what one sees as the spirituality of one's convictions. The reader is urged to compare the above with the teaching of Lewis Sperry Chafer's *Systematic Theology*, Vol. VII, 21–24.

²⁵ ²⁵ It is this writer's opinion that the reason men like A. W. Pink and S. Lewis Johnson, and many like them; rejected dispensationalism is because they were Five-Point Calvinists. They were already employing two hermeneutical methods - the grammatical-historical, and the grammatical-historical-theological, in order to hold to Limited Atonement and regeneration prior to faith. Quite clearly, something had to give!

All of this is disastrous for the advocates of Limited Atonement. They have ventured to set themselves above the combined scholarship of our lexicons, encyclopedias and dictionaries, when they have ascribed a further significance to the word “*Kosmos*”, which will support their theological system.²⁶

When a Limited Redemptionist is willing to ignore the standard reference works, ignore the plain sense of the texts, and ignore the fact that his doctrine is unsupported by a single explicit mention in Scripture, one can be sure that he has come to the Bible with his mind already made up.

Arguing From John 17

Not a few of the arguments offered by LR’s in defense of their teaching find their beginnings in the soil of Christ’s High Priestly Prayer of John 17. In his sterling defense of limited atonement, John Owen wrote: “Now, by the way, we know that Christ refused to pray for the world, in opposition to his elect. “I pray for them,” saith he: “I pray not for the world, but for them thou hast given me,” John 17:9. And therefore there was no foundation for such an interceding for them, because he was not [*hilasmos*] for them.”²⁷

In the context Owen is dealing with 1 John 2:2. He has seconded John 17:9 to deal with it. Since, in John 17 Christ did not intercede for the non-elect, this means that no propitiation could have been made for them. Hence, 1 John 2:2 can be tackled with this prior decision.

In our view, the best way to show up this method is to line up the many verses where “world” (*kosmos*) is a bone of contention:

He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. (John 1:10)

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (John 3:16)

For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:17)

And this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19)

And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. (John 4:42)

I am the living Bread which came out of heaven: if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live forever: and the Bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:51)

In all these representative verses the meaning of “world” (*kosmos*) is constant. Each verse is easily interpreted by the UR to refer to the rebellious, autonomous, and spiritually darkened world-system of fallen mankind. When one turns to read John 17:9, the question comes up, “Can somebody who believes in UR interpret this verse in the same consistent way, or is he forced to look for another interpretation?” Here is the verse in question: “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me; for they are Thine.” (John 17:9).

From verse 6 we know that Jesus is referring to His disciples, whom God has given to Him “out of the world.” So, when a UR comes to verse 9 he simply understands Jesus to mean that He is interceding specially for His disciples, as opposed to the world of mankind to whom they will be sent, and from whom they will make converts (v. 20). Then comes verse 21b: “that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me.” (cf. v. 25).

Now, we ask, what is difficult about all this? Unless limited atonement is presupposed, the term *kosmos* always means the same thing in these passages. F. F. Bruce comments: “If [Jesus] does not pray for the world, it is not because he had no concern for the world (John 4:42; cf. 3:17; 12:47). But

²⁶ ²⁶ Norman F. Douty, *The Death of Christ*, (Irving: William and Watrous, 1978), 44–45.

²⁷ ²⁷ Owen, 65. He also notices John 17:24.

the salvation of the world depends on the witness of those whom the Father has given him 'out of the world' (see verses 21, 23), and it is they who need his intercession at this junction."²⁸

The person who simply reads the text without assuming the doctrine of limited atonement does not have to qualify the meaning of any term. But LR's once more have to tamper with the plain sense of several of these verses so that they can retain their preconceived teaching.

Does God Love the "World"?

A corollary to this novel usage of "world" to mean "the elect" involves the understanding of John 3:16. Does it mean, "God so loved the elect that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever of the elect believes should not perish, but have everlasting life."? If it does, then doesn't it follow that God does *not* love the non-elect? And if that is so, then how can anyone invite a lost person to come to Christ? Perhaps Christ did not die for them, and God does not love them? One thing is for certain, no five-point Calvinist can tell a lost soul that Christ died for them.

For example: "As a reformed Christian, the writer believes that counselors must not tell any unsaved counselee that Christ died for him, for they cannot say that. No man knows except Christ Himself who are His elect for whom He died."²⁹

Further, as stated previously, if God does not love the non-elect then it follows that it is His will that they reject Christ - who is, after all, not sent to save them anyway. If that is true then verses like John 3:36 are simply incoherent. Condemnation becomes a doctrine grounded in a volutanstic fiat of God that is not based in His character.

Summary

To summarize our study, we may state that God's intention was to provide a universal atonement on the basis of which He can "judge the quick and the dead." The elect were predestined to eternal life through faith in Christ, while the non-elect are justly condemned for refusing the knowledge of God revealed in the world (Rom. 1:18–22), and their guilt increases for rejecting the Gospel of saving grace (John 3:36). Perhaps it would be useful to display our objections to Limited Atonement in the following way:

- There is no clear reference to Limited Atonement in the Bible. It is an inference from a System of Theology.
- It runs contrary to many explicit statements of Scripture.
- It depends upon a departure from normal grammatical-historical interpretation, and so ought not to be held by dispensationalists.
- In making the atonement the only instrument of securing our salvation it makes salvation "through faith" virtually meaningless.
- By making saving faith an effect, rather than a condition of salvation, Limited Atonement faces the philosophical problem of having God choose to provide salvation for less souls than He could have. This runs the Reformed believer into serious trouble when dealing with the problem of evil and the goodness of God.
- It rides roughshod over all the standard reference works in its singular definition of world (*kosmos*) as "the elect."
- If Christ only died for the elect then we can't tell an unsaved person (who may be non-elect) that God loves him, and that Christ died for him. John 3:16 may not refer to him.
- Again, if Limited Atonement is true then plainly the non-elect person, when he rejects Christ, is actually *doing God's will*. How, then, can God justly condemn him?

²⁸ ²⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 331. From his comments on other texts it is clear that Bruce believed in unlimited atonement.

²⁹ ²⁹ Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970), 70. The reader may wish to refer back to our comments on Perseverance of the saints under the sub-heading, "Dispensationalism, Limited Atonement, and Hermeneutics."

- It makes John 3:16, 1 Timothy 2:4–6; 2 Peter 3:9, *etc.* read as pointless tautologies.

Finally, Limited Atonement is not found in any of the Church Fathers until the later Augustine. Most of the Reformers did not hold to it *e.g.* *Luther, Melancthon, Bullinger, Cranmer, Latimer*; even *Calvin speaks up for unlimited atonement in some passages*). Among those who believed in unlimited atonement, a selection would include: *Athanasius, Cyril, Basil, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, John Preston, John Newton, Alfred Edersheim, J. C. Ryle, Charles Simeon, G. Campbell Morgan, A. T. Robertson, L. S. Chafer, F. F. Bruce, Leon Morris, C. C. Ryrie, John Walvoord, and Millard Erickson.* One of the aims of this paper is to show why they were fully justified in holding to this position.

Conclusion

Limited Atonement rises and falls with the legitimacy of the maxim, “Christ will save all whom he died for.”³ That may sound good, but it is not taught in Scripture, and it is from Scripture that we must fetch our theology. Christ’s death atoned for the sins of the whole world, but that atonement only becomes definite the moment a sinner repents and believes the Gospel (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19–20). The dispensationalist, whose consistent plain-sense, normative hermeneutic elicits a doctrine of *Unlimited* Atonement, needs to be on the watch for theological formulations which do not comport with his rules of interpretation. Systematic Theology, however ingenious it may become, must never be allowed to dictate to the text of Scripture what it is supposed to say.⁴

³ Note added by Phillip D. Mosher. This is the teaching of the Westminster Confession.

⁴ Tyndale Theological Seminary. (2005; 2007). *Vol. 9: Conservative Theological Journal Volume 9* (27) (241–257). Tyndale Theological Seminary.