

Limited Atonement

Is it Biblical?

Limited Atonement

Also known as:

Definite Atonement, Particular
Atonement, Efficacious Atonement,
Particular Redemption

What is the Atonement?

- **Atonement**—in modern usage, this term refers to the expiatory and propitiatory act of Christ on the cross whereby satisfaction for sin was accomplished.

—David L. Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*

Expiation—means to cover sin and/or to cleanse sin

Propitiation—a satisfying sacrifice. the act of appeasing the wrath of God against our sin.

3 Aspects of the Atonement

Intent: “What was Christ’s saving purpose in providing an atonement? Did he equally or unequally desire the salvation of every man?”

Extent: for whom did Christ die?

Unlimited—He died for everyone

Limited—He died for only the elect

Application: When is the atonement applied to the sinner? 3 Views:

1) It is applied in the eternal decree of God

2) It is applied at the cross to all the elect at the time of Jesus’s death.

3) It is applied at the moment the sinner exercises faith in Christ

“The doctrine of limited atonement is simply that the cross of Christ provides a sure, secure and real salvation for everyone God intended it to save and for them alone.”

–Gunn

“Christ died positively and effectually to save a certain number of hell-deserving sinners on whom the Father had already set His free electing love.”

–Seaton

“The doctrine of “limited atonement” which we maintain is the doctrine which limits the atonement to those who are heirs of eternal life, the elect.”

–John Murray

“The Lord Jesus, by his perfect obedience, and sacrifice of himself, which he, through the eternal Spirit, once offered up unto God, hath fully satisfied the justice of his Father; and purchased, not only reconciliation, but an everlasting inheritance in the kingdom of heaven, for all those whom the Father hath given unto him.”

–Westminster Confession of Faith VIII.5

“So Limited Atonement is just what it implies: Christ shed his blood and made an atonement only for the sins of the “elect””

–Lawrence Vance

“To them the atonement is like a universal grab-bag: there is a package for everyone, but only some will grab a package. Christ not only shed His blood, He also spilled it. He intended to save all, but only some will be saved. Therefore, some of His blood was wasted: it was spilled.”

–Palmer (a criticism of unlimited atonement)

“For if Christ died for all men and all men are not saved, the cross of Christ is of no effect. Calvary is a sham.”

–Hanko (criticism of unlimited atonement)

“If Christ died for the elect only, then there are no possible benefits in that death of Christ for anyone else but those for whom he died.”

–Homer Hoeksema

Four Point Calvinists

- Limited Atonement is the most controversial of the five points
- Calvinists who hold to the rest of the TULIP but deny Limited Atonement are called Four Point Calvinists.
- What is a four point Calvinists favorite Christmas song?

NOEL

Get it, No—L

Arguments for Limited Atonement

1. A Universal Atonement demands a Universal Salvation
2. Double Jeopardy
3. The sin of unbelief
4. If Christ did not make a Limited Atonement then some of his blood was wasted
5. Scriptures stating that He died for the elect

A universal atonement demands a universal salvation.

- “If Christ has paid the debt of sin, has saved, ransomed, given His life for all men, then all men will be saved.” -Seaton
- “It seems to follow from the idea of unlimited atonement that salvation is universal.” -Sproul
- “You cannot make good the assertion, “That Christ died for them that perish,” without holding...”That all the damned souls would hereafter be brought out of hell.” -Whitefield
- **If this is true then “the Atonement and its application are the same thing.”**

Double Jeopardy

- Double Jeopardy—A procedural defense (primarily in common law jurisdictions) that prevents an accused person from being tried again on the same (or similar) charges following an acquittal in the same jurisdiction.
—Wikipedia
- “if Christ has paid for a man’s sins then, legally speaking, it would be double jeopardy for him to be judged for those sins and sent to hell. Therefore, since all men are not saved, Christ could not have died for all men.”
- **For this to be true then “the Atonement and its application are the same thing.”**
- **“For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.”**
—I Corinthians 1:21

The Sin of Unbelief

- Argument made by John Owen, the English Puritan theologian in 1648 in his famous work, *Death of Death in the Death of Christ*.
- “God imposed his wrath due unto, and Christ underwent the pains of hell for, either **all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or some sins of all men**. If the last, some sins of all men, then have all men some sins to answer for, and so shall no man be saved;...If the second, that is it which we affirm, that Christ in their stead and room suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the world. If the first, why, then, are not all freed from the punishment of all their sins? You will say, “Because of their unbelief; they will not believe.” But this unbelief, is it a sin, or not? If not, why should they be punished for it? If it be, then Christ underwent the punishment due to it, or not. If so, then why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died from partaking of the fruit of his death? if he did not, then did he not die for all their sins? Let them choose which part they will.”
- **For this to be true then “the Atonement and its application are the same thing.”**

Biblical Viewpoint on the Atonement

- The Bible makes a distinction between the universal provision and the individual application of the Atonement. It is an unlimited provision (extent) and a limited application.
- *“Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference.” (Romans 3:22 KJV)*
- *“the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction.” (Romans 3:22 ESV)*
- *“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.” (I Tim. 4:10)*
- Examples: The passover in Exodus 12, brasen serpent in Numbers 21
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Calvinism's false premise

- False Premise: making the Atonement and its application the same thing.
- “If satisfaction of the debt of sin is made for any man, then that man’s debt of sin and guilt is gone! it is no more! From the moment that satisfaction has been made, that debt is forever removed.” -Homer Hoeksema
- Ephesians 2:1-3—“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in time past in the lust of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

If Limited Atonement is not true then some of Christ's blood was wasted

“To them the atonement is like a universal grab-bag: there is a package for everyone, but only some will grab a package. Christ not only shed His blood, He also spilled it. He intended to save all, but only some will be saved. Therefore, some of His blood was wasted: it was spilled.” —Palmer

This idea is refuted by a fellow Calvinist: “Had every sinner of Adam's race been elected, the same one sacrifice would be sufficient for all. We must absolutely get rid of the mistake that expiation is an aggregate of gifts to be divided and distributed out, one piece to each receiver.” —Dabney

Scripture states that Christ died for the elect.

- *“I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”* (John 10:11) *“As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.”* (John 10:15)
- *“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.”* (Eph. 5:25)
- Calvinist viewpoint: These verses state that Jesus Christ died for the elect, therefore he didn't die for the non-elect.
- **Negative Inference Fallacy**—A positive assertion about something does not by itself logically lead to a negative inference about something else. example: Bill loves his friends, therefore, Bill does not love his enemies.
- Taken to its logical conclusion: *“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”*(Gal.2:20)

What saith the scriptures?

- *“And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of whole world”* (1 John 2:2)
- Regarding this passage, A.W. Pink stated, “When John says, “He is the propitiation for our sins” he can only mean for the sins of Jewish believers. When John added, “And not for ours only, but also for the whole world” he signified that Christ was the propitiation for the sins of Gentile believers too, for, as previously shown, “the world” is a term contrasted from Israel.”
- How do we know Pink is wrong? *“And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.”* (1 John 5:19)

What saith the scriptures?

- *“And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world”* (I John 4:14)
- Lawrence Vance states, “The word *world* occurs twenty-three times in First John in seventeen verses. We are commanded to “love not the world” (I John 2:15). The world is full of lust (I John 2:16) and will pass away (I John 2:17). The world knows neither Christ nor the Christian (I John 4:3). The “**spirit of antichrist**” is in the world (I John 4:3). We have overcome the world (I John 5:4). So not only does the word *world* never denote the “elect”, it is unequivocally demeaned and condemned by God.”

What saith the scriptures?

- *“I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. 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.” (1 Tim. 2:1-6)*
- Smeaton gives the common Calvinist interpretation: “We cannot put a different sense upon the terms than the apostle employs throughout the context; that is, all ranks, conditions, and classes of men. He died for men of all conditions, high, low; for all nationalities, Jew and Gentiles equally. But the text does not affirm that He gave Himself for all men indiscriminately—the elect of every rank, and tribe, and people. More particularly, THE ALL for whom he gave Himself a ransom, were they for whom He acted as a mediator in atonement and intercession.”

What saith the scriptures?

- *“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.”*
- Vance states, “The phrase “all men” is set in contrast to “those that believe”. Therefore, the “those that believe” are the “elect”. Consequently, the “all men” couldn’t possibly be “all sorts of elect men” like the Calvinist made it in I Timothy 2:1-6.”

What saith the scriptures?

- *“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”* (Hebrews 2:9)

What saith the scriptures?

- *“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.”*
(2 Peter 2:1)

The Well Meant Gospel Offer

- According to Dr. David Allen, “My argument is simple: if there is no atonement for some people, then those people are not saveable. If no atonement exists for some, how is it possible that the gospel can be offered to those people for whom no atonement exists? If anyone is not saveable, he is not offerable. One cannot offer salvation in any consistent way to someone for whom no atonement exists. Strict Calvinists cannot have it both ways. Either Christ has substituted for the sins of all men or he has not.”

In Conclusion— 2 Views:

- 5 Point Calvinist View: Christ Jesus only made an atonement for the sins of the elect, whom the Father chose to save.
- My Understanding: Christ Jesus made an atonement for the sins of everyone (extent) because he desires the salvation of everyone (intent). He, by his sovereign will, has determined that the benefits of the atonement will only be applied to those that believe (application). It is “unto all and upon all that believe” (Romans 3:22).