

FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?

“not only our sins but also for those of the whole world”

Key question

For whom did Christ die, the whole world or the elect only?

Key text

I John 2:2

“and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

Key Definition

Unlimited Atonement

While Christ’s death is sufficient for the ransom of the sins of the whole world it is applied only to those who believe, at the moment of saving faith.

Introduction

A. **UNLIMITED ATONEMENT** - Christ died for the elect and nonelect alike. Salvation was provided for all at the cross and applied to as many as believed.

1. “Universal” terminology is used in Scripture.

- **Isa.53:6** “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him **the iniquity of us all.**”
- **Jn.1:29** “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of **the world!**”
- **Jn.3:16-17** “For God so loved **the world** that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.”
- **II Cor.5:14-15** “For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has **died for all**; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.”
- **I Tim.4:10** “who is the **Savior of all men**, especially of those who believe.”
- **Heb.2:9** “so that by the grace of God he might taste death **for every one.**”

- **I Jn.2:1-2** “Jesus . . . is the expiation for our sins, and **not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.**”
- **Heb.4:14** “the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of **the world.**”
- **I Tim.2:6** “gave himself a ransom **for all.**”

2. **Some for whom Christ died will perish.**

- **Rom.14:15** “Do not let what you eat cause the **ruin of one for whom Christ died.**”
- **I Cor.8:11** “And so by your knowledge this weak man is **destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.**”
- **Heb.10:29** “How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant **by which he was sanctified**, and outraged the Spirit of grace?”
- **II Pet.2:1** “But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even **denying the Master who bought them**, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.”

3. **The gospel is to be proclaimed, universally, not just to the “elect.”**

- **Matt.24:14** “preached throughout **the whole world**”
- **Acts 1:8** “**to the end of the earth**”
- **Acts 17:30** “he commands **all men everywhere** to repent”
- **Titus 2:11** “the grace of God has appeared for the salvation of **all men**”
- **Matt.11:28** “Come to me, **all who labor and are heavy laden**, and I will give you rest”
- **II Peter 3:9** “not wishing that **any** should perish, but that **all** should reach repentance”

4. **The love of God is for the whole world.**

- **Jn.3:16** “For God so loved **the world . . .**”
- **Rom.5:18** “Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to **acquittal and life for all men.**”

5. **At the Last Supper**, Jesus said (**Lk.22:19, I Cor.11:24**) “This is My body, which is **for you**; do this in remembrance of Me.” The gospel writers put Judas in the group that shared the Passover meal. Apparently, Jesus gave himself for Judas as well as the others.

6. Note: Christian Universalism teaches that God effected salvation through the incarnation to the whole world. For more information see apptoteach.org (theology file #703)

B. **LIMITED ATONEMENT - PARTICULAR REDEMPTION** - Christ died for the elect only.

1. **The atonement is said to have “actually accomplished” salvation for His people.**

- **Rom.5:10** “For if while we were enemies we **were reconciled** to God by the death of his Son.”
- **Matt.1:21** “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he **will save his people** from their sins.”
- **Col.1:21-22** “And you . . . he **has now reconciled** in his body of flesh by his death.”

2. **The atonement is said to have been directed at “the sheep,” “the church,” “his friends,” and “many” (not all).**

- **Jn.10:11 (14-18)** “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life **for the sheep** (believers - vs. 26-27)”

- **Jn.15:13** “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life **for his friends.**”
 - **Acts 20:28** “to feed **the church** of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood”
 - **Eph.5:25** “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up **for her**”
 - **Matt.26:28** “for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out **for many** for the forgiveness of sins.”
 - **Heb.9:28** “Christ, having been offered once **to bear the sins of many.**”
3. **The intercessory work of Christ is for a few, not all.**
- Jn.17:9** “I am praying for them; **I am not praying for the world but for those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine.**”
- The O.T. priest (a type of Christ) offered intercession only for those for whom he had made sacrifice.
4. **The nature of a “ransom” is to actually free the ones ransomed - Matt.20:28, Mk.10:45.**
- When paid and accepted, a ransom automatically frees those for whom it is intended. If it is universal, then all should be saved (universalism) but because we know that all are not in fact saved it suggests that the lost make (what amounts to) a double payment for sins (at their judgment). This does not make sense.
5. **A limitation must be admitted in one of two ways:**
- a. It was designed to secure salvation for certain sinners but not all.
 - b. It was designed only to make it possible for God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe. This means that the atonement is like a great wide bridge that goes only halfway across the stream while faith finishes the work.
6. **The doctrines of “election” and “limited atonement” are historically linked.** The idea that God would elect a specific group to salvation and then make provision for all seems to be a contradiction.
- NOTE:** Texts of Scripture that link Christ’s death with “all” and the “world” refer only to the elect from every nation in the world (all without distinction, not all without exception).

C. **An evaluation of Limited Atonement**

1. **Some of those who advocate limited atonement must limit more than the object of the atonement.**
 - a. **THE WORLD**--It is argued (in support of limited atonement) that the term “world” is sometimes used as a limited part of the whole world. This is true, but this could also be argued of terms like “God” - civil rulers; “everlasting” - a limited period of time; “salvation” - temporal deliverance; “resurrection” - regeneration; “baptism” - suffering. The challenge is to demonstrate that the term “world” refers to only the elect in a given passage. It is the theological assumptions brought to the text, more than the text itself that would equate “world” with “the elect.”
 - b. **GOD’S LOVE**--The “love” of God is limited to the “elect” if they are “the world.” But how can God’s nature, which is love, be so limited? “To tell the Christ rejecter that God loves him is to cauterize his conscience, as well as to afford him a sense of security in his sins. The fact is that the love of God is a truth for the saints only, and to present it to the enemies of God is to take the children’s bread and cast it to the dogs” (A.W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, p. 246).

- c. **FAITH**--Is faith an INSTRUMENT of redemption or is it to be viewed primarily as a SIGN of redemption? If redemption is finished and applied at the cross, then we should expect it to be a sign of the elect. There are some passages that can be read to support the "sign" view (Acts 13:48, 16:14, I Thess.1:4-5), but most picture faith as a MEANS of salvation. **Jn.3:18** "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." **Jn.20:31** "And that believing you might have life through his name." **Rom.3:28** "For we maintain that a man is justified by faith." **Rom.5:1** "Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God." Salvation is presented in Scripture as consisting of two factors: OBJECTIVE ATONEMENT & SUBJECTIVE FAITH.
- d. **THE CONVICTING WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**--Many who support limited atonement (A.W. Pink) recognize that they must restrict the work of the Spirit to the elect only. But this seems to disregard many passages like **Jn.16:8-11**.
- e. **THE BENEFITS OF THE CROSS** are split. On the basis of **I Tim.4:10**, some of those supporting limited atonement admit that some "natural" benefits go to all men because of the cross. But on what Scriptural grounds can we divide the benefits of the atonement? If we all agree that there are "natural" benefits to all, why not potential spiritual benefits as well?
2. **There are some texts used in support of unlimited atonement that are very difficult to get around.**
- **Isa.53:6** "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned **every one to his own way**; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of **us all**."
 - **I Tim.4:10** "who is the Savior **of all men**, especially of those who believe."
 - **I Jn.2:2** "And he is the propitiation for our sins; and **not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world**."
 - **Rom.5:18-19** "So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. For as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous."
 - **Heb.10:29** "How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by the man who has spurned the Son of God, and profaned the blood of the covenant **by which he was sanctified**, and outraged the Spirit of grace?"
 - **II Pet.2:1** "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even **denying the Master who bought them**, bringing upon themselves swift destruction." The word "bought" is used often of the atonement. **I Cor.6:20** "you were **bought** with a price therefore glorify God in your body." **I Cor.7:23** "You were **bought** with a price; do not become slaves of men." **Rev.5:9** "Thou wast slain, and didst **purchase** for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." **Rev.14:4** "These have been **purchased** from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb."
 - **II Cor.5:18-19** "Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ **reconciling the world** to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; **we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God**." This passage calls for a universal

proclamation of the gospel, not because of election or a “covenant of redemption” but because of a universal reconciliation.

3. **The fact that Jesus loved and died for “man,” “His sheep,” “His church,”** does not necessarily mean that it was only for them that he died.
4. **The fact that Christ ministered to the elect and non-elect alike in His life suggests that His atonement was not limited.**
5. **Attempts to establish limited atonement as a logical corollary to other doctrines** like Christ’s intercession and God’s election seem (at best) vague and convincing only if the doctrine is firmly established on other grounds. Limited atonement makes sense if one assumes a pre-creation “covenant of grace” with the elect (as many Reformed theologians do) but such a covenant is a deduction from a theological system (not an inductive product of the Biblical text).

D. **CONCLUSION**

1. As with many controversial doctrines where good hearts and minds are divided, we should be:
 - a. **CAUTIOUS**--not quick to close the issue.
 - b. **HUMBLE**--not dogmatic.
 - c. **RESPECTFUL**--willing to listen to, and understand, those who have a differing perspective.
 - d. **AWARE**--For example, there are many different brands of “limited” atonement. The position presented in this study represents a strong but not necessarily the only view.
2. The unlimited atonement position seems to satisfy the whole of Scripture’s teaching more fully than does the limited atonement position (in my opinion). The obstacles to limited atonement seem to be more difficult to answer. That is not to say that there is no room for disagreement.
3. The universality of the atonement is of God; its limitation is of man. Christ’s death provided salvation for the elect and non-elect alike, but this salvation was applied only to the elect upon their faith response.
4. **Illustration:** If someone lays puts \$100 in my bank account as a gift for me. It does not benefit me unless I believe it and withdraw it. If however I fail to believe it or act on it there will be no benefit to me. I do have a critical but not meritorious part in the process.

THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT

Unlimited Atonement

The death of Christ was sufficient for all people, but efficient for a limited number.

Support	Objections
Numerous verses seem to indicate that the death of Christ was for the whole of mankind. The major two verses are 1 Timothy 4:10 and 1 John 2:2. These state that Christ is the propitiation and the Savior of the world. Other verses are Isaiah 53: 6; John 1:29; 1 Timothy 2:6; Titus 2:11; Hebrews 2:9.	The words "all" and "whole" do not always refer to the totality of its contents. An example is the taxing of the whole world by Caesar; this did not include the Japanese. The whole world in these verses means people of every geographical area.
The universal proclamation of the Gospel is based on the unlimited atonement of Christ. In order for the Gospel to be sincerely offered to all mankind, Christ had to have died for all mankind (Matt. 24:14; 28:19; Acts 1:8; 17:30).	The proclamation of the Gospel is based on the finished work of Christ. The elect are throughout the world, and they need to hear the Gospel in order to be saved. The taking of the Gospel is a matter of obedience, not unlimited atonement.
The love of God is toward the whole world and whoever believes is saved. Therefore, the extent of Christ's death is to all people.	The love of God is toward a special group, as seen in his love of Israel (Amos 3:2). His love is toward the elect of every geographical area of the world. Those that believe are those God has given to the Son (John 6:37-40).
The work of Christ is sufficient to secure the salvation of the elect but is secured by means of faith (Rom. 10:17).	If the death of Christ was all sufficient, faith becomes unnecessary and meaningless.
The natural benefits of the world are also enjoyed by the nonelect. These benefits include sunshine, rain, good health, etc.	The natural benefits are a result of God's common grace. These things are given from God because of his character. He can be kind to whom he wishes.

Limited Definite Atonement

Christ's coming was not to provide salvation for all mankind, but to render certain the salvation of the elect.

Support	Objections
Those who advocate a limited atonement say that God provided salvation only for his people (Matt. 1:21), his sheep (John 10:15,26), his friends (John 15:13), the church (Acts 20:28), and the bride (Eph. 5:25).	The atonement will not save all men, but is available for all. These verses refer to those whom God chose. It is these that have made the atonement efficient.
Those for whom Christ died are those whom the Father gave to him (John 6:37-40). Christ did not die for those whom the Father did not give him. Therefore, it was for a certain number that he died.	These verses do not mention a limited atonement. That only a certain number are chosen is evident because not all will be saved.
Christ died for the elect in every area of the world. This is what the Scripture means when it says that Christ died for the whole world (1 Tim. 4:10; 1 John 2:2).	That the death of Christ was for all mankind makes more sense than that he died for people of every geographical area.
What connection does the death of Christ have with the nonelect? If he died for all, why are some people not saved?	The death of Christ makes potential the salvation of all, but it will be actual only to a certain number. This is the only connection; those who reject this must bear the consequences.
The intercessory work of Christ was for his own. Since he prayed only for a certain group, he intended to provide salvation for a limited number.	Only a certain number will actually be saved. Christ knew who these would be and these are the people he prayed for.
The work of Christ is said to be for specific groups: Paul, Israel, the church. This shows that his work is not unlimited	His salvation is made actual to certain groups, but he died for all. The groups who realize salvation are only a subset

in scope.	of those for whom he died.
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(Modified from Charts of Christian Theology and Doctrine by H.Wayne House, Zondervan)

THE PENAL SUBSTITUTION THEORY OF THE ATONEMENT

	Necessity	Substitution	Propitiation	Imputation
Explained	God cannot merely overlook man's sin, nor can he just forgive man without requiring that payment be made or punishment be given for sin. In this sense, the atonement is necessary for man to be made right with his Creator.	The normal meaning of the word is to be taken in this context. It simply means that the atonement is a sacrifice offered in place of the sinner. Thus the sacrifice bears the sinner's guilt.	To regain favor or to appease God. To satisfy his demands, and thereby divert his anger. Man's sin does not just make God sad, it makes him angry. His anger, or wrath, can be satisfied only by the execution of his justice. His judicial system cannot be short-circuited.	While substitution and propitiation have to do with negative aspects of the atonement (what God has taken away from us), imputation has to do with the positive aspect of the atonement (what God has given to us). God has taken away the guilt of believers, but he has also imputed to them the righteousness of Christ.
Scripture Reference	Heb. 9:22	Jn. 1:29; II Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13	Lev. 4:35; Rom. 3:25-26; 5:9	Rom. 6:3-4
Objection	Why does God not simply forgive us as an act of good will instead of requiring a payment?	Is it not improper and unjust to penalize an innocent party?	Doesn't the appeasement of the Father by the Son reveal conflict within the Godhead?	Is it not improper and unfair to reward a guilty party?
Response to Objection	Even if God could overlook sin against himself as an act of good will, he is still bound by his nature to preserve justice in the universe. To ignore sin would destroy the meaningfulness of the concept of justice. Also, humans may simply forgive other humans as an act of good will because we are imperfect and in desperate need of forgiveness ourselves. But God is perfect and does not need forgiveness. Consequently, the parallel between man's and God's forgiveness breaks down.	The answer to this question is yes unless the innocent party receives the penalty voluntarily and the judge is inseparable from the innocent party. Jesus meets both of these requirements. He gave his life willingly (John 10:17-18) and he was inseparable from the Father. Thus in effect, the Judge punished himself.	The answer to this question may be put in the form of another question: Can a person be angry and loving at the same time? Any parent knows that the answer is yes. The Father was angry over the world's sin, but he loved the world so much that he sent his Son to atone for the sin of man. Thus the Father did not change from an angry God to a loving God when Christ died on the cross. God's love was there all the time and was in fact the motivation for the atonement. His holiness demanded a payment for sin. His love provided the payment.	This question is the other side of the objection to substitution. It doesn't seem fair that an innocent party is punished and likewise, it doesn't seem fair that a guilty party is rewarded. Yet that is what happens in the atonement. But the reason that God sees this transaction as absolutely just is that when we put our faith in him, we become united with Christ. In a sense, we become married, inseparable, so that it is not a transfer of righteousness as much as holding it in common. It is shared.
Implications About God's Character	Emphasis on God's sovereignty and position of official administrator of the judicial system of the universe.	Emphasis on God's love for his creation. He defines love by his nature. Real love always demands personal sacrifice.	Emphasis on God's absolute holiness and justifiable anger over sin. He deserves respect and absolute obedience and vents his wrath on ungodliness.	Emphasis on God's desire for intimate fellowship with his creation. Because of the atonement we are heirs of the Father and joint-heirs with Son.

