

THE ATONEMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

I. Introduction

- a. The question: "For whom did Christ die?" Or, "What did Christ actually achieve on the cross for those for whom he died?"

II. **Paradox**—a statement, proposition, or situation that seems to be absurd or contradictory, but in fact is or may be true (*Encarta Dictionary*)

- a. The Bible makes definitive statements that seem contradictory but in reality are not. Example, **Romans 10:13** says, "All who call on the Lord will be saved." However, **Matthew 7:21** says, "Not all who say to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter into the kingdom of heaven." Thus, there is a calling that saves (**Rom 8:30**) and a general calling that goes out to all that is not salvific (**Matt 22:14**).

III. Limited vs. unlimited atonement

- a. **Limited Atonement**— The atonement is the work of God in Christ on the cross whereby he canceled the debt of our sin, appeased his holy wrath against us, and won for us all the benefits of salvation. The death of Christ was necessary because God would not show a just regard for his glory if he swept sins under the rug with no recompense (John Piper).
 - i. **Romans 3:25-26** says that God "put Christ forward as a propitiation by his blood...This was to demonstrate God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies those who have faith in Jesus."
 1. NOTE—God did **not** have to save anyone! Christians get what they do **not** deserve!
 - ii. **John 10:15, 26**, "I lay down my life for the sheep." The sheep of Christ are those whom the Father draws to the Son. "You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep." Notice: being a sheep enables you to become a believer, not vice versa. So the sheep for whom Christ dies are the ones chosen by the Father to give to the Son.
 - iii. In **John 17:6,9,19** Jesus prays, "I have manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to me...I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom Thou hast given me, for they are thine...And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth." The consecration in view here is the death of Jesus which he is about to undergo. His death and his intercession us uniquely for his disciples, not for the world in general.
 - iv. **Ephesians 5:25-27**, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendor."
 - v. Which of these statements is true?
 1. Christ died for some of the sins of all men.

2. Christ died for all the sins of some men.
 3. Christ died for all the sins of all men.
- b. **Unlimited Atonement**—“The the death of Christ provided grace for all person and that, as a result of his atonement, God extends sufficient grace to all persons through the Holy Spirit to counteract the influence of sin and to enable a positive response to God (Jn 15:26-27; 16:7-11).”¹
- i. **John 3:16-17**, “For God so loved the world, that he gave is only begotten son, that whosoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but to save the world through him.
 - ii. **2 Peter 3:9**, “The Lord...is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”
 - iii. **1 John 2:2** (see below)
- IV. **Propitiation**—“a sacrifice that turns away the wrath of God—and thereby makes God propitious (or favorable) toward us” (Grudem, 575); “A sacrifice that averts wrath through expiating sin and canceling guilt” (Packer, 156)
- a. “A gospel without propitiation at its heart is another gospel than that which Paul preached (see Gal 1:8),” JI Packer, *Knowing God*, 182.
- V. Troubled texts and questions
- a. **1 John 2:2**, “He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”
 - i. **John 11:51-52**, “He prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”
 - ii. Propitiated sins cannot be punished. Otherwise propitiation loses its meaning. Therefore if Christ is the propitiation for all the sins of every individual in the world, they cannot be punished, and must be saved. But John does not believe in such universalism (**John 5:29**). Therefore it is very unlikely that **1 John 2:2** teaches that Jesus is the propitiation of every person in the world.
 - b. **John 3:16**, “For God so loved the world.”
 - i. If God “loved” and “died” for all the people in the entire world for all time, then why are **not** all people saved? An Arminian would answer, “Because some do not believe.” But is this unbelief not one of the sins for which Christ died? If they say “yes,” then why is it not covered by the blood of Jesus and all unbelievers saved? If they say “no” (unbelief is not a sin that Christ has died for) then they must say that men can be saved without having all their sins atoned for by Jesus, or they must join us in affirming statement number two: **Christ died for all the sins of some men**. That is, he died for the unbelief of the elect so that God's punitive wrath is appeased toward them and his grace is free to draw them irresistibly out of darkness into his marvelous light.

¹Jerry Walls and Joseph R. Dongell, *Why I Am Not a Calvinist*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 11.

- ii. Let's work **John 3:16** backwards. Q: Who has eternal life? A: Those who do not perish. Q: Who are those that do not perish? A: Those who believe, or Believers. Q: What do Believers believe in? A: The only begotten Son. Q: Why did the Son come? A: Because God loved the world.

VI. Application:

- a. **Humility**—we boast only in Christ who saves us, we thank Him for His grace knowing that there was nothing we could do to save us and nothing inside us that was appeasing to God nor anything that we could offer Him. Not only that but that we know that we deserve death and Hell but Jesus took our place.
- b. **Help in evangelism**—Paul was discouraged in Corinth but God encouraged him saying, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people” (**Acts 18:9-10**). Combine that with **Acts 13:48**, “as many as were appointed to eternal life believed” and the burden is on God to save and not man. God uses men to deliver the gospel message (**Rom 10:14, 17**) but it is God who saves (**Psalm 3:8**).
- c. **Assurance of salvation**; we don't lose our salvation vs. Jesus doesn't lose any of his sheep—If we lose our salvation then Jesus is a liar in His prayer to God to keep all those that the Father gave Him in **John 17**, His promise is void to give all things to the Elect in **Romans 8:32-33**, and then Jesus did not really die for the church to purify, cleanse, and sanctify her to God in splendor (**Eph 5:27**). “He who began a good work in you will complete it” (**Phil 1:6**). “To the called, beloved in God the Father and **kept** for Jesus Christ” and “Now to him who is able to **keep** you...” (**Jude 1, 24**). Christ's atonement accomplished what it set out to do!

VII. Hindrances:

- a. **Too much sovereignty not enough us**—some go too far to the right and say “If God is sovereign then I do not have to do anything, He will change me.” This does not mean if you believe this doctrine that this will happen, it's just a temptation.
- b. **Knowledge vs. application**—knowledge puffs up but love builds up (**1 Cor 8:1**). I am prone to have great doctrine and theology but little application.
- c. **Take advantage of grace**—it is tempting to go on sinning so that grace may abound (Rom 6:1). We cannot fix our brokenness, only Jesus can and did on the cross.

VIII. Quotes:

- a. Christ's death was sufficient for all but efficient for the elect.
- b. Both/and **not** either/or
- c. God's sovereignty is compatible with human choice, see <http://abidingbranches.files.wordpress.com/2008/06/divine-foreknowledge-human-freedom.pdf>
 - i. Romans 9
- d. If, as I prefer to think in your case, you agree with us in supposing that we are doing our duty in praying to God, as our custom is, for them that refuse to believe, that they may be willing to believe and for those who resist and oppose his law and doctrine, that they may believe and follow it. If you agree with us in thinking that we are doing our duty in giving

thanks to God, as is our custom, for such people when they have been converted...then you are surely bound to admit that the wills of men are preveniently moved by the grace of God, and that it is God who makes them to will the good which they refused; for it is God whom we ask so to do, and we know that it is meet and right to give thanks to him for so doing... (Augustine, *CONFESSIONS*)

- e. There has been a wonderful alteration in my mind, in respect to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, from that day to this...God's absolute sovereignty...is what my mind seems to rest assured of, as much as of anything that I see with my eyes...The doctrine has very often appeared exceeding pleasant, bright, and sweet. Absolute sovereignty is what I love to ascribe to God...God's sovereignty has ever appeared to me, a great part of his glory. It has often been my delight to approach God, and adore him as a sovereign God. (Personal Narrative from Jonathan Edwards).
- f. "I embrace the Calvinistic scheme, not because Calvin, but Jesus Christ has taught it to me" (Arnold Dalimore quoting, *GEORGE WHITEFIELD* 1, p. 406). Man is nothing: he hath a free will to go to hell, but none to go to heaven, till God worketh in him to will and to do his good pleasure.
- g. To my great astonishment I found that the passages which speak decidedly for election and persevering grace, were about four times as many as those which speak apparently against these truths; and even those few, shortly after, when I had examined and understood them, served to confirm me in the above doctrines. (George Mueller, *Autobiography*, pp. 33-34).
- h. I have my own private opinion that there is no such thing as preaching Christ and Him crucified, unless we preach what is nowadays called Calvinism. It is a nickname to call it Calvinism; Calvinism is the gospel, and nothing else. I do not believe we can preach the gospel...unless we preach the sovereignty of God in His dispensation of grace; nor unless we exalt the electing, unchangeable, eternal, immutable, conquering love of Jehovah; nor do I think we can preach the gospel unless we base it upon the special and particular redemption of His elect and chosen people which Christ wrought out upon the Cross; nor can I comprehend a gospel which lets saints fall away after they are called (C.H. Spurgeon, *AUTOBIOGRAPHY* 1, p. 168). All of us are born Arminians.

IX. Resources:

- a. The link below is the best resource I have found on the Doctrines of Grace; it is free to copy on a Word Document and distribute as long as you don't change the words or charge for it. (John Piper, *Desiring God*, ed. 3, is also a great resource)
http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/articles/bydate/1985/1487_what_we_believe_about_the_five_points_of_calvinism/
- b. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, chapter 27: THE ATONEMENT, pages 568-607 and Part 5: THE DOCTRINE OF THE APPLICATION OF REDEMPTION (pages 657-852)
- c. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*, chapter 13 on "The Grace of God," pages 128-137, also chapter 15 "The Wrath of God," pages 148-157
- d. I compiled this true/false test; the answers are on the website.
<http://abidingbranches.files.wordpress.com/2008/03/true-false-test-on-calvinism.pdf>