

## DOCTRINE OF CHRIST

### Lesson 13

#### Christ's Atoning Work

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Some have called the atonement “the heart of the gospel.” It is at the center of what Christ came to do during His first coming. Most understand that Jesus came to die. If you ask them why, they might tell you that He had to die for our sins. If you asked them how or in what way did Jesus’ death deal with sin, most would probably be able to tell you that He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for sin. But if you pressed them about the doctrine of atonement many would be unable to explain it and its significance. The doctrine of Christ’s atoning work intersects with many other doctrines, affects how we proclaim the gospel, reveals our understanding of the sovereignty of God in salvation and how God’s sovereignty works with man’s responsibility to repent and believe. It also relates to judgment and why unbelieving men are sentenced to hell.

Millard Erickson in his *Christian Theology* has said, “*The doctrine of the atonement is the point at which the organic character of theology is most apparent. Our views on the other doctrines influence strongly our conclusions in this area.*”<sup>1</sup> Leon Morris has said, “*The atonement is the crucial doctrine of the faith. Unless we are right here it matters little, or so it seems to me, what we are like elsewhere.*”<sup>2</sup> It is very difficult to study the atonement by itself without getting into disagreements and age long controversies. In this lesson we will attempt to look at the atonement and touch on some of the questions related to its scope, extent, purpose, and practical ramifications to how we preach the gospel.

#### I. DEFINITION OF CHRIST’S ATONEMENT

- A. *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “The word ‘atonement’ is one of the few theological terms which derive basically from Anglo-Saxon. It means ‘a making at one’, and points to a process of bringing those who are estranged into a unity. . . Its use in theology is to denote the work of Christ in dealing with the problem posed by the sin of man, and in bringing sinners into right relation with God.”<sup>3</sup>
  
- B. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*: “[Atonement describes] The bringing together of two who have been enemies into a relationship of peace and friendship. . . In Christian theology, atonement is the central doctrine of our faith and can properly include all that our Lord accomplished for us on the cross. It was vicarious (i.e. substitutionary) atonement.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pg. 802.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, pg. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, pg. 147.

<sup>4</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, pgs. 83-84.

- C. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*: “Etymologically the word atonement signifies a harmonious relationship or that which brings about such a relationship, i.e., a reconciliation. It is principally used of the reconciliation between God and man effected by the work of Christ. The necessity for such reconciliation is the breach in the primal relationship between the Creator and the creature occasioned by man’s sinful rebellion.”<sup>5</sup>

## II. THOUGHTS TO PONDER

- A. How could a perfectly just and holy God allow someone innocent to suffer and die for the sin of the guilty and unjust? Especially in light of the fact that **Deut. 24:16** says, “*Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.*” And **Ezek. 18:20** says, “*The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.*”
- B. How could Jesus die for the sins of the world and give himself a ransom for all and yet all not be saved?
- C. How could Jesus die for the sins of the elect and yet the elect not receive atonement until they believe? How can you have an actual atonement without an immediate application of that actual atonement?
- D. *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia* says: “The cross is a fitting symbol of the atonement, for it represents the intersecting of two attributes or facets of God’s nature. Here it is that the love of God meets the holiness of God. The holiness requires payment of the penalty, and the love provides that payment.”<sup>6</sup>
- E. How can we offer the gospel to the masses if Christ died only for the elect? If Christ did not in any way die for the non-elect, then how can we offer them “good news?”
- F. Louis Berkhof points out that one cannot suffer on behalf of another as a substitutionary sacrifice for sins unless they meet certain legal criteria. Consider the criteria below, what they mean, and why they are necessary.
1. The judge must approve.
  2. The guilty must have no way of paying the penalty.

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<sup>5</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, pg. 408.

<sup>6</sup> Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, pg. 818.

3. The payment must not encroach upon the rights and privileges of innocent third parties.
4. The person paying the penalty must not be indebted himself and must be fully aware of what he is doing.
5. The guilty party must retain consciousness of his guilt and the fact that a substitute is suffering for him. If all these criteria are met then atonement is permitted.<sup>7</sup>

### III. THE SCOPE, SUFFICIENCY, AND PURPOSE OF THE ATONEMENT

It is in the areas of the scope, sufficiency, and purpose of the atonement that men have had sharp disagreement throughout the history of the church. Since the purpose of this lesson is to merely survey and introduce the subject of the atonement we don't have the luxury to even survey the views and the scriptural pros and cons for each. However, we will attempt to address the key issues.

#### A. What Pretty Much All Bible Believing Christians Believe Concerning the Atonement

1. Jesus' sacrifice, since it was perfect, was sufficient in power or ability to potentially atone for the sins of the entire human race.
2. When all has been said and done, the elect and the elect only receive the benefits of Christ's atoning work.
3. The elect do not receive atonement for their sins until they believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ (**Jn. 3:36; Eph. 2:1-3**).
4. No one ends up in hell who has received atonement for their sins.
5. It was God's purpose in sending Christ to die on the cross to save the elect and the elect only.
6. We need to preach the gospel to all men, which includes repentance from sin and faith in the person of Christ and His Work on the cross, namely faith in that He died for sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day.

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<sup>7</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, pg. 376.

7. Jesus' atoning death was superior than all the animal sacrifices that came before (**Heb. 9:11-14; 10:1, 4**).
8. Jesus sacrifice is absolutely sufficient being the "once for all sacrifice for sins" (**Rom. 6:10; Heb. 7:27; 9:12; 10:10; I Pet. 3:18**).

**B. Areas of Disagreement Related to the Scope, Sufficiency, and Purpose of the Atonement**

1. *What "died for" means.*
  - a. Some believe the phrase "died for" means "died to save." The reason they believe this is that in their minds there is no logical or scriptural reason for Jesus to die for those He did not intend to save. They believe it would be purposeless to have Christ die for those He knew He would never save. To say that Jesus died for everyone is in the minds of some rejecting the sovereignty of God in salvation. So "died for" must mean "died to save."
  - b. Others believe the phrase "died for" only describes an action and not a purpose for that action. The context in which the phrase is used will determine the purpose of Christ's death and there are multiple divine purposes for the death of Christ which relate to both the elect and non-elect. This is affirmed along with the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation and in conjunction with man's responsibility.
2. *There is disagreement concerning what the words "world," "all," "every," "whosoever," "whoever," etc. mean.*
  - a. Some believe that these terms are never used in the Scriptures to describe Christ dying universally for the elect and non-elect, and in every context where the death of Christ is in view, mean "some," "a few," "a remnant," or "the totality of the elect only."
  - b. Some believe that the terms above can have limited meaning if the context so indicates, but that there are texts which teach Christ died for the totality of the elect and non-elect. In relation to the elect, He died to save them, in relation to the non-elect He died so that the gospel might be preached to them and so they could be judged for not rejecting the gospel.
  - c. Consider how the two camps mentioned above might interpret the texts below:

- (1) **Jn. 3:16-17** “For God so loved *the world*, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whoever believes in Him* shall not perish, but have eternal life. 17 “For God did not send the Son into *the world* to judge *the world*, but that *the world might be saved through Him*.”
- (2) **Acts 2:21** “And it shall be that *everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved*.”
- (3) **Rom. 10:13** “*Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved*.”
- (4) **I Tim. 2:1-6**, “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of *all men*, 2 *for kings and all who are in authority*, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in *all godliness and dignity*. 3 This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, 4 *who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*. 5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and *men*, the man Christ Jesus, 6 *who gave Himself as a ransom for all*, the testimony given at the proper time.”
- (5) **I Tim. 4:10** “For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, *who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers*.”
- (6) **Tit. 2:11** “*For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men. . .*”
- (7) **Heb. 2:9** “But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God *He might taste death for everyone*.”
- (8) **I Jn. 2:1-2** “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; 2 and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and *not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world*.”

3. *Provision for Atonement Versus Actual Atonement*

Consider the various statements below about the atonement and try to determine which one represents the totality of what the Word of God teaches.

- a. When Jesus died on the cross He made actual atonement for the past, present, and future sins of the elect only.
- b. When Jesus died on the cross He made actual atonement for the past, present, and future sins of the elect and non elect.
- c. When Jesus died on the cross He made actual atonement for the past, present, and future sins of the elect who had believed up unto that point and made provision for the sins of the elect who would believe thereafter.
- d. When Jesus died on the cross He made actual atonement for the past, present, and future sins of the elect who had believed up unto that point and provision for the sins of the elect who would believe thereafter, and provision for the past, present, and future sins of all the non-elect past, present, and future who He knew would never believe in Him.

4. *What is the gospel and how should we preach the gospel to the unbelieving masses?*

- a. Some believe that we should never tell groups of unbelievers things like, "Christ died for you," or "Christ died for your sins." Believing that Christ died for the sins of the elect and the elect only it would be wrong to tell those who are not the elect that Christ died for them. We should instead say things like "Christ died for sins" or "Christ died to save sinners." They would refer to texts like those listed below.
  - (1) **Isa. 53:11** As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify *the many*, As He will bear their iniquities.
  - (2) **Jn. 10:15-16** "even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 *"I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd."*

- b. Others believe that the Bible teaches Christ died for all, every, and each person, the world, anyone, whosoever, etc. The most universal terms are used to describe who Jesus died for and we should use the same terminology the Scriptures use. The gospel could not be legitimately offered to the unsaved masses unless Christ in some way and for some purpose died for their sins. The non-elect never believe and therefore never benefit from Christ's death on their behalf.
  - (1) **Isa. 53:4-6** Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 *All of us* like sheep have gone astray, *Each of us* has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused *the iniquity of us all* To fall on Him.
  - (2) **Acts 17:31** "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that *all people everywhere* should repent.
  - (3) **I Jn. 4:14** "We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son *to be the Savior of the world.*"

5. *Purpose of Christ's death.*

- a. Some believe Christ died for the single purpose of making atonement available and actual for the sins of the elect and the elect only. This is called the Limited Atonement or Particular Redemption view of the atonement. There are various degrees of those who believe in limited atonement. Yet the fact is all believe that in the end, the elect have their sins particularly atoned for and in that way the atonement is limited to the elect only in regards to salvation. Most in the limited atonement camp do not believe there are non-redemptive purposes for the non-elect in relation to Christ's death.
- b. Some believe Christ died for the dual purpose of making the atonement available to both elect and non-elect knowing only the elect would believe and receive its benefits. Walter Elwell in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* says this view of the atonement is called the general redemption view and says:

*“The doctrine of general redemption argues that the death of Christ was designed to include all mankind, whether or not all believe. To those who savingly believe it is redemptively applied, and to those who do not believe it provides the benefits of common grace and the removal of any excuse for being lost. God loved them and Christ died for them; they are lost because they refuse to accept the salvation that is sincerely offered to them in Christ.”<sup>6</sup>*

- c. Elwell gives arguments for holding to the general redemption view of the atonement.
- (1) It is the historic view of the church.
  - (2) When the Bible says Christ died for “all” it means just that. The Word ought to be taken in its normal sense unless some compelling reason exists to take it otherwise, and no such reason exists.”
  - (3) The Bible says Jesus “takes away the sin of the world” and is “the Savior of the world” and there is no place in the New Testament where the word “world” means “church” or “elect.”
  - (4) Just because the Bible teaches that Christ died for all does not mean that all are saved. “One must believe in Christ to be saved, so the fact that Christ died for the world apparently does not secure the salvation of all. Those who assert this are simply wrong.”
  - (5) “God is not unfair in condemning those who reject the offer of salvation.” He is not punishing Christ for sins the first time and the unbeliever the second time. “Because the nonbeliever refuses to accept the death of Christ as his own, the benefits of Christ’s death are not applied to him. He is lost, not because Christ did not die for him, but because he refuses God’s offer of forgiveness.” It is unattested that Christ died for believers. “But it would have to be shown that Christ died only for them. No one denies Christ died for them. It is only denied that Christ died exclusively for them.”
  - (6) The Bible says that Christ died for sinners, which includes everyone (e.g., **I Tim. 1:15; Rom. 5:6-8**).

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<sup>6</sup>Walter Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 99.



- (7) “God sincerely offers the gospel to everyone to believe, not just the elect. How could this be true if Christ did not actually die for everyone. . . Even Berkhof, a staunch defender of limited atonement, admits, “It need not be denied that there is a real difficulty at this point (*Systematic Theology*, p. 462).””

#### IV. SCRIPTURAL PROOF OF CHRIST’S ATONEMENT

##### A. Texts Anticipating Christ’s Atoning Work

1. **Gen. 3:15, 21** And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you shall bruise him on the heel.” . . 21 The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.
2. **Gen. 4:3-6** So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the Lord of the fruit of the ground. 4 Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5 but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?”
3. **Gen. 22:1-8** Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” 2 He said, “Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you.” 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. 4 On the third day Abraham raised his eyes and saw the place from a distance. 5 Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey, and I and the lad will go over there; and we will worship and return to you.” 6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” And he said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?” 8 Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.
4. **Lev. 17:11, 14** ‘For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.’ . . 14 “For as for

the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life. Therefore I said to the sons of Israel, 'You are not to eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.'

5. **Isa. 53:4-12** Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on Him. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? 9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. 10 But the Lord was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

#### B. **New Testament affirmation of Christ's atoning work**

1. **Jn. 3:16** "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
2. **Rom. 5:8** But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
3. **Rom. 8:32** He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?
4. **II Cor. 5:14, 19, 21** For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; . . . 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of

reconciliation. . . 21 He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

5. **Gal. 1:3-4** Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,
6. **Eph. 5:2** and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.
7. **Heb. 9:8-14** The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing, 9 which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, 10 since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation. 11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?
8. **I Pet. 3:18** For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

## V. WHAT GREAT PREACHERS HAVE TAUGHT ABOUT THE ATONEMENT

- A. **Richard Baxter (1615 – 1691)** said, *“When God telleth us as plain as can be spoken, that Christ died for and tasted death for every man, men will deny it, and to that end subvert the plain sense of the words, merely because they cannot see how this can stand with Christ’s damning men, and with his special love to his chosen. It is not hard to see the fair and harmonious consistency: But what if you cannot see how two plain truths of the Gospel should agree? Will you therefore deny one of them when both are plain? Is not that in high pride to prefer your own understandings before the wisdom of the Spirit of God, who indicted the Scriptures? Should not a humble man rather say, doubtless both are true though I cannot reconcile them. . . So others will deny these plain truths, because they think that all that Christ died*

*for are certainly Justified and Saved: For whomsoever he died and satisfied justice for, them he procured faith to believe in him: God cannot justly punish those whom Christ hath satisfied for, etc. But doth the Scripture speak all these or any of these opinions of theirs, as plainly as it saith that Christ died for all and every man? Doth it say, as plainly any where that he died not for all? Doth it any where except any one man, and say Christ died not for him? Doth it say any where that he died only for his Sheep, or his Elect, and exclude the Non-Elect? There is no such word in all the Bible; Should not then the certain truths and the plain texts be the standard to the uncertain points, and obscure texts?"*<sup>9</sup>

- B. John Newton (1725 – 1807)** *"The design and extent of this gratuitous removal of sin, by the oblation of "the Lamb of God," is expressed in a large and indefinite manner: he "taketh away the sins of the world." Many of my hearers need not be told, what fierce and voluminous disputes have been maintained concerning the extent of the death of Christ. . . For myself, I wish to be known by no name but that of a Christian, and implicitly to adopt no system but the Bible. . . If, because the death of Christ is here said to take away "the sin of the world," or, (as this evangelist expresses it in another place,) the "whole world," it be inferred, that he actually designed and intended the salvation of all men, such an inference would be contradicted by fact. For it is certain that all men will not be saved. . . But, on the other hand, I cannot think the sense of the expression is sufficiently explained, by saying, that the world, and the whole world, is spoken of, to teach us that the sacrifice of "The lamb of God" was not confined, like the levitical offerings, to the nation of Israel only; but that it is available for the sin of a determinate number of persons, called "the elect," who are scattered among many nations, and found under a great variety of states and circumstances of human life. This is undoubtedly the truth, so far as it goes; but not, I apprehend, fully agreeable to the Scriptural manner of representation. That there is an election of grace, we are plainly taught; yet it is not said, "that Jesus Christ came into the world to save" the elect, but that he came to save, "sinners," to "seek and to save them that are lost." Upon this ground, I conceive that ministers have a warrant to preach the Gospel to every human creature, and to address the conscience of every man in the sight of God; and that every person who hears this Gospel has thereby a warrant, an encouragement, yea, a command, to apply to Jesus Christ for salvation; and that they who refuse, thereby exclude themselves, and perish, not because they never had, nor possibly could have, any interest in his atonement, but simply because they will not come unto him that they might have life."*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Richard Baxter, *Universal Redemption of Mankind by the Lord Jesus Christ*, London, 1694, 282-283.

<sup>10</sup>John Newton, *The Works of John Newton*, sermon 16, New York by S. Whiting in 1811, 190, (Google Books).

- C. **R. L. Dabney (1820-1898)** in his *Systematic Theology*, wrote this in conclusion to his discussion of the nature of Christ's sacrifice, "*This seems, then, to be the candid conclusion, that there is no passage in the Bible which asserts an intention to apply redemption to any others than the elect, on the part of God and Christ, but that there are passages which imply that Christ died for all sinners in some sense, . . . Certainly the expiation [sacrifice] made by Christ is so related to all, irrespective of election, that God can sincerely invite all to enjoy its benefits, that every soul in the world who desires salvation is warranted to appropriate it, and that even a Judas, had he come in earnest, would not have been cast out.*"<sup>11</sup>
- D. **C. H. Spurgeon (1834 – 1892)** a self-proclaimed Calvinist and believer of limited atonement, in a sermon entitled "The Death of Christ" preached against the false idea that the damned can have their sins atoned for said, "*Now, such an atonement I despise! I reject it. I may be called Antinomian or Calvinist for preaching a limited atonement; but I had rather believe a limited atonement that is efficacious for all men for whom it was intended, than a universal atonement that is not efficacious for anybody, except the will of man be joined with it. Why, my brethren, if we were only so far atoned for by the death of Christ that any one of us might afterwards save himself, Christ's atonement were not worth a farthing, for there is no man of us can save himself, no not under the gospel; for if I am to be saved by faith, if that faith is to be my own act, unassisted by the Holy Spirit, I am as unable to save myself by faith as to save myself by good works. And after all, though men call this a limited atonement, it is as effectual as their own fallacious and rotten redemptions can pretend to be.*"

Though Spurgeon was a strong Calvinist and defended the limited atonement view, he did not reject, as most in the limited atonement camp today do, that there is a sense in which Christ died for all universally. Spurgeon frequently proclaimed that Christ died for all, every, and each person. In His work *All of Grace* Spurgeon appeals to the unrepentant saying, "*Assuredly the contemplation of the death of Christ is one of the surest and speediest methods of gaining repentance. . . if you believingly think of **Jesus dying for you**, repentance will burst forth. **Meditate on the Lord's shedding His heart's blood out of love to you**. Set before your mind's eye the agony and bloody sweat, the cross and passion; and, as you do this, He who was the bearer of all this grief will look at you, and with that look He will do for you what He did for Peter, so that you also will go out and weep bitterly. **He who died for you can, by His gracious Spirit, make you die to sin.***"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 607.

<sup>12</sup>C. H. Spurgeon, *All of Grace*, 90.

- E. **William Shed (1820 – 1894)** Shed in his *Dogmatic Theology* wrote, “Christ’s death as it relates to the claims of the law upon all mankind, cancels those claims wholly. ‘It is an infinite propitiation for the sins of the whole world,’ 1 Jn 2:2. . . . This one offering expiated ‘the sins of the whole world,’ and justice is completely satisfied in reference to them. The death of the God-man naturally and necessarily cancelled all legal claims. When a particular person trusts in this infinite atonement, and it is imputed to him by God, it then becomes his atonement for judicial purposes as really as if he had made it himself.”<sup>13</sup>
- F. **Charles Hodge (1873 – 1966)** wrote in his *Systematic Theology*, “The whole question, therefore, concerns simply the purpose of God in the mission of his Son. What was the design of Christ’s coming into the world, and doing and suffering all He actually did and suffered? Was it merely to make the salvation of all men possible; to remove the obstacles which stood in the way of the offer of pardon and acceptance to sinners? or, Was it specially to render certain the salvation of his own people, i.e., of those given to Him by the Father?” [What Hodge is asking is if there are any non-redemptive purposes for the death of Christ. Hodge goes on to answer his question.] “Christ died. . . sufficiently for all, efficaciously only for the elect. There is a sense, therefore, in which He died for all, and there is a sense in which He died for the elect alone.”<sup>14</sup>

Hodge reveals his grasp of the issue when he says, “The people of God are not justified from eternity. They do not come into this world in a justified state. They remain (if adults) in a state of condemnation until they believe.”<sup>15</sup>

- G. **John Calvin (1509–1564)** Commenting on **Isa. 53:12** wrote, “I approve of the ordinary reading, that he alone bore the punishment of many, because on him was laid the guilt of the whole world. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that ‘many’ sometimes denotes ‘all.’”

Commenting on **Rom. 5:18** Calvin said, “For though Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and is offered through God’s benignity indiscriminately to all, yet all do not receive him.”

Commenting on **Gal. 1:3-5** Calvin wrote, “For the faithless have no profit at all by the death and passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, but rather are so much the more damnable, because they reject the means that God had ordained: and

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<sup>13</sup>William Shed, *Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2, 437-438.

<sup>14</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 545-546.

<sup>15</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 472.

*their unthankfulness shall be so much the more grievously punished, because they have trodden under foot the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was the ransom for their souls."*

Commenting on **Mk. 14:22-26** and the shedding of blood for many Calvin wrote, *"Which is shed for many." By the word many he means not a part of the world only, but the whole human race; for he contrasts many with one; as if he had said, that he will not be the Redeemer of one man only, but will die in order to deliver many from the condemnation of the curse. It must at the same time be observed, however, that by the words for you, as related by Luke, Christ directly addresses the disciples, and exhorts every believer to apply to his own advantage the shedding of blood. Therefore, when we approach to the holy table, let us not only remember in general that the world has been redeemed by the blood of Christ, but let every one consider for himself that his own sins have been expiated."*

Calvin in his last will and testament he says, *"I testify also and declare, that I suppliantly beg of Him, that He may be pleased so to wash and purify me in the blood which my Sovereign Redeemer has shed for the sins of the human race, . . ."*<sup>16</sup>

- H. **Eric Svendsen**, of New Testament Research Ministries, says, *"I'm convinced that Christ had a dual purpose in the atonement: one for the elect, and another for the non-elect. In the case of the elect, the atonement provides the necessary ground for redemption. In the case of the non-elect, the atonement provides the necessary ground for condemnation in the rejection of the gospel. Further, I think the limited atonement view so focuses on the former that it neglects the latter, and in so doing unwittingly renders groundless the condemnation of the non-elect in their rejection of the gospel. At the very least, I don't think the limited atonement camp can any longer make the charge that every other view except five-point Calvinism posits some sort of "unfulfilled purpose" of Christ in his death and atonement."*<sup>17</sup>

## VI. ERRORS CONCERNING CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

- A. Christ died for the purpose and intent of saving all men.
- B. Christ's atonement was not sufficient for all sin.
- C. Christ's atonement was only temporary in effect.

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<sup>16</sup>Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

<sup>17</sup>Erik Svendsen, <http://ntrminblog.blogspot.com/2005/02/limited-atonement-debate-in-historical.html>

- D. Christ's atonement does not remove guilt, it only covers up sins.
- E. Christ died to save the non-elect, but could not because they would not believe.
- F. Christ died not knowing who would benefit from His atoning work.
- G. Since Christ died to save the elect only we should not preach to unbelievers that Christ died for them.

## VII. APPLICATION OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT

- A. You need to know that Christ is the only way to get to heaven because He is the only one qualified to pay the penalty of your sin.
- B. If you are a believer, you should regularly give thanks to God for Christ's perfect atoning work.
- C. You don't need to feel guilty about sin you have confessed knowing Christ's atonement is perfect and sufficient for all your sin.
- D. When you preach the gospel, tell people the good news that Christ died for all, gave himself a ransom for all, and that whoever will believe will not perish but have everlasting life.

**John Newton** discussing the age long debate over the atonement wrote: *"I know something of the cavils and curious reasonings which obtain upon this subject, and I know I may be pressed with difficulties, which I cannot resolve to the full satisfaction of inquiring and speculative spirits. I am not disheartened by meeting with some things beyond the grasp of my scanty powers, in a book which I believe to be inspired by Him whose ways and thoughts are higher than ours, "as the heavens are higher than earth." But, I believe, that vain reasonings, self-will, and attachment to names and parties, and a disposition to draw our sentiments from human systems, rather than to form them by close and humble study of the Bible, with prayer for divine teaching, are the chief sources of our perplexities and disputes." To that I say, "Amen!"*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> John Newton, *Works of the Rev. John Newton*, Sermon 16, New York by S. Whiting in 1811, 193 (Google Books).



**“How many are mine iniquities and sins?” — Job 13:23**

*Have you ever really weighed and considered how great the sin of God’s people is? Think how heinous is your own transgression, and you will find that not only does a sin here and there tower up like an alp, but that your iniquities are heaped upon each other, as in the old fable of the giants who piled Pelian upon Ossa, mountain upon mountain. What an aggregate of sin there is in the life of one of the most sanctified of God’s children! Attempt to multiply this, the sin of one only, by the multitude of the redeemed, “a number which no man can number,” and you will have some conception of the great mass of the guilt of the people for whom Jesus shed his blood. But we arrive at a more adequate idea of the magnitude of sin by the greatness of the remedy provided. It is the blood of Jesus Christ, God’s only and well-beloved Son. God’s Son! Angels cast their crowns before him! All the choral symphonies of heaven surround his glorious throne. “God over all, blessed for ever. Amen.” And yet he takes upon himself the form of a servant, and is scourged and pierced, bruised and torn, and at last slain; since nothing but the blood of the incarnate Son of God could make atonement for our offences. No human mind can adequately estimate the infinite value of the divine sacrifice, for great as is the sin of God’s people, the atonement which takes it away is immeasurably greater. Therefore, the believer, even when sin rolls like a black flood, and the remembrance of the past is bitter, can yet stand before the blazing throne of the great and holy God, and cry, “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather, that hath risen again.” While the recollection of his sin fills him with shame and sorrow, he at the same time makes it a foil to show the brightness of mercy—guilt is the dark night in which the fair star of divine love shines with serene splendor.<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, evening July 6th.