

Steve Whitacre

## SESSION 4: Particular Redemption<sup>1</sup>

*“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.” (John 6:37–39, ESV)*

*“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 2:1–2, ESV)*

This truth is not a novelty or theological fine point. Christ’s atonement is at the center of the TULIP and the center of the gospel.

### I. FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?

“That agreeably thereunto, Jesus Christ the Savior of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer, according to the word of the Gospel of John 3:16, ‘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.’ And in the First Epistle of 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.’”<sup>2</sup>

“The question we are raising is this: What did Jesus accomplish by his death? What did his death do? Did Jesus’ death make salvation possible for everyone, because he died for all, without actually saving anyone? Or did his death actually accomplish the salvation of those for whom he died?”<sup>3</sup>

“The term that is usually preferred is *particular redemption*, since this view holds that Christ died for particular people (specifically, those who would be saved and whom he came to redeem), that he foreknew each one of them individually (cf. Eph. 1:3-5) and had them individually in mind in his atoning work.”<sup>4</sup>

#### DEFINITION:

“God, out of his infinite love to his elect, sent his dear Son in the fulness of time,

---

<sup>1</sup> This outline is adapted from portions of chapter 5 of *The Doctrines of Grace*, by James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken. For further study, see Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology*, chapter 27; J.I. Packer, “Introductory Essay” in John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (<http://bit.ly/aDzC9Y>).

<sup>2</sup> The Articles of the Remonstrance, Article II. Phillip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Volume 3, 545ff.

<sup>3</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 114.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 596.

---

whom he had promised in the beginning of the world, and made effectual by that promise, to die, pay a ransom of infinite value and dignity, for the purchasing of eternal redemption, and bringing unto himself all and every one of those whom he had before ordained to eternal life, for the praise of his own glory.<sup>5</sup>

## II. A MINORITY POSITION

“The opposite view to particular redemption is universal redemption... These people all believe that Jesus died for all men and women and that the only thing that keeps them from the benefits of his death (if, indeed, there are some who do fail to benefit from it) is their unbelief or lack of faith. Those who hold to the Reformed position affirm that Jesus died for a select number of people, those whom the Father specifically had given him, that his atonement accomplished their salvation, and therefore that all of these are certain to be saved.”<sup>6</sup>

Three options:

1. Universalism
2. Universal redemption/indefinite atonement (Arminian)
3. Particular redemption/definite atonement (Calvinist)

Points of agreement between Calvinists and Arminians:

- There is agreement about the value of Jesus' atonement
- We agree that there are benefits of the death of Jesus Christ for all people, benefits short of salvation
- We are not in disagreement as to whether or not all people will be saved.
- “We also agree that a free offer of the gospel can rightly be made to every person. It is completely true that “whoever will” may come, and no one who comes to him will be turned away.”<sup>7</sup>

“Furthermore, we all agree that the atonement must be limited in one way or another. Unless a person is a genuine universalist, and believes that every individual eventually will be saved, he or she inevitably circumscribes the atonement. Either it is limited in its *effects* (Christ died for all, but not all get saved), or it is limited in its *scope* (Christ did not die for all, but all for whom he died will be saved).”<sup>8</sup>

“While the value of the atonement was *sufficient* to save all mankind, it was *efficient* to save only the elect... The Arminian limits the atonement as certainly as does the Calvinist. The Calvinist limits the *extent* of it in that he says it does not apply to all persons... while the Arminian limits the *power* of it, for he says that in itself it does not actually save anybody. The Calvinist limits it quantitatively, but not qualitatively; the Arminian limits it qualitatively, but not quantitatively. For the Calvinist it is like a narrow

---

<sup>5</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 119.

<sup>6</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 115.

<sup>7</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 597.

<sup>8</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 116.

---

bridge which goes all the way across the stream; for the Arminian it is like a great wide bridge which goes only half-way across. As a matter of fact, the Arminian places more severe limitations on the work of Christ than does the Calvinist.”<sup>9</sup>

### III. THE DESIGN OF THE ATONEMENT

“The real question concerns the *design* of the atonement; that is, what did God the Father actually intend to do in sending his Son to die for us? And did Jesus do it? We can express the matter with questions such as these: Did Jesus’ death actually redeem anyone? Did his sacrifice of himself make a true propitiation for our sins? Did Jesus’ death reconcile any specific individual to God? Was Jesus’ death an actual atonement? If the answer to these questions is “Yes,” then for whom did he do these things?”<sup>10</sup>

Scriptural basis:<sup>11</sup>

- A. Verses which “hold out the counsel, purpose, mind, intention, and will of God and our Savior in this work:”
  - 1. “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” (Luke 19:10, ESV)
  - 2. “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21, ESV)
  - 3. “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” (1 Timothy 1:15, ESV)
  - 4. “Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.” (Hebrews 2:14–15, ESV)
  - 5. “Husbands, love your wives, as 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, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” (Ephesians 5:25–27, ESV)
  - 6. Cf. Titus 2:14; John 17:9; Galatians 1:4; 2 Corinthians 5:21
- B. Verses “which lay down the actual accomplishment and effect of this oblation, or what it doth really produce and effect in and towards them for whom it is an oblation:”
  - 1. “...he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal

---

<sup>9</sup> Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 152-153.

<sup>10</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 117.

<sup>11</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 97ff.

---

redemption... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” (Hebrews 9:12, 14, ESV)

2. “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,” (Hebrews 1:3, ESV)
3. “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24, ESV)
4. “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,” (Colossians 1:21–22, ESV)
5. “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” (Ephesians 2:13–16, ESV)
6. Cf. Acts 20:28; Rom 8:33–34; Rev 5:9–10; Dan 9:24; John 7:33; John 10:15, 28; 2 Tim 1:10; Rom 5:6–10

“If the death and oblation of Jesus Christ (as a sacrifice to his Father) doth sanctify all them for whom it was a sacrifice; doth purge away their sin; redeem them from wrath, curse, and guilt; work for them peace and reconciliation with God; procure for them life and immortality; bearing their iniquities and healing all their diseases; — then died he only for those that are in the event sanctified, purged, redeemed, justified, freed from wrath and death, quickened, saved, etc.; but that all are not thus sanctified, freed, etc., is most apparent: and, therefore, they cannot be said to be the proper object of the death of Christ. The supposal was confirmed before; the inference is plain from Scripture and experience, and the whole argument (if I mistake not) solid.”<sup>12</sup>

#### IV. BELIEF AND UNBELIEF

If the sins of all men are forgiven, what keeps men out of heaven? Arminians might say it is their unbelief. Is that unbelief a sin? If not, why would it keep them out of heaven? If so, isn't it still forgiven?

“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.

---

<sup>12</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 102.

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 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."<sup>13</sup>

### V. PROBLEM TEXTS

- A. Passages that seem to teach that God has a will to save everyone (e.g. Ezek 18:32; 1 Tim 2:3-4; 2 Pet 3:9).
- B. Passages in which it is suggested that some people for whom Jesus Christ died will perish (e.g. Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11; Heb 10:26-27; 2 Pet 2:1).
- C. Passages in which the work of Jesus seems to be intended for the entire world (Isa 53:6; John 1:29; 4:42; Rom 5:18; 8:32; 2 Cor 5:14-15; 1 Tim 2:5-6).

"Does this doctrine weaken the gospel message? Far from weakening the message, the doctrine of definite atonement strengthens it and alone makes it a genuine gospel."<sup>14</sup>

### VI. REFORMED THEOLOGY FOR REAL LIFE

Confidence before God

1. Our salvation is actual. Jesus actually accomplished it!
2. Our salvation is complete, not dependent upon our faith

Glory to God

1. Rather than man. Rev 5:9
2. Jesus did this, and it doesn't depend finally on faith.

### MORE QUOTATIONS:

---

<sup>13</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 61.

<sup>14</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 133.

---

Here's a controversial subject that tends to divide  
For years it's had Christians lining up on both sides  
By God's grace, I'll address this without pride  
The question concerns those for whom Christ died  
Was He trying to save everybody worldwide?  
Was He trying to make the entire world His Bride?  
Does man's unbelief keep the Savior's hands tied?  
Biblically, each of these must be denied  
It's true, Jesus gave up His life for His Bride  
But His Bride is the elect, to whom His death is applied  
If on judgment day, you see that you can't hide  
And because of your sin, God's wrath on you abides  
And hell is the place you eternally reside  
That means your wrath from God hasn't been satisfied  
But we believe His mission was accomplished when He died  
But how the cross relates to those in hell? <sup>15</sup>

“It cannot be over-emphasized that we have not seen the full meaning of the Cross till we have seen it as the divines of Dort display it—as the centre of the gospel, flanked on the one hand by total inability and unconditional election, and on the other by irresistible grace and final preservation. For the full meaning of the Cross only appears when the atonement is defined in terms of these four truths. Christ died to save a certain company of helpless sinners upon whom God had set His free saving love. Christ's death ensured the calling and keeping—the present and final salvation—of all whose sins He bore. That is what Calvary meant and means. The Cross saved; the Cross saves.”<sup>16</sup>

“Did Jesus' death actually save anyone, or did it only make the gift of salvation possible? When the question is asked in this way, we can see that there are only three possible answers:

- Jesus' death was not an actual atonement, but only something that makes atonement possible. The atonement becomes actual when the sinner repents of his or her sin and believes on Jesus.
- Jesus' death was an actual atonement for the sins of God's elect people with the result that these, and only these, are delivered from sin's penalty.
- Jesus' death was an actual atonement for the sin of all people with the result that all people are saved.”<sup>17</sup>

“Does this weaken the gospel message? Far from weakening the message, the doctrine of definite atonement strengthens it and alone makes it a genuine gospel. Suppose we go to the lost with the message that Jesus died for everyone but without conviction that his death actually accomplished salvation for those who should believe. Suppose, in other words, that we proclaim a redemption that did not redeem, a propitiation that did not propitiate, a reconciliation that did not reconcile, and an atonement that did not atone? That would seem a fool's errand. But if we can say, “Christ did for sinners to restore them

---

<sup>15</sup> Shai Linne, “Mission Accomplished,” *The Atonement (album)*, 2008.

<sup>16</sup> J.I. Packer, “Introductory Essay,” in John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 118.

---

to God; if you believe on him, you are saved and can know that he has died for you," then we have a message worth proclaiming and our hearers have a gospel worth believing."<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> James Montgomery Boice and Philip Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace*, 133.