

Sovereign Grace, Chapter 3

Limited Atonement

[Brian Schwertley](#)

A doctrinal issue which is crucial to our understanding of God's nature (i.e. His sovereignty) and the gospel is the extent of Christ's atoning death on the cross.¹ There are three different views current among professing Christians today: universalism, inconsistent universalism, and particularism. Universalists believe that Christ died for every individual (without exception) who ever lived. They believe that God intended to save every man by the death of Christ, and that since Christ died for everyone, everyone will (without exception) be saved. Although this view is logically consistent, it is *obviously unscriptural*. The Bible teaches that many people will go to hell (Mt. 7:13). Universalism is the dominant view among theological liberals, but since it is rare among evangelicals, our attention will be directed to the two remaining positions. Inconsistent universalism holds that Christ died for all men without exception, but that only *some* of those for whom Christ died actually will be saved. The rest will go to hell. This view is held by virtually all so-called fundamentalists and evangelicals today. Inconsistent universalists (i.e. Arminians) believe that Christ's meritorious work did not actually secure the salvation of any man, but merely made salvation a possibility for all men. Those who hold to particular atonement (i.e. Calvinists) teach that Christ died for the elect only. Christ's atoning death definitely secured the salvation of those for whom He died. The doctrine that Christ died only for some is very unpopular today; therefore, it is important to establish this doctrine from a careful examination of Scripture.

Scriptural Particularism

Since many professing Christians have been taught that limited atonement is a dangerous error, one must carefully and objectively look at the scriptural evidence for such a doctrine. One must avoid going to Scripture with a set of preconceived notions that are *not* derived from the Bible itself. This brief study will show that the doctrine of limited atonement is expressly taught in Scripture. Furthermore, the doctrine of a limited atonement logically proceeds from the other well-established doctrines, such as God's absolute sovereignty, total depravity, regeneration, election, etc. After the scriptural evidence is set forth, the Arminian arguments against this doctrine will be examined.

Matthew 1:21. "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

¹ "To this cardinal doctrine of the Word of God [God's sovereignty] Arminianism does great violence, for it teaches that God did no more than make salvation possible through the death of His Son, and that it is for the sinner to make his salvation actual by the acceptance of Christ in faith of his own free volition. Thus the realization of salvation is made to depend on the will of man, not the will of God. Man becomes his own savior. Salvation is no longer 'of God that showeth mercy,' but 'of him that willeth' (R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959], 40).

There is great significance in the angels' expression "His people." Did Christ come to save every person? Did He come to save the Jews only? No, He came to save His people. "Jesus is not to save every man, but only his *own people*, for whose ransom he made a pact with the Father, in the covenant of redemption, for it is said, *he shall save his own people.*"² Jesus came to save only those (the elect) given to Him by the Father. "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.... This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day" (Jn. 6:37, 39).

Note that the passage does not say that Jesus came to make salvation a possibility for every individual, but that He actually will save His people. Jesus saves His people from their sins. He saves from the guilt and penalty of sin by His sacrificial death. He provides a perfect, sinless life through His righteousness to satisfy the covenant of works and the demands of the law. Furthermore, He saves from the pollution and dominion of sin by the Spirit of His grace. "[I]n the fullest and most glorious sense he will save his people from their sins."³ The angels' glorious declaration regarding Jesus could *not* have been made if Christ did not actually secure any person's salvation but had merely opened the *possibility* of salvation. B. B. Warfield writes, "The Calvinist is he who holds with full consciousness that God the Lord, in his saving operations, deals not generally with mankind at large, but particularly with the individuals who are actually saved. Thus, and thus only, he contends, can either the supernaturalism of salvation which is the mark of Christianity at large and which ascribes all salvation to God, or the immediacy of the operations of saving grace which is the mark of evangelicalism and which ascribes salvation to the direct working of God upon the soul, come to its rights and have justice accorded to it. Particularism in the saving processes, he contends, is already given in the supernaturalism of salvation and in the immediacy of the operations of the divine grace; and the denial of particularism is constructively the denial of the immediacy of saving grace, that is of evangelicalism, and of the supernaturalism of salvation, that is of Christianity itself. It is logically the total rejection of Christianity."⁴

John 10:11, 14-16, 26-29. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.... I am the good shepherd, and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.... But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand."

Here is a portion of Scripture from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself which explicitly teaches particular redemption. Jesus does *not* lay down His life for the goats, for those who on the day of judgment are cast into the lake of fire, but *only* for the sheep. "It is for *the sheep—only*

² David Dickson, *A Brief Exposition of Jesus Christ According to Matthew* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1647] 1981), 7.

³ William Hendriksen, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), 133.

⁴ B. B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 87.

for the *sheep*—that the good shepherd lays down his life. The design of the atonement is definitely restricted. Jesus dies for those who have been given to him by the Father, for the children of God, for true believers. This is the teaching of the Fourth Gospel throughout (3:16; 6:37, 39, 40, 44, 65; 10:11, 15, 29; 17:6, 9, 20, 21, 24). It is also the doctrine of the rest of Scripture. With his precious blood Christ purchased his church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27); his people (Matt. 1:21); the elect (Rom. 8:32-35).⁵

Other Passages

If Jesus' statement regarding bearing the sins of the sheep were contrary to all the other biblical teaching regarding the extent of the atonement, election, predestination, and so on, one could reasonably argue that perhaps this passage does not mean what it appears to mean. There are several passages, however, which teach that Christ died not for every individual, including those in hell, but only for His church. Writing to Roman Christians Paul says: "Jesus our Lord...was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Rom. 4:25). To the Galatians Paul writes, "Our Lord Jesus Christ...gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). Paul says that Christ became "a curse for *us*" (Gal. 3:13); and that He *actually* redeemed His people from the curse of the law (v. 13). The church—the bride of Christ—is the object of His love: "Christ...loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25). If Christ died for every individual and God really intends to save everyone, Romans 8:31-33 cannot be true, for nothing created can separate *us*—that is, God's own people—from His love: "If God be for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also freely give us all things?" How does Paul define *us* in Romans? As every person in the world? No, but only as the elect: "Who shall bring a charge against God's *elect*?" (8:33).

When the apostle Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders regarding their responsibility toward God's people, he says: "Shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Ac. 20:28). Christ purchased, redeemed, and rescued from destruction His people, His bride, His church. Thus the saints in heaven proclaim: "You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). Note that Christ did not purchase all men from every nation, but only some out of each nation. Christ purchased the elect, the universal church, with His own blood. This incredible purchase price (the bloody death of Christ) is repeatedly used by Paul to goad Christians to a greater sanctification: "You were bought at a price" (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23). If Christ did *not* purchase all men, then He certainly did *not* die an atoning death for all men. "Furthermore, when it is said that Christ gave His life for His Church, or for His people, we find it impossible to believe that He gave Himself as much for reprobates as for those whom He intended to save. Mankind is divided into two classes and what is distinctly affirmed of one is impliedly denied of the other."⁶

Christ came not to save each individual in the world, but to set apart for Himself a special people: "Jesus Christ...gave Himself for *us*, that He might redeem *us* from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works" (Tit. 2:14). This passage restricts salvation "to his people, his church, those who are redeemed from iniquity, who are purged, who are a choice and peculiar people, and are zealous of good works. For these Christ

⁵ William Hendriksen, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 2:111.

⁶ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ, [1932] 1979), 157.

gave himself and no other.”⁷ Peter, writing to the elect (1 Pet. 1:2), agrees with Paul: “Christ suffered for *us*...who Himself bore *our* sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24). The writer of the epistle to Hebrews says that Christ “Himself purged *our* sins” (Heb. 1:13); that He “obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12). “For by one offering He has perfected forever *those* who are being sanctified” (Heb. 10:14). The inspired apostles never speak of a salvation made possible to all men, but of the actual salvation of some men—the elect. Christ sets apart a people and *removes* their punishment. As John says, “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses *us* from all sin” (1 Jn. 1:7); “In this the love of God was manifested toward *us*, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that *we* might live through Him.... He loved *us* and sent His Son to be the propitiation for *our* sins” (1 Jn. 4:9-10).

Jesus Died for Many

At the last supper Jesus tells His disciples that His blood is poured out “for many”: “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Mt. 26:28). Jesus did not die for all or for just a few, but for many—the elect. In Mark 10:45 Jesus says, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” “*Many*, distinguished from one and all, and here applied to true believers, or the elect of God, for whom Christ came to suffer.”⁸ Jesus dies as a substitute for His people the many. “The sacrifice of the one is contrasted with those for whom it is made; in allusion to Isa. 53:11 f. In rabbinic literature, and even more strikingly at Qumran, ‘the many’ is a technical term for the elect community, the eschatological people of God.”⁹ The apostle John understood Christ’s meaning when he wrote: “He laid down His life for *us*. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the *brethren* (1 Jn. 3:16). The author of the epistle to the Hebrews says that “Christ was offered to bear the sins of many” (9:28). “The ‘many’ here are the same as the ‘many sons’—His ‘brethren’—those who should be ‘heirs of salvation,’ for everyone of whom, ‘by the grace of God, He tasted death.’”¹⁰

There are some who argue that “many” is simply synonymous with “all”; that Christ died for all or every individual. There is a passage where all and many are used in a parallel manner: “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:18-19). Although Paul describes the benefits of Christ’s death to “all men,” the “all” refers only to those united to Christ in His death. As Adam is the covenant head of all who are sinners by imputation, Christ is the covenant head of all who are justified or made righteous. “The plain meaning is, all connected with Adam, and all connected with Christ.... If the *all* in the latter part of the verse is co-extensive with the *all* in the former, the passage of necessity teaches universal salvation; for it is impossible that *to be justified, constituted righteous*, can mean simply that justification is offered to all men. The *all* who are justified are saved. If therefore the *all* means, all men, the apostle teaches that all men are saved...but Paul himself, distinctly teach[es] that all men are not to be saved, as in 2 Thes. i.

⁷ Thomas Taylor, *Exposition of Titus* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, [1619] 1980), 363-364.

⁸ J. A. Alexander, *Mark* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1858] 1960), 294.

⁹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 384.

¹⁰ John Brown, *Hebrews* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1862] 1983), 430.

9.”¹¹ Thus, not only does Paul teach that “all” refers *not* to the whole human race but *only* those united to Christ in His death, but he also teaches that Christ’s death actually guarantees or secures salvation for the elect. Paul rules out the idea that Christ’s death merely made salvation a possibility.

Christ’s Death Is Limited Not in Power but Extent

The inconsistent universalist and particular redemptionist both limit Christ’s death in some manner. The Arminian limits the power of Christ’s death to save, while the Calvinist limits the design of it.¹² The Calvinist teaches that Christ’s death is of infinite value to God because Christ was the *divine*-human mediator. Christ’s death was sufficient to save every man, woman and child who ever lived. In fact, it was sufficient to save everyone on a thousand planets, if God so desired. What limits Christ’s death is that by God’s design and purpose Jesus died only for the elect, those chosen to be saved before the foundation of the world. His death is directed to and actually saves particular persons; not an indefinite mass of people or a hypothetical humanity. Christ offered a definite atonement. It is personal. He knows His own by name (Jn. 10:14).

The Arminian believes that Christ’s death guarantees the actual salvation of not even one person. The Arminian believes in a very limited atonement: an atonement that is weak and impotent to save. God is helpless and waits for the sinner to save himself by choosing Christ. The Father’s plan to save humanity has been defeated, because almost all of mankind has gone to hell. Christ shed His blood and suffered horrible tortures in vain for those who throughout eternity scorn and reject Him. The Holy Spirit has been overpowered and successfully resisted by the vast majority of people throughout history. If Arminianism is true, then God’s plan of redemption is a colossal failure. God simply could not get the job done. Can a view which presents Christ’s death as a failure be true? Should we believe in a theological system which presents God as mere puppet of man, as incompetent in achieving His own purpose? Arminianism presents a false picture of God. It is man-centered, a deadly hybrid between biblical Protestantism and humanism.

¹¹ Charles Hodge, *Romans* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1835] 1989), 172. “And just as the relation to Adam means the imputation to us of his disobedience, so the relation to Christ means the imputation to us of his obedience. Justification means our involvement in the obedience of Christ in terms of the same principle by which we are involved in Adam’s sin. Nothing less is demanded by the analogy instituted in this verse. Again, the involvement in the obedience of Christ is not that of our personal voluntary obedience, nor that of our subjective holiness. This would violate the forensic character of the justification with which the apostle is dealing. But we must not tone down the formula ‘constituted righteous’ to any lower terms that the gracious judgment on God’s part whereby the obedience of Christ is reckoned to our account and therefore reckoned as ours with all the entail of consequence which righteousness carries with it” (John Murray, *Romans*, 206).

¹² Christ died on the cross after mankind had already been around for at least 4,000 years. Did Christ die on the cross for the millions of people who already had lived and died; who were already in hell with no possibility of exercising saving faith in Christ? Such a notion is quite absurd. Furthermore, the Arminian believes that God has a perfect foreknowledge of whatsoever comes to pass. If God knew who was going to believe in Christ beforehand and based election on such a foreseen faith, then why did Christ bother to die for people He knew would certainly reject Him and go to hell? The Arminian must either limit the design of the atonement in some manner or believe that God is unwise and incompetent in carrying out His plan of redemption.

The Nature of the Atonement

The greatest theological problem for Arminians (or inconsistent universalists) is the doctrine of the atonement. If one is going to hold that Christ died for every person, and yet hold that millions of people are going to hell, then one must distort the biblical meaning of Christ's death. That is precisely what Arminians have done. They argue that Christ's death has opened the door to reconciliation with God, but has not actually achieved reconciliation. They believe that Christ's death has made salvation possible for all, but has guaranteed the actual salvation of none. Does the Bible teach that Christ simply removed some legal obstacles, making salvation a possibility? No, that is not what the Bible teaches at all.

1. An Actual Redemption

When the Bible discusses Christ's work of redemption, it uses terms that can mean nothing less than the actual accomplishment of a people's comprehensive salvation. All the theological words derived from the biblical doctrine of the atonement are unmistakably clear. Christ suffered *vicariously*; that is, He died in the place of His people. Christ was the *substitute* for His people. He assumed all their legal responsibilities; He suffered their penalty and rendered a perfect obedience for them. Christ could not be a substitute or vicarious sacrifice in a hypothetical sense. He lived and died for a real, definite, actual group of people. Christ's death was *expiatory*; His death actually removes the guilt of sin. His sacrifice of Himself was *propitiatory*; that is, it actually removes God's judicial displeasure against the sinner. Christ not only eliminated the guilt, penalty, and wrath due sinners, but He also lived in perfect obedience, fulfilling all the requirements of God's law and the covenant of works. If Christ has rendered a perfect and complete satisfaction to God, it logically follows that those united to Him in His life, death and resurrection must be saved and cannot go to hell.

2. A Salvation Secured

That is the reason why the Bible teaches that Christ actually secured the salvation of His people, the elect. "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost" (Mt. 18:11; Lk. 19:10). In the same discourse Christ says, "Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (Mt. 18:14). "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). "Christ...gave Himself for our sins; that He might deliver us from this present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). Jesus was "born under the law to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5). "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15). "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day" (Jn. 6:39). "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21). "When Paul says that 'Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it' (Eph. 5:25), he is alluding to Christ's sacrificial offering. But he also states the design: 'that he might sanctify and cleanse it...that he might present it to himself a glorious church' (vv. 26, 27). The love spoken of here, the reference of the sacrificial offering, and the design are all restricted to the church. The design will certainly be fulfilled, and so the love and the giving of Himself achieve their object in the glorifying of that to which they were

directed. It is impossible to universalize the reference of the sacrifice of Christ alluded to here; it is severely limited to those who will finally be holy and without blemish.”¹³

3. An Accomplished Reconciliation

The Scriptures do not teach that Christ made reconciliation with God possible, but that He accomplished reconciliation, justification, and peace with God. Christ “is our peace” (Eph. 2:14). He died “that He might reconcile them [Jews and Gentiles] both to God in one body through the cross” (Eph. 2:16), “which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph. 3:11). Paul says that Christ achieved reconciliation not for those who made the first move toward God, but for sinners, for enemies. “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.... For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:8, 10). “But to make salvation possible, to make possible purification, deliverance, reconciliation, is something very different indeed from actually saving, purifying, delivering or reconciling. No man has the right to empty the glorious terms in which the gospel is revealed of all their saving power.”¹⁴

4. A Real Ransom

The Bible describes Christ’s death as a ransom or payment to God. Jesus came “to give His life a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:28; cf. Mk. 10:45; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; 1 Pet. 1:18-19; Heb. 9:12; Rev. 5:9, etc.). Jesus eliminated the penalty due from the guilt of sin by His blood. He “redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal. 3:13). By His death, Christ obtained the forgiveness of sins for His people (Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). There is no indication in Scripture that Christ only paid a partial ransom, or that God the Father has not accepted the ransom price. On the contrary, Paul says that Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people” (Tit. 2:14). If Christ has paid the full ransom price, then those bought and paid for with Christ’s blood cannot go to hell. Such a thing would be a travesty of justice and would make God’s acceptance of Christ’s work a sham. The implications of Christ’s ransom payment are obvious. Boettner writes, “If the suffering and death of Christ was a ransom for all men rather than for the elect only, then the merits of His work must be communicated to all alike and the penalty of eternal punishment cannot be justly inflicted on any. God would be unjust if He demanded this extreme penalty twice over, first from the substitute and then from the persons themselves.”¹⁵

5. All Saving Graces Flow from the Atonement

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ accomplished an objective redemption for the elect. No one who takes the Bible seriously can question the legal, forensic, objective nature of the terms used within the theological orbit of Christ’s atoning sacrifice (e.g., expiation, propitiation, reconciliation, justification, and redemption). But another crucial aspect of Christ’s atonement that is ignored by Arminians is the biblical teaching that Christ by His death also guaranteed the

¹³ John Murray, *The Atonement* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, n.d.), 28-29.

¹⁴ A. A. Hodge, *The Atonement*, 402.

¹⁵ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 155.

application of His work to the elect subjectively. Christ purchased all the spiritual graces for His people. God “has blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing in the heavenly places *in Christ*” (Eph. 1:3). Christ’s perfect redemption is the fountain out of which flows regeneration, faith, repentance, and sanctification.

Although faith, repentance and sanctification are spiritual graces in which man cooperates with the Holy Spirit, nevertheless they are described in Scripture as gifts from God. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the *gift* of God” (Eph. 2:8). “Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior, to *give* repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins” (Ac. 5:31). “When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God saying, ‘Then God has also *granted* to the Gentiles repentance to life’” (Ac. 11:18). It is man who must believe, repent, and grow in holiness, yet man, being dead in trespasses and sins, has no natural power to do these things. But because of God’s election of some and their union with Christ in His life, death, and resurrection, God enables those who are unable. Even the believer’s sanctification is guaranteed by his union with Christ. Paul argues in Romans 6:1-14 that real Christians cannot continue living in sin, because they were united with Christ in His death and resurrection. This means that those who are never sanctified (i.e. unbelievers) were never united to Christ in His death and resurrection. In other words, Christ did not die for them. Morey writes, “When Christ lived, died, was buried, arose, ascended, and sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, we are told that the ones for whom He did these things are to be viewed as being in such a life union with Him as their covenant head and representative that it is said that they lived, died, were buried, arose, ascended and sat down at the Father’s side ‘in Christ’ (Rom. 6:1-11; Gal. 2:20; 6:14; Eph. 2:5-6). *To say that Christ died for all is to say that all died in Christ.* It means that unbelievers are to be told that they have been crucified with Christ, been buried with Christ, have been resurrected with Christ and have ascended and sat down with Christ. This position is so manifestly false that it should grieve the child of God even to consider it.”¹⁶

6. God Regenerates Only the Elect

All the graces mentioned in which man must cooperate have their starting point in regeneration. Regeneration is an act of God the Holy Spirit upon the human heart, which enables men who are dead spiritually to live, understand spiritual truth, and trust in Christ. Regeneration, or the new birth, is sovereignly bestowed by God. “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit” (Jn. 3:8). God is the author of regeneration. “Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols...I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezek. 36:25-26). Regeneration is a gift of God. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit. 3:5). The foundation of a believer’s regeneration is not his faith, but union with Christ in His death and resurrection. “God...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)” (Eph. 2:6). “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being

¹⁶ Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement* (Southbridge, MA: Crown Pub., 1989), 64.

dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him (Col. 2:11-13).

If you are a Christian, it is because the Holy Spirit first renewed your heart and raised you up spiritually, enabling you to believe in Christ. Why did Lydia believe in the gospel preached by the apostle Paul? Because God first *opened her heart* and *enabled her to respond* to the gospel. Paul “sat down and spoke to the woman who met there. Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul” (Ac. 16:13-14). If regeneration is something that the Holy Spirit works directly upon the human heart, and is based upon a believer’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection, then one must conclude that God only regenerates the elect, and the rest He passes by.¹⁷ If every person were united with Christ in His death and resurrection, then God would regenerate every person—but He does not.

The doctrine of a universal atonement has led out of logical necessity to a perversion of the biblical teaching regarding regeneration. Arminians argue that the new birth is God’s response to man’s faith in Christ. This assumes that man has the ability to believe apart from the regenerating power of God’s Spirit. “It infers that sinners are not really dead in sins or totally depraved. It implies synergism, i.e. salvation is accomplished by man and God, each doing his own part. It implies free-willism, i.e. Adam’s fall into sin and guilt did not bring man’s will into bondage to sin.”¹⁸ The cart is placed before the horse, and God must share credit and glory with sinful man. “On the other hand, if regeneration precedes faith, this implies monergism, i.e. salvation is totally God’s work from beginning to end.”¹⁹ As Jonah declared: “salvation is of the LORD” (Jon. 2:9).

7. *Christ Intercedes Only for the Elect*

In His priestly office Jesus Christ not only sacrificed Himself on the cross for the elect, but also continuously intercedes for them. “If anyone sins, we have an *Advocate* with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 Jn. 2:1). “He continues forever [and] has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:24-25). Christ’s bloody death and His high priestly work go hand in hand. They cannot be separated. The common notion that Jesus died and is now passively waiting for people to accept Him is false. This means that if Christ died for every person in the world He must also intercede for every person in the world. It would be absurd for Christ to suffer and die an agonizing death to save someone and then *refuse* to pray for that person, yet in Jesus’ high priestly prayer He refused to pray for all men and prayed only for the elect. “As You have given Him authority over all flesh, then He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.... I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given me, for they are Yours.... Holy Father, keep through your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are.... I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one...and for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for

¹⁷ The apostle John says specifically that those who believe in Jesus were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man but of God” (1:13). Paul says, “It is not of him who wills...but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16).

¹⁸ Robert A. Morey, *Studies in the Atonement* (Southbridge, MA: Crown Pub., 1989), 82.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

those who will believe in me through their word.... Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved me before the foundation of the world” (Jn. 17:2, 9, 11, 15, 19, 20, 24).

If Jesus had indeed died for everyone in the world and was endeavoring to save all mankind, would He not then pray for everyone in the world to be saved? Yet He prays only for those chosen by the Father, those whom the Father gives to the Son. J. C. Ryle wrote, “This special intercession of the Lord Jesus is one grand secret of the believer’s safety. He is daily watched, and thought for, and provided for with unflinching care, by One whose eye never slumbers and never sleeps. Jesus is ‘able to save them to the uttermost who come unto God by Him, because He ever liveth to make intercession for them’ (Heb. vii. 25). They never perish, because He never ceases to pray for them, and His prayer must prevail. They stand and persevere to the end, not because of their own strength and goodness, but because Jesus intercedes for them. When Judas fell never to rise again, while Peter fell, but repented, and was restored, the reason of the difference lay under those words of Christ to Peter, ‘I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not’ (Luke xxii. 32).”²⁰

One is left with only three possible choices. First, Christ prays for everyone and the Father refuses to answer Christ’s prayers. This option is unscriptural and impossible, for Christ doesn’t pray for all, and we are told that Christ’s intercession does save to the uttermost (Heb. 7:25). Second, Christ died for all but refuses to intercede for all. This would place a gross disharmony within Christ’s redemptive work. Third, Jesus died only for the elect, and thus prays only for the elect. This is the only option that is scriptural and makes any sense.

The apostle Paul clearly held to the third view. “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies.... It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us” (Rom. 8:33-34). Owen writes, “That he died for *all* and intercedeth for *some* will scarcely be squared to this text, especially considering the foundation of all this, which is (verse 32) that love of God which moved him to give up Christ to death for us all; upon which the apostle infers a kind of impossibility in not giving us all good things in him; which how it can be reconciled with their opinion who affirm that he gave his Son for millions to whom he will give neither grace nor glory, I cannot see.”²¹

The Arminian Dilemma

The Arminian view of Christ’s atonement not only contradicts the biblical definition of Christ’s redemptive work, but also contradicts itself. An examination of three options regarding Christ’s death will prove that Arminianism is irrational. Jesus Christ paid the price and endured God’s wrath against sin for either: 1) all the sins of all men, 2) all the sins of some men, or 3) some of the sins of all men. If number 3 is true, then all men still have the guilt of some sins to answer for. This would mean that all men will go to hell, for it only takes the guilt of one sin to merit eternal damnation. If one holds to option 2, that Christ died for all of the sins of some men, then one believes that only some men (i.e. God’s elect) will be saved and go to heaven. This is simply biblical Christianity; that Christ actually achieved the salvation of all of God’s elect. The non-elect are passed by and perish. Arminianism, or inconsistent universalism, holds to position number 1, that Christ died for all the sins of all men. If this position is true, then why are not all men freed from the punishment of all their sins. The Arminian will answer: “because they

²⁰ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (England: James Clark, 1976), 3:205.

²¹ John Owen, *Works* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1850-53] 1967), 10:182-183.

refused to believe in Jesus Christ. They are guilty of unbelief.” But this unbelief, is it a sin or is it not a sin? If unbelief is not a sin, then why should anyone be punished for it? If unbelief is a sin, then Christ was punished for it in His death. If Christ paid for this sin as all others, then why must this sin stop anyone from entering heaven more than any of the other sins (e.g., murder, adultery, homosexuality, etc). Furthermore, if Christ did not die for the sin of unbelief, then one cannot say that He died for all the sins of all men. The Arminian cannot escape from the horns of this theological dilemma.²²

The Two Options

Given the fact that the Bible explicitly teaches that many people will go to hell, one is basically left with two options as to why; first, one can believe that God never really intended to save all men, that He of His own good pleasure decided to save only some. In other words, God is simply *unwilling* to save all men. The other option is that God really wants to save all men, but He does not have the power to do so. God is *unable* to save all men. The one who believes in a limited or definite atonement accepts the first option, because he believes it is in accord with all of the scriptural passages related to Christ’s death. The one who believes in a universal atonement does have some apparent universalistic passages (dealt with below), but he is forced by his position to ignore or redefine several important doctrines: the nature of the atonement, union with Christ, Jesus’ intercessory work, the new birth, and even God’s sovereignty.

Universalistic Presuppositions

The Bible teaches that God has ordained all things that come to pass, that He controls all events. God is absolutely sovereign. Yet the Bible also teaches that God is not the author of sin; that God doesn’t do violence to, or coerce the wills of men; that men are definitely responsible for their actions as valid moral secondary agents. The Arminian system is a denial of the biblical doctrine of salvation and God’s absolute sovereignty. In order to understand Arminian theology, one must examine their presuppositions. The whole system of universalism grows out of a few assumptions, *none* of which are based on the word of God. The first presupposition is that God had to voluntarily limit His own sovereign power in order for men to have a genuine free will. Arminians reason that if God has control over man’s will, then man cannot be held responsible for His actions. A second presupposition is that God cannot command man to do something that he does not have the ability to carry out. Both of these assumptions are contrary to the clear teaching of God’s word.

Does God Control the Human Heart?²³

1. The Bible teaches that God can accomplish whatever He desires. God is God. He cannot be thwarted by finite sinful man.

²² This argument was taken from John Owen’s treatise, “End of Christ’s Death as Eternally Intended,” in *Works*, 10:173-174 (paraphrased so as to be more understandable to the modern reader).

²³ The biblical use of the word “heart” is different than today’s English usage. In the Bible, “heart” represents every aspect of man’s nature, including the intellect, will, and emotions. Repeatedly the Bible presents God working directly upon man’s heart. Thus, God directly can influence man’s will. God did not want Pharaoh to let Israel go, so He hardened Pharaoh’s heart. This affected both his emotional state (he became angry and obstinate) and his will or decision (he refused to let Israel go).

Psalm 115:3. “But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.”

Psalm 135:6. “Whatever the LORD pleases He does, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deep places.”

Isaiah 46:10-11. “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.... Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.”

Job 42:2. “You can do everything, and that no purpose of Yours can be withheld from You.”

Daniel 4:35. “He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand.”

2. Note also that God is sovereign even over man’s heart and will.

Proverbs 16:1. “The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD.”

Proverbs 16:9. “A man’s heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps.”

Proverbs 19:21. “There are many plans in a man’s heart; nevertheless, the LORD’S counsel, that will stand.”

If God controls man’s steps, does this not prove that God is in total control? No matter what man plans, God’s will is perfectly executed.

Proverbs 21:1. “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turns it wherever He wishes.”

“What could be more explicit? Out of the heart are ‘the issues of life’ (Prov. 4:23), for as man ‘thinketh *in his heart*, so is he’ (Prov. 23:7). If then the heart is in the hand of the Lord, and if ‘he turneth it whithersoever He will,’ then is it not clear that men, yea, governors and rulers, and so *all men*, are completely beneath the governmental control of the Almighty!”²⁴

3. God controls the human heart. He can harden it or He can open it to receive the gospel.

Revelation 17:17. “For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled.”

2 Thessalonians 2:11-12. “For this reason God will send them [those who perish] strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned.”

²⁴ Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, [1930] 1976), 43. “It would seem that if God put forth His power and exerted a direct influence upon men their freedom would be interfered with. It would appear that if God did anything more than warn and invite men, their responsibility would be infringed upon. We are told that God must not coerce man, still less compel him, or otherwise he would be reduced to a machine. This sounds very plausible; it appears to be good philosophy, and based upon sound reasoning; it has been almost universally accepted as an axiom in ethics; nevertheless, it is refuted by Scripture!” (Ibid., 145). “Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar” (Rom. 3:4).

Romans 9:18-21. “He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens. You will say to me then, ‘Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?’ But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?”

Deuteronomy 2:30. “But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass through, for the LORD your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, that He might deliver him into your hand, as it is this day.”

Joshua 11:19-20. “There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, except the Hivites, the inhabitants of Gibeon. All the others they took in battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, and that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

Exodus 10:1, 20. “Now the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his servants, that I may show these signs of Mine before them....’ But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the children of Israel go” (cf. Ex. 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 14:4; 20:27).

John 12:39-40. “Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their heart, lest they should turn, so that I should heal them” (cf. Mk. 4:11-12).

Luke 24:4. “And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.”

Acts 16:14. “Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul.”

Philippians 2:13. “For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

Ezra 1:1, 5. “The LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom.... Then the heads of the fathers’ houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, with all those whose spirits God had moved, arose to go up and build the house of the Lord” (cf. Ezra 6:22; 7:6; Ex. 12:36; Ezek. 36:27; Gen. 20:6; Isa. 6:9-10; Lk. 8:10).

The idea that God surrendered His sovereignty to man’s will is clearly unscriptural. There are so many passages in Scripture which show God working directly upon man’s heart and will to achieve His own ends that it is astonishing that anyone who believes in the authority of Scripture could deny it. Most evangelicals and fundamentalists, in their attempt to protect their unbiblical concept of free will, have dethroned God. God is helpless, waiting to see what finite, sinful mortals will do. The Most-High is stripped of His omnipotence. Pink writes, “The God of

the twentieth century is a helpless, effeminate being who commands the respect of no really thoughtful man. The God of the popular mind is the creation of a maudlin sentimentality. The God of many a present-day pulpit is an object of pity rather than of awe-inspiring reverence. To say that God the Father has purposed the salvation of all mankind, that God the Son died and that God the Holy Spirit is now seeking to win the world to Christ; when as a matter of common observation, it is apparent that the great majority of our fellow-men are dying in sin, and passing into a hopeless eternity: is to say that God the Father is *disappointed*, that God the Son is *dissatisfied*, and that God the Holy Spirit is *defeated*.²⁵

The Arminian doctrine that God sovereignly decided to create an area of created reality (man's will) outside of His control is irrational. It is a theological impossibility. Why? Because God by nature is absolutely sovereign and all powerful. He *cannot* create a pocket of chance or pure contingency in His creation. God would have to cease to be God and deny Himself to do so. God could no more cease control of man's spirit than He could create a being that could exist apart from His sustaining power. God has created all things. He controls all things that come to pass by His power, and according to His plan. There is not one atom or one creature beyond His power and control. The very reason that God knows every bit of history in advance is not just that He knows all things and is outside of time, but also because everything comes to pass according to His decree. Nothing can occur without His ordering. "Should anything take place contrary to the will of God, because in the opinion of the finite creature it is not 'good,' then Satan and man (on occasion at least) must be equal or superior to the Creator whose Word claims that He is omnipotent and wholly irresistible! On the other hand, if the determinative will of Jehovah reflects His immutable nature of Being, it can neither be obstructed nor cancelled. Therefore, whatever comes to pass in any part of creation, at any time in history, does so because the omniscient God knew it as a possibility, willed it as a reality by His omnipotence, and established it in His divine plan or purpose."²⁶

The Bible teaches that when Christ returns, all His saints will receive glorified bodies and spend eternity in paradise with Him. All evangelicals believe this, yet the popular modern evangelical idea that God voluntarily limits His power so He doesn't intrude on man's free will would render this doctrine impossible. Why? Because if God has no power to control man's heart and will, there can never be a guarantee that someday down the road God's saints or the angels will not sin and rebel against Him. In fact, given the length of the saints' stay in heaven (i.e. forever and ever), another fall into sin would be inevitable. If the Arminian argues that God will change the saints' nature at the resurrection rendering Christians unable to sin in heaven, then he has conceded the whole argument. Why? Because if God is able to change man's heart or spirit to make it fit for the heavenly state, then He also has the power to change man's heart and will on earth.

Does God Command What Man Is Unable to Do?

One of the common arguments against God's sovereign grace is that God would never command man to do something that he is unable to do. Thus, it is argued that all men must have the ability to believe and repent of their own power apart from God's regenerating grace. It is

²⁵ Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 20.

²⁶ Duane Edward Spencer, *Tulip: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 15-16.

astounding that an argument so obviously unscriptural could be so common among churches that hold to biblical inerrancy.

The Bible unequivocally teaches that all men are sinners (Rom. 3:9); none are righteous (Rom. 3:10); none does good (Rom. 3:12); none seek after God (Rom. 3:11); all are corrupt (Ps. 14:3); none have the ability to repent (2 Pet. 2:13; Jer. 13:23; Rom. 8:6-8); all are dead spiritually (Eph. 2:1); and are deaf and blind to spiritual truth (Isa. 6:9-10; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:10). Nothing could be more clear than that the fall of Adam has rendered mankind spiritually unable to respond to the gospel, yet God commands “all men everywhere to repent” (Ac. 17:30), and believe in Jesus Christ. The same Jesus who went throughout Israel preaching the good news said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him” (Jn. 6:44).

God gave the ten commandments to Israel and demands a perfect and perpetual obedience to His moral law from all mankind in thought, word and deed. Yet the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that no one except Jesus Christ has kept, or can keep, God’s law. “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). Jesus commanded His disciples to be perfect (Mt. 5:48), yet the apostle John says that no Christian can achieve sinless perfection in this life (1 Jn. 1:8). Jesus often commanded people to do things that apart from God’s miraculous power they were totally unable to accomplish. “The man with the withered hand was commanded to arise and walk; the sick man to arise, take up his bed and walk.”²⁷ After Lazarus was in the tomb dead for four days and was a rotting corpse, Jesus commanded Him to come forth. The idea that God can only base His commands on what man can do is thoroughly unscriptural and humanistic to the core. Why should God lower His perfect standard of righteousness to cater to man’s sinful infirmities? The fact that man has rendered himself spiritually unable because of sin does not for one moment absolve him of his responsibility to obey God’s moral precepts, believe in Jesus Christ, or repent of his sins. Berkhof writes, “The *reductio ad absurdum* of the Arminian view is that the sinner can gain complete emancipation from righteous obligations by sinning. The more a man sins, the more he becomes a slave of sin, unable to do that which is good; and the deeper he sinks into this slavery which robs him of his capacity for good, the less responsible he becomes. If man continues to sin long enough, he will in the end be absolved of all moral responsibility.”²⁸ Girardeau writes, “It is common to represent the Calvinist as holding that God chains the sinner to a stake, and then invites him to come to provisions which are placed beyond his reach. The Calvinist teaches no such doctrine. He contends that the sinner chains himself, and that he prefers his chains to the provisions of redemption which are tendered him. He forges his own chain and then hugs it. The true doctrine is that the bread and the water of life are offered to all. None, by nature, hunger for the bread; none thirst for the water. To some God pleases to impart the hunger and the thirst which impel them to come and partake. Others he leaves under the influence of a distaste for these provisions of salvation—a distaste not implanted by him, but engendered by their own voluntary sin.”²⁹

²⁷ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 214.

²⁸ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 218.

²⁹ John L. Girardeau., *Calvinism and Evangelical Arminianism*, 369.

How Then Is Man Responsible?

All honest students of Scripture must acknowledge that the Bible teaches that God is absolutely sovereign over His creation, including the actions of mankind. God has predestined (or foreordained) whatsoever comes to pass (Eph. 1:5, 11; Rom. 9:13-22; 8:29-39). The Bible also teaches that men are valid secondary agents and are truly responsible for their actions (Ac. 2:23; 4:27, 28; Jn. 9:11; Rev. 20:12; Jas. 1:13). The reason that so many evangelicals have perverted and avoided many of these important biblical truths is their insistence on attempting to fit difficult theological concepts into a humanistic straightjacket. The humanistic definition of human freedom, in which nothing can have an outside influence upon man, would require *man* to be God. Only God, who is self-existent, uncreated, undetermined, etc, is truly free in the sense that humanists demand. Man, however, is a creature. No person chose his parents, culture, time of birth, genetic pattern, etc

The biblical view of human freedom means first that man is not a robot or unconscious machine, but is a rational being created in the image of God. Man has rational self-determination. He is not determined by materialistic or extrinsic physical causes. It also means that God exerts His sovereign influence over man without destroying man's valid choice. God does not put a gun to man's head to force him to choose a certain way, but so uses internal (emotions, desires, habits, etc) and external (upbringing, circumstances, etc) means upon him that he freely acts in accordance with God's plan (i.e. His decree). When a person chooses to do something, he does not act against his own will but freely follows his own heart. "The comprehensive decree provides that each man shall be a free agent, possessing a certain character, surrounded by a certain environment, subject to certain external influences, internally moved by certain affections, desires, habits, etc, and that in view of all these he shall freely and rationally make a choice. That the choice will be one thing and not another, is certain; and God, who knows and controls the exact causes of each influence, knows what the choice will be, and in a real sense determines it."³⁰

Modern evangelicals may find this doctrine difficult and abhorrent, but those who claim to accept the authority of Scripture cannot escape it. God decrees the acts of man, yet men are free and responsible for their actions. "There is not a single indication in Scripture that the inspired writers are conscious of a contradiction in connection with these matters. They never make an attempt to harmonize the two. This may well restrain us from assuming a contradiction here, even if we cannot reconcile both truths."³¹ When the apostle Paul mentions the obvious objection to God's control over man's will in Romans 9:20, he refuses to even debate the issue. He simply says: "But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?"

Problem Texts

In spite of the overwhelming evidence in the Bible for a limited atonement, universalists simply point to the passages in the New Testament which say that Christ died for "all men" or the "world" and say, "case closed." These passages, on the surface, may appear to contradict a

³⁰ Ibid., 215. "The will is not determined by any law of necessity; it is not independent, indifferent, or self-determined, but is always determined by the preceding state of mind; so that a man is free so long as his volitions are the conscious expression of his mind; or so long as his activity is determined and controlled by his reason and feelings" (Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 2:288).

³¹ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 106.

limited atonement, but when biblically understood are actually in complete harmony with it. It is not uncommon for important doctrines to have what are called problem texts. Anyone familiar with cults knows how they take passages out of context and import their own meaning into them. In order to avoid the same mistake, a few principles of biblical interpretation should be considered.

One important principle is that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. Therefore, when two or more passages seem to contradict one another, the clearer passages must be used to interpret the less clear ones. Another important principle is that the meaning of a word should be derived from the biblical text and not modern culture. Several passages in which a word is used should be studied and compared in order to understand its meaning and usage when the gospel or epistle was written. If someone ignores how a word or phrase was used in first century Greek, Roman, or Hebrew society and instead imports a twentieth century American or European meaning, he often will totally misunderstand what the Bible says. This is precisely what Arminians have done with the words “all” and “world.” They have not closely checked the biblical usage, and thus have poured their own meaning into these words. A brief examination of these words in Scripture will prove that they do not teach that Christ died for every sinner who ever lived.

“All Men“

Does the word “all” in Scripture mean all men without exception throughout the entire world? The word “all” almost never carries that sense. It is restricted by the biblical context. “And you [the apostles] will be hated by *all* for My name’s sake” (Mt. 10:22). The apostles obviously were not hated by every man, woman, and child throughout the world, but only by a majority of unbelievers whom they came in contact with throughout the Roman empire. “*All* counted John to have been a prophet indeed” (Mk. 11:32). This cannot mean all men or even all of the Jews, for many of the Pharisees did not regard John as a prophet. It simply means that most people among the Jews regarded John as a prophet. “My manner of life from my youth...*all* the Jews know” (Ac. 26:4). This cannot mean that all the Jews scattered throughout the world knew of Paul. Nor does it even mean that every Jew within Israel knew Paul personally. It simply means that many Jews knew Paul’s manner of life. “And they came to John and said to him, ‘Rabbi, He who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you have testified—behold, He is baptizing, and *all* are coming to Him!’” (Jn. 3:26; cf. Mt. 3:5-6; Mk. 1:5). Not all in the world, or even all in Judea, but *many* in Israel came to Jesus. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw *all* men to Myself” (Jn. 12:32, NASB). This cannot mean all men without exception, for it would mean that all men will be saved. “This *all men*, in the given context which places Greeks next to Jews, must mean *men from every nation*.”³² The apostle Paul was told, “you will be a witness for him to *all men* of what you have seen and heard” (Ac. 22:15). Did Paul preach the gospel to the Chinese, the Eskimos, or the Indians in North and South America? Of course not! What is meant is that Paul would be preaching to the Jews and *the Gentiles*. Now that it has been

³² William Hendriksen, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953) 2:203. “In Scripture the word ‘all’ (as applied to humankind) is used in two senses—absolutely and relatively. In some passages it means all without exception; in others it signifies all without distinction. As to which of these meanings it bears any particular passage, must be determined by the context and decided by a comparison of parallel Scriptures. That the word ‘all’ is used in a relative and restricted sense, and in such cases means all without distinction, is clear from a number of Scriptures” (Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 68-69).

established scripturally that *all* often does not mean every human being on earth throughout history, let us examine some of the universalistic proof texts that are based on the word *all*.

2 Peter 3:9. “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance.” When Peter says that “God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance,” who is he referring to when he says all? The word all is clearly restricted by the context to the pronoun *us*. Peter is clearly referring to believers, to Christians when he says “us” (2 Pet. 1:1). God is not willing that any of *us* (that is, Christians) should perish, but that all of *us* (God’s people) should come to repentance. If Peter had meant that God is not willing that any person in the whole world will perish, then this passage would teach universal salvation, for the Bible teaches that God does have the power to carry out His will. “No one can take II Pet. 3:9 to support the Arminian position without wrestling it out of context, misapplying it to the reprobate, and breaking basic rules for the interpretation of plain English or Greek. Peter’s position there, as everywhere else, is that *Christ died for us* (the elect) and not for the whole world.”³³

2 Corinthians 5:14-15. “For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” This passage says that Christ died for all. The question is: does all here refer to the whole human race or to the elect—the church? The analogy of Scripture and the context clearly favors the elect only. Paul’s aim in this passage is to motivate Christians to greater obedience by pointing to Christ’s love for us and the judicial union with Christ in His death and resurrection. If Paul was teaching that Christ died for all men without distinction, this passage would prove too much, for Paul’s argument is that this union with Christ in His death and resurrection (which according to the Bible definitely achieves expiation of sin and reconciliation with God) must lead to the service of Jesus Christ—“the love of Christ constrains us.” “Can it be said of all men, including those who reject the gospel or have never heard it, that they died when Christ died on the cross; can it be said of them that they no longer live unto themselves but unto Christ who died for them?”³⁴ Can it be said that they are a new creation; that the old pagan lifestyle has been replaced by a Christian lifestyle (v. 17). Can we refer to Adolf Hitler, Stalin, or Charles Manson as “the righteousness of God in Him” (v. 21). If the things that Paul attributes to those united to Christ in His death and resurrection cannot be attributed to all men, then in this passage Paul cannot be referring to all men, but to the elect only.

1 Corinthians 15:22. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” The use of all in this passage refers to all in Adam and all in Christ. Adam is the covenant head of all those who die, and Christ is the covenant head of all those who shall live, or all those who will have eternal life. Since all men do not have eternal life, the “all” in Christ cannot refer to the whole human race without exception. The word all in the second half of the verse must be restricted to believers. This interpretation is strengthened by the parallel passage in Romans 5:12-21, where it is stated that those in Christ are justified. “No historical Christian church has

³³ Duane Edwards Spencer, *Tulip*, 40.

³⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *God Transcendent and Other Sermons* (Grand Rapids, 1949), 134 ff., quoted in R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* 30.

ever held that all men indiscriminately are justified. For whom God justifies, them he also glorifies, Rom. 8:30.”³⁵ Consistent universalists understand that those in Christ who are justified in Him must go to heaven; therefore, this is a major proof text for their heretical notion that all men will go to heaven.

2 Timothy 2:3-6. “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to 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.” Of the proof texts cited thus far for a universal atonement, this passage is considered to be the strongest in favor of their doctrine. However, before jumping to conclusions one should first examine the Greek text, the immediate context, and the theological context (or the analogy of Scripture). There are many reasons why this passage should not be construed to mean that Christ died for every individual who ever lived.

Note, first, that the context favors translating the Greek word all (*pas*) as *all kinds* of men. In 1 Timothy 2:1 Paul says “that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority.” Paul means that we are to pray for *all kinds* of people, or *all sorts* of people—including the civil authorities. Paul’s use of all in verse one *cannot* mean all men that have ever existed, or who exist presently, or who shall exist in the future. Are Christians supposed to pray for the millions of people who are dead and burning in hell? Furthermore, the myriads of people in heaven certainly are in no need of our prayers. In John chapter 17 Jesus refused to pray for all men: “I pray for them. I do not pray for the world” (v. 9). The apostle John says specifically that believers are not to pray for those who have committed the sin leading to death (cf. 1 Jn. 5:16). Paul also tells believers to give thanksgiving for all men. Are Christians supposed to give thanks for the persecuting Nero, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Chairman Mao, Charles Manson, child molesters, etc? Of course not! Christians are to pray for all *types* of men: “that is, for men of the highest, as well as the lowest rank and quality.”³⁶

But does the Greek language permit one to translate or interpret “all men” as “all kinds of men”? Yes; in fact, there are many instances in the New Testament in which *pas* is translated as “all kinds of” or “all manner of” (e.g., Mt. 4:23; 5:11; 10:1; Lk. 11:42; Ac. 10:12; Rom. 7:8; Rev. 21:19). Custance writes, “Every lexicon of New Testament Greek and of Classical Greek agrees upon the validity of the expanded translation. Thayer, for example, gives a number of references by way of illustration and adds this comment: ‘So especially with nouns designating virtues or vices, customs, characters, conditions, etc’ On numerous occasions it greatly illuminates the text to convert the simple ‘all’ (whether things or men) into ‘all kinds of’ or some such alternative.”³⁷ Therefore, if the context and many other clear doctrines and passages point in the direction of the expanded meaning of all (i.e. “all kinds of”), then one is justified in preferring such an interpretation.

Although the Greek language permits, and the immediate context favors, the view that Paul is speaking of *all kinds of men*, the greatest reason one should favor the interpretation above is that it best fits with the many clear passages which discuss Christ’s death and God’s will. The salvation spoken of in this passage is not a mere possibility of salvation, or an offer of salvation,

³⁵ Charles Hodge, *I and II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1857] 1959), 325.

³⁶ John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, 1978 [1855]), 50.

³⁷ Arthur C. Custance, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, 163.

or an arrangement set up by God in which men can save themselves. Paul is speaking of a real, certain and actual salvation. When Paul says that it is God's will, or desire, that all men are to be saved, he is not speaking of a will conditioned by man's response. Such would clearly contradict Scripture: "It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (Rom. 9:16; cf. Jn. 1:13). God's will regarding "the salvation of men is absolute and unconditional, and what infallibly secures and produces it"³⁸ (cf. Rom. 9:11; Eph. 1:4, 5, 11; 2:10). If it was God's will that all men without exception should be saved, then all men would go to heaven. This passage would teach a universal salvation. Paul says, "Who has resisted His will" (Rom 9:19)? God's word declares: "He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth" (Dan. 4:35).

Does the Bible teach that it is God's desire to save all men? No, not at all. God did not choose or elect all men to eternal life. He only chose some; the rest are hardened (Rom. 9:18). These are vessels of wrath prepared for destruction (2 Th. 2:11-12; 1 Pet. 2:8-9; Pr. 16:4; 1 Th. 5:9). God is infinite in power, knowledge and wisdom. If God really was trying to save every individual throughout history, then why did He restrict His special revelation to a tiny nation in Palestine under the Old Covenant? Why did God forbid Paul, Timothy, and Silas to preach the gospel in Asia (Ac. 16:6)? Why does the Bible repeatedly say that God hides the truth from many people (Mt. 11:25; Isa. 6:9-10)? Why did Jesus Christ not pray and intercede for all men, but only for some (Jn. 17:9)? In Acts 9, Jesus Christ appears to Paul and turns a zealous persecutor of Christians into the greatest evangelist the world has ever known. Why doesn't God raise up thousands of apostle Pauls to spread the gospel throughout the earth? God certainly has the power to do so. But He does not. Regeneration is a sovereign act of God, yet God refuses to regenerate all men. Faith and repentance are gifts of God, yet God only grants these gifts to some and not others. The Bible clearly teaches that God is not trying to save all men. What it does teach is that He will save some people out of every nation before Christ returns (Rev. 5:9).

"The World"

Those who believe that Christ died for all men without exception use as proof texts passages which say that Christ is the "Savior of the world" (Jn. 4:42; 1 Jn. 4:14), or that say "God so loved the world" (Jn. 3:16). Before one assumes that the term "world" means every single human being in the world without exception, one should carefully examine how the word world (*kosmos*) is used in Scripture. The term "world" has a variety of meanings in the New Testament. The best way to determine the meaning in each passage is to examine the context and other passages that have a similar usage. A clear passage can shed light on a less clear passage.

There are at least eight different uses of the term "world" in the New Testament. 1. The word can refer to the entire created order—the universe. "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth..." (Ac. 17:24). 2. It can refer to the earth itself. "Jesus...loved His own who were in the world" (Jn. 13:1; cf. Eph. 1:4). 3. "World" can mean the evil world system (cf. Jn. 12:31; 1 Jn. 5:19). 4. Sometimes *kosmos* refers to the whole human race (except Jesus Christ). After spending two and a half chapters proving that all men without exception are sinners, Paul says "all the world" is guilty before God (Rom. 3:19). 5. Sometimes world refers only to unbelievers. The devil is called the "deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9). John says that "the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one" (1 Jn. 5:19). Christians are not under Satan's power. Revelation 13:13 says that "all the

³⁸ John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 50.

world...followed the beast,” yet Christians do not follow the beast or receive his mark (Rev. 14:9-10). When Jesus told His disciples: “the world hates you” (Jn. 15:18), He obviously was referring only to unbelievers. 6. The term world can also be used to describe the Roman Empire or what was considered the civilized world in the days of the apostles. “A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered” (Lk. 2:1). When Paul wrote to the church at Rome and said, “your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (1:8), most of the earth had not heard the gospel and knew nothing about the Roman church (cf. Ac. 2:5; Col. 1:23; Ac. 19:27; Gen. 41:57). 7. “World” is also used as a synonym for the Gentiles. “Now if their [i.e. the Jews] fall is riches for the *world*, and their failure riches for the *Gentiles*, how much more their fullness?” (Rom. 11:12; cf. v. 15, 32). 8. Sometimes “world” is used as a general term referring to the human race throughout the world. “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19). This passage means that God is propitious to men (i.e. the class of beings). This passage *cannot* mean that God has reconciled every single individual in the world to Himself, for it cannot be said of individuals who do not believe and go to hell that God has not imputed their trespasses to them. People without sin do not go to hell. God is exercising mercy toward mankind as a class by saving men out of every nation, tribe, and tongue (Rev. 5:9). Some commentators (e.g., Arthur W. Pink and John Gill) argue that “world” in this and other similar passages is synonymous with believers only or the elect.³⁹ Although this interpretation has merit and fits in with the analogy of Scripture, it is not necessary to refute the notion that Christ died for all men without exception. Passages such as 2 Corinthians 5:19 and John 3:16 contain within their own contexts phrases which render the universalist interpretation impossible. Since the word “world” can be used in so many different ways in Scripture, one should be very careful to study the context in each case before jumping to a conclusion which contradicts other plain teachings in Scripture. Here are a few examples.

John 4:42

When the Bible says that Jesus Christ is “the Savior of the world,” it does not mean that He died for every individual in the world, but that He came to save people from every nation and not just Israel. This later interpretation is easily proven from the context. In John 4 Jesus witnesses to and converts a Samaritan woman. To modern believers this may hold little significance, but in Jesus’ day the Jews had nothing to do with the Samaritans (Jn. 4:9). After the woman witnesses to the Samaritans of her city and many believe, Jesus spends two whole days among the Samaritans and many more believe in Him (Jn. 4:39-41). The Samaritans say to the woman, “this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (4:42). The common idea in Jesus’ day among Jews was that the Messiah was coming to save only Israel, but to the Samaritans’ surprise and gratitude, they now understand that the Messiah will save people from every nation, even the despised Samaritans. To assert that the Samaritans were saying that Christ had come to offer a hypothetical salvation to every individual, or that every individual in the whole world would actually be saved is absurd.

³⁹ Pink writes, “Kosmos is [also] used of believers only: John 1:29; 3:16, 17; 6:33; 12:47; I Cor. 4:9; II Cor. 5:19. We leave our readers to turn to these passages, asking them to note, carefully, exactly what is said and predicated of ‘the world’ in each place” (*The Sovereignty of God*, 254).

1 John 2:2

But what about 1 John 2:2: “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only, but also for the whole world“? The apostle John was a Jew writing to Jewish believers.⁴⁰ John is saying that Christ is the propitiation not only for the sins of the Jews, but also for the whole world—the Gentiles also. This interpretation is preferable for a number of reasons. First, note the striking similarity between this passage and John 11:51, 52, “Jesus would die for the nation [Israel], and not for that nation [Israel] only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad [i.e. the elect in every nation—the world].” Caiaphas, under divine inspiration, contrasts Israel and the world. It was common for Jews in ancient rabbinic literature to use the terms “world” and “Gentiles” as synonymous. Note how the apostle Paul uses “world” and “Gentiles” in a parallel manner: “Now if their fall is riches for the *world*, and their failure riches for the *Gentiles*...” (Rom. 11:12).⁴¹ Second, John uses the word “propitiation,” a word which means that God’s wrath against the sinner is appeased and removed. If John means that Christ is a propitiation for all men without exception, even for those people in hell, then this passage would teach a universal salvation. If one prefers to translate the Greek word as “expiation” instead of “propitiation,” the passage would still teach universalism. Expiation means that the guilt of sin is removed. If the guilt of sin is removed from everyone, then why would God punish anyone? Third, “If Christ is the propitiation for *everybody*, it would be idle tautology to say, first, ‘He is the propitiation for *our* sins and *also* for everybody.’ There could be no ‘also’ if He is the propitiation for the entire human family. Had the apostle meant to affirm that Christ *is* a universal propitiation, he had omitted the first clause of v. 2, and simply said, ‘He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world.’”⁴²

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

This passage is often quoted by those who argue that Christ died for all men without exception. But the phrase “that whosoever believes” restrains the universal term “world.” It shows that Christ only died for those who believe in Him. Only believers have their sins removed and thus have eternal life. Furthermore, the reason that the Father sent His Son into the world was His love. The Bible, however, teaches that God does *not* love every individual in the world. “Did God love Pharaoh? (Rom. 9:17). Did He love the Amalekites? (Ex. 17:14). Did He love the Canaanites, whom He commanded to be exterminated without mercy? (Dt. 20:16). Did He love the Ammonites and Moabites whom He commanded not to be received into the

⁴⁰ “In Gal. 2:9 we are told that John, together with James and Cephas, were apostles ‘unto the circumcision’ (i.e. Israel). In keeping with this, the Epistle of James is addressed to ‘the twelve tribes, which are scattered abroad’ (1:1). So, the first Epistle of Peter is addressed to ‘the elect who are sojourners of the Dispersion’ (1 Pet. 1:1, R.V.). And John is also writing to saved Israelites, but for saved Jews and saved Gentiles” (Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 258).

⁴¹ “Beyond all doubt, Romans 11:32, ‘For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, in order that he might have mercy on all,’ must also be interpreted as referring to both Jews and gentiles rather than to all individuals constituting the human race. The entire context points unmistakably in that direction. Nothing could be clearer than that the reference of the twofold ‘all’ is exhausted by the two classes, Jews and gentiles, discussed in the immediate context” (R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?* 34).

⁴² Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, 260.

congregation forever? (Dt. 23:3). Does He love the workers of iniquity? (Ps. 5:5). Does He love the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction, which He endures with much long-suffering? (Rom. 9:22). Did He love Esau? (Rom. 9:13).⁴³ It is true that God bestows a type of general favor upon mankind that theologians call common grace. That is, all men enjoy the benefits of God's creation for a season. It is also true that in a sense all mankind receives certain benefits from Christ's death. The rise of western Christian culture has influenced the world, but these general benefits certainly do not explain the infinite love behind Christ's death.

Because of the context and the manner in which "world" is used in other similar passages, it is unlikely that "world" in John 3:16 refers to mankind generally. "[T]he term indicates *fallen mankind in its international aspect*: men from every tribe and nation; not only Jews but also Gentiles."⁴⁴ God did not love Israel alone, but every nation. This does not mean that God loves every individual in each nation. Poole writes, "It is proper enough to say, A man loved such a family to such a degree that he gave his estate to it, though he never intended such a thing to every child or branch of it."⁴⁵

Other Objections

A common objection against a particular redemption is to quote passages in which men are invited to believe, and then infer that man must have a free will and that Christ died for all men without exception. There are many "whoever" passages: "whoever believes" (Jn. 3:16; 11:26; Rom. 9:33; 10:11; Ac. 10:43, etc); "whoever confesses" (Lk. 12:8); "whoever receives Me" (Mk. 9:37); "whoever will come after Me" (Mk. 8:34). Isaiah's prophetic invitation is often quoted: "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters" (55:1). The idea that the gospel is offered to all; therefore, God is trying to save all; or therefore, Christ died for all *is an assumption*. The gospel is to be preached to "all nations" (Mt. 28:19) and "to every creature" (Mk. 16:15) because God has His elect in every nation (Rev. 5:9). No one knows who is elect and who isn't; the gospel must be offered to all without exception. Jesus said, "Many are called but few are chosen" (Mt. 22:14). Christ encouraged Paul to preach the gospel in Corinth; "for I have many people in this city" (Ac. 18:10). It is true that whoever believes in Christ will be saved, but the Bible teaches that some believe and others do not believe because of the electing choice of the Father and the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit. God makes those dead in sins and unable, alive and able (Eph. 2:1). The unwilling are made willing. "No one can come to Me, unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn. 6:44).

Another passage quoted as a proof text against sovereign grace is Romans 10:17: "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." Arminians quote this passage and say, "See, people hear the word and believe; God didn't cause them to believe." The Calvinist does not deny that God uses means to achieve His purpose. The Holy Spirit uses the word of God to convince and convict. "If God has ordained a man to be saved, he has also ordained that he shall hear the Gospel, and that he shall believe and repent."⁴⁶ Paul says, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Cor. 3:6-7). In order for people to become Christians,

⁴³ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 293.

⁴⁴ William Hendriksen, *John*, 140.

⁴⁵ Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1685] 1963), 3:292.

⁴⁶ Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination*, 254.

they must hear the gospel and believe. But only those who God regenerates *will* believe. *God* gives the increase.

A passage often quoted by Arminians is Matthew 23:37, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!” Arminians say that this passage proves that Christ is trying to save all men without exception, but it is only their human wills that prevent Him. Such an interpretation ignores both the context and the text itself and thus must be rejected.

A common mistake is to assume that Christ is speaking only about one group of people—the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Note, however, that Christ is discussing two groups. One is designated Jerusalem; the other “your children” (or Jerusalem’s children). A careful reading of the whole chapter makes it very clear that by Jerusalem is meant the civil and ecclesiastical rulers of the city: “The scribes and the Pharisees [who] sit in Moses’ seat” (v. 2); that is, the Sanhedrin. Jesus calls the scribes and Pharisees hypocrites, hinderers of the truth, oppressors of the poor, blind fools, blind guides, full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness, and sons of those who murdered the prophets. Jesus does *not* say, “I wanted to gather you (the ecclesiastical guides and rulers of the people) but you were not willing”; he says, “I wanted to gather *your children* [your subjects]...but you were not willing.” That is, the leaders of Jerusalem did everything in their power to hinder the work of Christ and prevent the people from coming to Him. Their apostate leadership brought destruction upon the city. It would be contradictory for Christ to spend a whole chapter speaking judgment, indignation, and rejection upon the Jewish leaders and then say, “I want to protect and nurture you wicked hypocrites, oppressors, murderers, etc” Gill writes, “The ruler and governors...are manifestly distinguished from their *children*; it being usual to call such who were the heads of the people, either in a civil or ecclesiastical sense *fathers*, Acts 7:2, and 22:1., and such who were subjects and disciples, *children*, 19:44, Matt. 12:27, Isa. 8:16, 18. Besides, our Lord’s discourse, throughout the whole context, is directed to the Scribes and Pharisees, the ecclesiastical guides of the people.”⁴⁷ David Dickson writes, “O Jerusalem, how oft was I about to convert thy children, so many as I had elected, by the offers of mercy which my servants made unto you, the visible Church their mother? And you would not, but opposed my work so far as you could, in slaying the prophets, and stoning them who were sent unto thee for the elect’s cause who were in the midst of you.”⁴⁸

A passage that is often quoted as a proof text for a universal atonement is 2 Peter 2:1, “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, *even denying the Lord who brought them*, and bring on themselves swift destruction.” Arminians use this passage to argue that Christ died for people who reject Him and go to hell. In other words, Christ bought or purchased with His own blood not just those who believe, but also those who disbelieve. The Arminian interpretation of this passage is the result of sloppy exegesis of Scripture, and must be rejected for a number of reasons.

First, one needs to understand that Peter is *not* speaking about Christ in this passage, but God the Father. The word that Peter used for Lord (*despoten*) in this passage, when used of a person in the Godhead, is always used to describe God the Father, and is never used to describe Christ. For example, Jude 4 says, “The only Lord (*despoten*) God and our Lord (*kurion*) Jesus Christ.” Other instances are Luke 2:29, Acts 4:24, 2 Timothy 2:21, and Revelation 6:10. The

⁴⁷ John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Streamwood, IL: Primitive Baptist Library, [1735] 1978), 28.

⁴⁸ David Dickson, *Matthew* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1647] 1987), 318.

Holy Spirit for some reason uses a different word to describe the Father's lordship from that of Jesus Christ. This, of course, is not meant to detract in any way from Christ's glory and power. Gill writes, "the word *despotes* is properly expressive only of that power which masters have over their servants; whereas the word *kurios*, which is used whenever Christ is called Lord, signifies that dominion and authority which princes have over their subjects."⁴⁹

The reason that it is significant that Peter is speaking about the Father rather than specifically about Christ is that the word "bought," in this context, cannot refer to the blood of Christ. This makes sense in light of the fact that the Bible teaches that those redeemed by Christ cannot fall away and be forever lost (e.g., Jn. 10:29; Rom. 8:29-39; Eph. 1:11, 14). What this purchase refers to is a *temporal* deliverance. Peter is using an expression which hearkens back to Israel's deliverance from Egypt. "Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?" (Dt. 32:6). There can be no question that Peter had Israel's deliverance and experience in the wilderness in mind (cf. 2 Pet. 2:12-13; Dt. 32:5). Note the comparison between the people's corruption and their blemish. Gill writes, "Peter makes use of this phrase much in the same manner as Moses had done before him, to aggravate the ingratitude and impiety of these false teachers among the Jews; that they should deny, if not in words, at least in works, that mighty Jehovah, who had of old redeemed their fathers out of Egypt, with a stretched-out arm, and, in successive ages, had distinguished them with particular favours; being ungodly men, turning the grace, the doctrine of the grace of God into lasciviousness."⁵⁰

The history of Israel shows that many of the Israelites denied the Lord that bought them, and thus perished in the wilderness. But we know from subsequent revelation that the Israelites who perished in the wilderness were never truly saved in the spiritual sense, but only received a temporary physical deliverance. When the author of Hebrews describes the Israelites who perished in the wilderness he says, "They have not known My ways.... We see that they could not enter in because of *unbelief*" (Heb. 3:10, 19). Therefore, there is no reason (in 2 Pet. 2:1) to conclude that Peter refers to people who had genuine saving faith in Christ and who were actually purchased with His blood. In fact, there is every reason to conclude that Peter is discussing people who never had true faith; who only received temporary outward benefits. As the apostle John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (1 Jn. 2:19).

Another strong reason to reject the interpretation which says that Christ shed His blood for people who go to hell is that it would totally contradict Scripture. Scripture consistently affirms that Christ died for: "His people" (Mt. 1:21); His "sheep" (Jn. 10:11, 14-16); "the church" (Eph. 5:25); "the elect" (Rom. 8:31-33); "us"—that is, believers (Tit. 2:14; 1 Pet 2:24; Heb. 1:3; 9:12; 10:14; 1 Jn. 1:7; 4:9-10); "the brethren" (1 Jn. 3:16); the "many" (Mt. 26:28; Mk. 10:45; Heb. 9:28). The Bible emphatically declares that all those for whom Christ died will definitely be saved (Jn. 6:39; Mt. 1:21; 18:11; Lk. 19:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 4:4-5). Furthermore, it is irrational to assert that Christ removed the guilt and penalty due for sin for a particular person who will also have to pay the penalty for his sins in hell. That would be a great

⁴⁹ John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, 61.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

injustice. If one lets Scripture interpret Scripture, then one must reject the Arminian interpretation of 2 Peter 2:1.⁵¹

Conclusion

Those who teach that Christ died for all men without exception must ignore the clear testimony of Scripture. Furthermore, the objections commonly raised against a limited atonement reveal either a poor understanding of biblical interpretation or a desire to impose one's own presuppositions upon Scripture, or both. To deny limited atonement is to distort and pervert the whole biblical message of salvation, for there is a great difference between a death that actually saves—that actually renders satisfaction—and a sacrifice that makes salvation possible, if spiritually dead sinners do their part. The Arminian (or semi-Pelagian) message denigrates the cross of Christ. It is the root of both Romanism and humanism.

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⁵¹ Another acceptable interpretation of 2 Pet. 2:1 that does not contradict Scripture is that of Alexander Nisbet (1623-1669): "That they should deny the Lord that brought them; which is not to be understood as if either Christ had died for such men (for then they could not have perished, John 10:11, 28)... The meaning therefore is that they, being by profession and in their own and others' esteem, redeemed ones, should vent errors as would in substance tend to the denial of the sovereignty and Lordship of Christ over His people, by labouring under a pretence of Christian liberty (as it is, v. 19) to loose believers from their subjection to Christ's royal law.... Albeit only the elect are redeemed unto life; and none of them who are given to Christ of the Father can perish or finally deny Christ unto destruction, because Christ is engaged to keep them from perdition (John 6:39), yet reprobates who do profess themselves to be redeemed by Christ and are esteemed for such by the church, may be said to deny the Lord that brought them, in the terms of judicial process (when they say He has redeemed them, and in the mean time, in doctrine and deeds, do deny Him and betray Him), howsoever in the terms of historical narration, they were never redeemed nor written in the Book of Life" (*Exposition of 1 and 2 Peter* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, (1658) 1982], 245-246).