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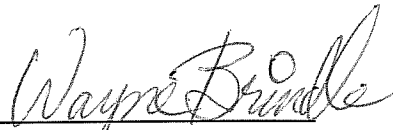
Completed at Calvary: An Examination  
of the Extent of the Atonement

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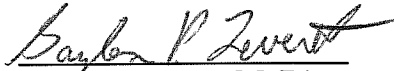
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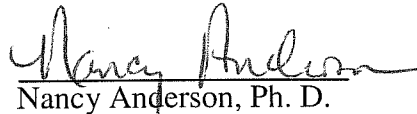
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## Abstract

Calvinism's "limited atonement" is the pillar that has been notorious for being the "weak link" in the Calvinists' theological system (TULIP). This paper purposed to delve into the legitimacy of their argument, using the popular penal theory as the foundation for determining the extent of the atonement. Here Christ's sacrifice is seen as the act accomplishing such things as reconciliation and redemption, instead of merely providing potentials effectual upon faith, for all those to whom the atonement extends. Three problematic texts were examined and dealt with, maintaining consistency theologically. From the basis of the penal view, both universal salvation and particular redemption logically follow, depending on whether Christ died for all or some. Since universalism is not a valid evangelical doctrine it was discarded, leaving particular redemption as the sole conclusion of the penal theory.

Completed at Calvary: An Examination  
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God's attitude on missions is purely mind-boggling. The Messiah has commissioned His people to go throughout His creation and proclaim Him to all nations (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). Prior to Christ's coming there was a "come and see" mentality in Israel. After His ascension there remained a "go and tell" command. However, God Himself set the stage for all missionary activity. God the Father chose to send His only Son to the earth, giving up the infinite to take on the finite. This was done out of His great love for the world (John 3:16). Not only did Jesus come to earth, but He also orchestrated the greatest missionary journey ever. No one will ever give up more than He did; nor will anyone ever travel farther than He. No, none will love people more than the Creator.

Typically, missionaries go into a different environment and learn its culture in order to win the lost. It was no different with Christ. God became man. The Ultimate One humbled Himself and took the form of a man. Then Christ, knowing man's need of restoration with the Father on account of his sin, took His love further. While man was at enmity with God, Christ died for him on the cross, removing the albatross of sin from around his neck. Completing the task before Him, He accomplished what He came to do in justifying men (Rom 3:24; 5:9). It is Christ's life and ultimately His vicarious death that motivates and challenges through the example that it set. The cross is central to the Christian

life and will hence be examined, for the Christianity that is not centered on the cross is not Christianity.

Because of the importance of missions, evangelism, and one's identity in Christ, understanding the cross is crucial. There is hardly a more critical aspect of soteriology and the Christian faith than that of the atonement. One theologian penned, "The atonement is the crucial doctrine of the faith. Unless we are right here it matters little, or so it seems to me, what we are like elsewhere" (Morris, Cross 5). Another wrote, "The message of the Cross is the central mystery of the Scriptural Gospel. This question is of supreme significance today" (Brunner 437). This is where the transition is made from the nature of Christ to His active work and where systematic theology is directly applicable to a person's life. Here the puzzle pieces of the doctrines of God, man, sin, and the deity of Christ are placed in a cohesive fashion to magnify man's need and what was provided for it (Erickson 782). These lead into other areas of salvation: being declared righteous by a holy God; the quickening of the spirit from the dead; the process toward the image of Christ. The most visible display of the love of God and His grace was demonstrated through the sacrifice of "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

Christ's death was not the first time sacrifice played a significant part in religion. In Ancient Near East culture, offering sacrifices was a widespread practice of religious ceremony. Early during the development of the prestigious Greek Empire, Greek citizens explained that this ritual was an expiatory offering to tame the wrath of the gods (Hengel 19). The many differing peoples and

civilizations that ultimately comprised the Roman Empire all had their respective customs, in which sacrifice played an essential part (Young 7). This extended from the less civilized to the more sophisticated, including the Hebrew lifestyle. This was nearly a universal religious rite of all cultures of antiquity (Morris, Glory 91).

When Jesus Christ privileged humanity by humbling Himself and coming to the earth there were many benefits that man would receive. God-With-Us allowed a fallen society to catch a glimpse of a complete man who could fully keep the law. Creation was not worthy to house such a Person, yet Christ was despised, persecuted, and put to death by those who could not comprehend Who was among them. The Redeemer offered Himself before the Master to satisfy His Divine Justice and Holiness in regard to sin (Walker 16-17; Rom 5:9-10; Heb 2:14-15; Titus 2:14). It is the death of the Savior that has brought the gift of redemption through His atoning blood. He placed in front of the Father's eyes His personal righteousness, in the stead of others, averting God's gaze from the sinner's sin disease (Peterson 37). This paves the way to the Father's throne where Christ is making intercession as the ongoing application of His death to man's salvation (37).

Really, the preeminent issue in discerning the truth of the extent of the atonement is found in one's theology of the atonement. Each person has a perspective, a lens through which he views Christ's cross-work. These lenses allow the individual to see the atonement in a particular way. Through one lens it can be seen that Christ died merely as an example, through another that He

perished for the masses, yet another shows He did it for only a few. Lightner correctly argues that if one sees Christ's satisfaction as an event that accomplishes redemption for those for whom He died, then it would be consistent to say that He died only for the elect (96). He states, however, that if Jesus died to secure potential for salvation, then He would have naturally died for the entire human race (96).

This "potential" theory views Christ's sacrifice as securing the potential for all men to come to Christ. God's infinite love for His creation provides a "fair shot" for each and every person to be saved through faith, which causes the fruits of the cross to be applied to him. This places direct responsibility upon man, for he will either accept or reject this salvation that has been provided for him. The disagreement between the two major camps appears to revolve around the place of one's own choice to believe. The key to this view and unlocking the potential of the cross is in fact personal faith in Christ. It is here that a man can have the work of Christ applied to his life. It is also here where the argument culminates upon scrutiny of the chronology of one's salvation experience. The proponents of the "potential" theory claim faith comes first, then the application of the cross. But where does such faith come from? Surely it is not something within the person, for Romans 1-3 tells how sin has corrupted every facet of man (total depravity). It is their opinion that the cross does not change a man's depraved state, until after faith, but even if the door were open to salvation, the unregenerate man would never go through on his own. Thus, faith would have to be given by God. Now, if this were the case, then God is only acting on the

behalf of some and being unfair to others. This goes against the whole "fairness" theme that lies behind the "potential" theory and would seem to be an illogical act for God to do.

The penal interpretation, on the other hand, sees the atonement as meeting the fine to be paid for the elect. The Messiah's sacrifice actually accomplished the redemption of all those in its scope. The proponents point to those verses where it seems that the atonement is addressed in a finalized, complete manner, not merely acquiring potentials (Rom 5:9-10; Col 1:21-22; Heb 2:14-15; Titus 2:14; Rev 5:9-10; Eph 1:7). Many find this theory to be deficient in regards to God's love for the world, for would not God at least provide salvation for all alike? The first century reader likely agreed that God's book is filled with a general tenor of His love for man. It proves hard to reconcile God's love with the idea that He would not provide potential salvation for all. Upon reading the text at its face-value, one would likely be sympathetic with the "potential" view, for it appears easier to take the text as is, instead of tending to stretch the Word as many penal theorists do. Just a general reading of the Bible immediately also gives this side an increased advantage over the penalists in interpreting God's Word. Theological consistency is what is important to those of the penal group who find it necessary to interpret the atonement texts by their already established theological systems.

A person who holds to a general, universal salvation of all is eclectic in taking from both the "potential" and penal camps. They combine some points, arguing that Jesus Christ actually accomplished salvation for all; a pleasant idea



perhaps, but incorrect none-the-less. Universalism does not hold that any individual spends eternity in ongoing punishment for his sin (hell). This does not find a real home in evangelism, Christianity, nor the Bible, and therefore will not be given any respect as a valid evangelical viewpoint (Matt 5:22; 11:23; 13:40-42; 22:13; Mark 9:43-48; Luke 10:15; 16:19-31). However, universalism will be shown to be logically consistent, through the penal view, in its pillar that Christ actually accomplished and completed salvation.

All theories of the cross-work of Jesus have their deficiencies because men tend to single out and emphasize particular pieces of the truth (Lidgett 129). No theory of the atonement will be perfect in its explanation of the cross, for when certain aspects of truth are elevated, others are left out. It seems that men, being what they are, will never come to a place where they can offer a whole, precise doctrine of the atonement. The penal theory, with its strengths and shortcomings, will be examined and followed to its logical conclusions concerning the extent of the atonement.

#### Red and Yellow, Black and White

The Almighty has planned to rescue certain people out of each tribe and tongue, then mesh them together through the bond of His Son. Christ knew that it was His Father's intention to draw all people to Himself without discrimination as to religious background, prestige, wisdom, or race (Rev 5:9). All the kinds of people are precious in the Lord's sight, so He indiscriminately included diverse members in His plan for one unified body.

One misunderstanding that was held in the early Church was an ethnocentric concept concerning the universality of God's plan. Jews commonly embraced the divisive doctrine that the Messiah's mission was to restore them as a nation and not an entire world of persons in every nation to God (Acts 1:6; John 6:15). The erroneous conviction of the Jews strongly influenced the apostles' thoughts. These men seemed to have understood their commission (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15) only to extend their invitations to the lost sheep of the Israelites (Acts 11:19). When the salvation of Gentiles was witnessed and displayed about them, they worshipped God saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life" (v18) and admired it as a thing with which they were not familiar. Consequently, they used in their writings various general expressions, which gave direct opposition to their previous error concerning their ethnocentrism (Owen 190). The atoning work that was wrought at Calvary did not merit exclusive rights to the Jews, but every nationality, crossing any boundary of elitism (Rev 5:9).

#### Factors Necessitating the Atonement

God is by nature totally and completely holy. Everything about Him is perfect, including the fact that He does not commit any sin, nor could He possibly do so. Sin deserves to be punished because it is a breach of purity within the man and against the nature of God. Since God is who He is morally, the failure to meet His righteous requirement results in punishment for the sin (Denney 84). Their unrighteousness forfeits blessed communion with Jehovah.

Humans, because of their own diseased nature, are in bondage to sin and are constantly breaking God's righteous requirement for them, estranging and alienating themselves from their Creator (Torrance 49; Rom 3:10-12). Man has grievously and continually offended the Holy One, casting off any allegiance to Him, revolting against Him, abhorring His authority. His commandments are worthless to man. The effective barrier to reconciliation is sin, which strikes out at the very throne of God, creating a breach that no mere creature is able to repair, especially not the culprit (Pink, Doctrine 61). Man is unable to comprehend such a heinous and incalculably enormous offense against the Most High on his own. Here he stands in need, with sin as his master, serving it with the utmost diligence.

The law is an expression of the nature of God and is then hard guidelines as to what He expects. Since there are certain actions that morally God cannot do, He proclaims them to be wrong. There is nothing man could do to commend himself to a holy Being for salvation. The condition and position of every man in respect to the law is the same before his actual justification by God. Here both the elect and the non-elect are equally in a state of alienation from God (Eph 4:18). Because man cannot keep the law, the need for restored fellowship exists, so then something had to be provided to accomplish what man could not. The atonement is the Almighty's quintessential provision for the multifaceted need of man.

### Limited Atonement? – Yes!

All fundamental believers hold to some form of restrictions concerning Christ's work at the cross (Horton 128). Those who hold to a global redemption position state that Christ died for every man. Due to the fact that not all will be saved, this view places limits on the power of Jesus to save those for whom He perished. Here is where His power is described in a universal potential for all men, effectual only upon their faith in Christ. However, if atonement were made only for those chosen, through God's divine election, before the foundation of the world, this limits the purpose or scope of it. Such a view is commonly denoted as "limited atonement" but for obvious reasons such a term is not totally accurate. The phrase "particular redemption" is more consistent with this viewpoint in its definition, meaning: "satisfaction made that has a specific intention that is neither vague nor general" in its accomplishment of salvation for some (128). Buswell notes that Christ's sacrifice accomplished exactly what it was specifically intended to accomplish: the salvation of God's elect (142). However, if the design and intention is not to accomplish what it did accomplish then how sure can one be of any decree of God (143)? He also holds that all on the particular atonement side believe that the atonement is sufficient in its value for all, universal in its application to all, and also is offered to all (142). All those Christ set out to save, He saves.

### The Terms

Defining the terms by which these arguments stand must be done with care. It is here that definite atonement has its foundation. Also, this is the place

where the universalism argument is strengthened. Universalists see these such key words as redemption, reconciliation, and merit, as events being completed through the cross, but for everyone. By defining these phrases in light of what is accomplished at Calvary, a solid argument is to be made. If, though, these are potentials effectual through faith, the definite atonement and universalism wall of truth is then toppled.

Redemption is the delivery from captivity by the payment of a price or ransom (Owen 147; 1 Cor 6:20). The release cost of a man bound by sin is the blood of Christ, setting him free from the grip of sin (Matt 20:28; 1 Tim 2:6). Here the aim of the ransom is the deliverance of those covered by the blood from the evil by which they were enslaved (Horton 139). Hell is the just punishment for man's sin debt, but thankfully the blood, whose worth in redemption is more precious than "silver and gold," made sufficient payment to deliver (Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 1:18-19). Christians are "justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom 3:24), and they "have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14). A free declaration of righteousness, pardon of sin, and liberation from due justice are the effects of such a redemption secured by the ransom payment (Owen 147). It is an unusual redemption where the captives remain hostage even after the price had been paid for their release (and in fact is no redemption at all). If it had been the Savior's purpose to redeem all men, then how He must be terribly disappointed.

A biblical perspective shows that the prisoner is not only set loose from bondage, but he is also brought into favor of the One who did hold him captive

(Pink, Doctrine 76). No longer is the freedman to pay for his former liability because God Himself has made the person one of His sheep, not to be imprisoned again (Rom 6:17-18). In spiritual redemption, the ransom price is the precious blood of the Lamb; those covered are not removed from God or His power; rather, they are restored to favor and “have been made near by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13). The elect were not justified immediately upon Christ's death (most were not even born yet), but rather God causes the justification based on whether or not Christ purchased salvation for him.

This act of God secures the reformation of the guilty, gaining a guarantee for their future obedience to the law (Barnes 108). God cannot label the guilty as “free” if they remain in bondage, for that would be to make God a liar. He ensures that those whom He releases from the penalty of the law have Another's righteousness and therefore avoid His wrath (Rom 3:21-22; 6:9; 2 Cor 5:21). If the guilty are set free because of the atonement, then their eventual good conduct is certain. There is some power within the atonement itself that acts on the individual to bring him into voluntary submission, repentance, and faith.

Some would suppose that the doctrine of particular redemption subtracts from the goodness and grace of God and also from the merit of Christ. The true basis of Christ's sacrifice is not the wrath of God but His grace (Forsyth 89). However, is it God honoring to affirm that all humanity has only a possibility of salvation and a greater probability of perishing, even taking into account everything that He has done for them? This is what the universal side agrees to upon affirming that Christ died to make the salvation of men merely possible

(Lightner 96). That love and grace is greater which secures the salvation of some, albeit the minority, than that which provides a contingency for all (Pink, Doctrine 102). It seems that God would be distant and indifferent if He left man to secure his own salvation when man's will has been ruined though Adam (Rom 5:12-17).

Since a ransom has been paid in full for the prisoner, why would it not follow that he would obtain the freedom purchased for him? Can it be that there is a redemption of men and they be not redeemed, that the payment be made but the purchase not fulfilled? This is true to the one who is an advocate of universal redemption. The ransom is made, but few are set at liberty. Since redemption cannot be separated from the work of Christ on the cross, would it not follow that all equally would be redeemed, no matter what view was held? The redemption manifested by Christ is the full liberation of "the many" out of their misery wherein they were trapped, by the price of His blood, and it cannot be rendered to be universal unless all are saved, as agreed by the universalist (Owen 149).

Another such concept that is ascribed to the death of the Savior, that extends to those for whom He died, is reconciliation (Col 1:21-22; 2 Cor 5:18-21). It is true that "it takes two to tango," and also true that it takes two for a friendship to be restored again. All those reconciled to God are also done so by Him and herein is the perfect reconciliation constructed by the Creator so that peace is obtained concerning both parties (Murray 23). What division can be made, for if God is reconciled and not man, why does not He reconcile him because it is definitely in His power? And surely man cannot reconcile himself to God left on his own, let alone be the only party reconciled.

Reconciliation is the restoration of friendship between previously opposing groups (Horton 139-140). This renews the relationship of peace and friendship between man and God, because they were separated and at enmity by the barrier of sin (Col 1:21; Rom 5:10). Unregenerate man does loathe the Holy One with everything that is in him, and His “wrath” is upon him as God’s enemy, until the day of the believer’s salvation (Rom 3:10-12; Eph 2:3; John 3:36). No reconciliation can be wrought between an offended God and one in bondage to sin until His holy wrath has been appeased, and until man throws down his weapons against Him. Perfect reconciliation required, first, the turning away of God’s wrath, an aversion of His anger, and that every effect of animosity towards the man be removed; second, the believer must be turned from enmity toward Him and reunited in obedience (Habermas 70).

Jesus turned aside the wrath of God, appeased Him, and brought the love of God upon the elect, for “when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10). This is the reconciliation of God, consisting in His turning away of wrath and the forgiveness of sin. The latter part of the verse completes this part of the process, that one reconciled through Christ’s death “shall be saved” (Horton 140). All those reconciled will be saved. The “now” in verse eleven depicts a reconciliation that has recently been received. It is received when the Holy Spirit works within a person to draw him into a right relationship with his Maker (Pink, Doctrine 9).

God is reconciled to believers in Jesus, consisting in “not imputing their trespasses to them,” which is the primary matter in “the ministry of



reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18-19). The elect person then can be reconciled to God because the barrier of division has been broken down, creating peace between the two (v20; Eph 2:13-15). If Christ removed all obstacles in the way of salvation, what barrier is there in the way of salvation? And if sin is removed, are those not all eventually saved? It is evident in Scripture that reconciliation is the effect and product of the death of the Son (Col 1:21-22).

Reconciliation is the proper consequence of the death of Christ, as is attested by all. How is it then, if He died for all, as the universalist espouses, that God is not reconciled to all (John 3:36)? Each are not reconciled to God, but are “by nature children of wrath” (Eph 2:3), doing nothing except “treasuring up...wrath in the day of wrath” (Rom 2:5). If God is reconciled to all, when does He start to be unreconciled toward them that perish? And when do men begin to be unreconciled who perish? Reconciliation on God’s behalf is the turning away of wrath and not imputing iniquity (2 Cor 5:18-19), which is part of the act of justification (Rom 4:6-8). So if He is reconciled to every man, are not all justified and blessed through forgiveness of sins? The universalist, who has no concept of a real hell, and the global redemptionist, who has created a redemption where none are rightly redeemed and a reconciliation where none are rightly reconciled, can answer such questions. Reconciliation is where there is a restoration of lost friendship, a breaking down of enmity, a creating of peace, a non-imputation of sin, and the turning away of divine wrath. The reconciliation on the believer’s part, conversion to the Master through faith and repentance, is the direct consequence of the death and blood atonement at Calvary. It cannot be asserted

that these properties and acts belong to any other than for whom the Savior died. Nor can it be asserted that every man is finally at a position of peace and not wrath with God.

Another concept attached to the cross is "merit". This is the worth value of Christ's work whereby He obtained and procured, for those for whom He died, those good things to be bestowed upon them (Cessario 104-105). The word is not found at all in the New Testament, but that which comes nearest to it in significance is the word "purchase" in Acts 20:28 (Owen 175).

The fruits and effects of His death that are found in the Word of God, Christ did merit and purchase for those whom He died. Such things included deliverance from the hand of enemies (Luke 1:74) and from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10), the demise of the power of death (Heb 2:14) and the works of the devil (1 John 3:8), deliverance from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13), from vain conversation (1 Pet 1:18), and from the present evil age (Gal 1:4), reconciliation with God (Rom 5:10; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20), appeasing Him by propitiation (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2), peace (Eph 2:14), and salvation (Matt 1:21). Each one Jesus merited and purchased for every person for whom He died. It is by the free grace of God that these good things procured by His death are bestowed upon them. Because the Lord merited and procured grace and glory for each, it is His obligation that they are communicated. It would be illogical that those glorious benefits merited should not then be bestowed upon them for whom they were procured. Should they not then be bestowed upon all if Christ has been all these things for them? Is He not able to because of their unbelief or maybe there has

been a crack in God's plan? It proves to be a vain assertion that they are conditionally, not absolutely, given to men upon faith since these things had already been declared and the condition merited and procured (Eph 1:3-4; Phil 1:29).

The effects and fruits of Christ unto sanctification produce another argument: if the blood of Christ does wash, purify, cleanse, and sanctify those for whom it was shed, then He was a sacrifice for them that are washed, purified, cleansed, and sanctified. Faith is the first ingredient of the heart's purification (Acts 15:9; 2 Thess 3:2). The flesh was legally sanctified by altar sacrifice and much more the sacrifice of Christ cleanses and purges unto the purifying of the flesh (Heb 9:13-14).

Participation in His death is linked together with conformity to Jesus in His resurrection (Rom 6:5). One's sinful corruption and depraved nature are, through His death and crucifixion, effectually disabled from their place as master and the believer should no longer obey them (v6). This section of Romans lays the foundation to press forward to higher sanctification and total emancipation from the power of sin (Owen 139).

Both purification and sanctification are asserted to be the intended end of the work of Christ (Tit 2:14; Eph 5:25-26). He "became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30). Thus, His blood secured sanctification, along with other effects of free grace. Holiness is the sure fruit of those for whom Christ died, but not everyone is a partaker in this, showing that Christ did not die for everyone.

Imagine a POW camp where a certain individual visits the person that holds his friend hostage and agrees to pay the sizable price for his friend's deliverance. This man goes to the keepers of the prison, and they unlock his friend's shackles, give him new attire, disposing of his old clothes, according to the agreement. Because the prisoner has been freed from his bondage and discharged, would not the payment of the ransom be the sole cause for the man's delivery? Keep in mind that nothing later would happen if the price had not been paid in full, and are simply as much an effect of the ransom as is the delivery. In a believer's release from the bondage of sin, it is accurate that there are other such things which do contribute besides the death of Christ (i.e., the quickening of the Spirit, the grace of God), but these are equally the results of the death of Christ as is the deliverance. Even faith is the fruit and procurement of the death of Christ in all for whom He died, which is something that is hard to hear for most people (Heb 9:12; 12:2; Phil 1:29; Acts 13:48).

Christ perished in the stead of His elect, accepted in the place of the other (Rom 5:6-8; Gal 3:13; 2 Cor 5:21). Because He became the surety of those, two things directly follow. First, Christ liberated them from the wrath and anger of God, and the guilt of death, because He took it upon Himself. They should then be reconciled and released from the dominion of sin leading to death. The reason He underwent all these things in another's place was so that they would not have to face them themselves (Owen 134). The transgressions of His people were taken upon the Offering, Who then became sin (Isa 53:6; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24; Gal 1:4). His substitutionary death benefited those chosen in Him. He was made

“sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21). Not all are set free from wrath and guilt of death, and truly reconciled to God, as the universalist does hold, because “the wrath of God abides on him,” having remained since they are children of wrath by nature (John 3:36; Eph 2:3).

Second, it would follow that Christ made satisfaction for the sins of those He died for (Owen 135). Satisfaction of God’s justice for sin was the reason He died in the elect’s place, for if justice were not satisfied, His sacrifice was rejected as insufficient (135). Atonement is essential for the satisfaction of a violator of God’s law, for He “will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex 34:7). Each person must achieve satisfaction for the sins he committed; therefore, God’s justice is satisfied when an unbeliever undergoes eternal punishment (Matt 5:26). Christ did not purpose to make satisfaction for the sins of every man because innumerable souls are resident in hell, undergoing punishment for their sins. Can it be supposed that the Savior would make Himself an offering for those already enduring eternal punishment, knowing that His work could not create in them any fruit or benefit? Was the blood cast upon those for whom Christ intended no good at all? He could not purpose any good to them without direct opposition to the Father’s eternal decree.

If the Savior died as a substitute for all men, making satisfaction for their sins, then did He do it for all or some of their sins? If for some only, how can any be saved? If then for every sin, why is not everyone saved? What is left standing between them and heaven? Some will put forth it is because of their unbelief that they are not saved (Owen 137). Is unbelief a sin? If it is not, how can it be the

cause of eternal damnation? If it is a sin, then did Christ die for it? If not, then He did not die for all the sins of all men. If so, why would it be an obstacle to eternal life?

### Mission Accomplished

The Savior had a mission from the Father, and it was intended to be accomplished at Calvary. Was this the design of God to make all men savable, or was it His purpose to secure His children through the shedding of His Son's blood? What, then, was the intention of the Messiah? He came to rescue and restore poor lost sinners (Matt 18:11; Luke 19:10; 1 Tim 1:15).

These depraved towards whom the divine purpose was intended are defined through Jesus' coming "to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28). Christ did not perish solely to stir men but to revolutionize salvation, not merely to sway a man's heart, but to fulfill His Father's will (Forsyth 19). It was the will of God that Christ should give Himself for the elect, that they should be redeemed and separated out of the goats. This is the church that He gave Himself for (Eph 5:25-27), that they might be made worthy of eternal life, as it is asserted in Titus 2:14, "who 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." It is apparent that the design of Christ was to save the elect, to cleanse and wash them, to make them holy, to render them acceptable, and to draw them to Himself (Owen 46).

This basic truth was taught to the Jews at the end of the plagues on Egypt (Ex 11-12). There were no exceptions that were to be excluded, for the firstborn

of Israel and Egypt alike were to be slain. No exception was made, but a substitute was provided for the Israelites. A lamb without blemish was to be slain, and its blood was to be sprinkled on the doorposts for any to be saved from the angel of death. Likewise, the Lamb was slain as the substitute, as it is written, “Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7).

Christ had a definite purpose before Him when He suffered on the Cross. Old Testament Scripture shows the Father promising His Son a certain product of His blood-shedding. Isaiah fifty-three says, “When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed,” that “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied,” and He “shall justify many” (vv10-11). How will He see the result of His work and be satisfied unless it was part of God’s eternal decree to save specific members of humanity? Could He actually “justify many” if no effectual provision was made by Him? On the other hand, to assert that Christ did purpose the salvation of all men is ludicrous for He knew it would never come to be. He did not offer Himself a ransom to make possible the salvation of everyone, but to ensure the salvation of all that were chosen (Pink, Sovereignty 60). Jesus perished not to designate sin pardonable, but “to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:26). It is the elect’s sin that has been “put away” (1 John 1:7).

Since God had before the foundation of the world chosen certain individuals, Jesus would not try to add to His election because Christ’s will is in perfect harmony with the Father’s (Eph 1:4; Heb 10:7; John 6:38). Over and over the Lord speaks of those the Father had given Him: “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 Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day” (John 6:37, 39). And again, Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said:

Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him...I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word...I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours...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. (John 17:1-2,6,9,24)

Before the foundation of the world the Father predestined certain people to be conformed to His Son’s image, and His death and resurrection were the means to carry out such a purpose.

One emphatic example from the Holy Writ that should bolster the particular atonement side is found in John 11:49-52. Here it is told:

And one of them, Caiaphas, being high priest that year said to them, “You know nothing at all, nor do you consider that it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.” Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being



high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.

Caiaphas is explained to have “prophesied not on his own authority,” such as was displayed in Old Testament times (2 Pet 1:21). Take note that this prophecy did not originate with himself, but as the Holy Spirit led him (John 18:14). It is declared that Christ died for “that nation” (i.e., believing Israel) and also for the Church of the children of God that are “scattered” among the nation who He will “gather together in one” (more discussion later). These “children of God” were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and also “predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself” (Eph 1:4,5).

If ever the true purpose of Calvary were prominent in the mind of the blessed Savior it was during His final days of earthly ministry (Pink, Sovereignty 66). The Scripture treats this most important period by enunciating, “when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end” (John 13:1). The apostle goes on to illuminate Jesus’ teaching: “Greater love has no one that this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (15:13). John records His utterance, “for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth” (17:19). These passages seem to teach that Christ died only for those given to Him by the Father to make them holy. Why would the Scripture record such discriminate phrases if the Savior had perished for all men equally?

Disputed Texts

1 John 2:1-2 reads, "My little children, these things I write to you, that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world." The universal redemptionist would ask what could be meant by the whole world besides all men in the world? He would go on to note the distinction verse two makes between the world and believers.

First, it is important to discern that the apostle John is writing these words to and about the saints of God (1 John 2:1). Specifically, John was a minister and apostle to the Jews, as were the others of the "inner circle" James and Peter, and they were the foremost objects of his concern. John addresses the Israelite believers, as did James and Peter, but truths can be drawn for the whole of believers (Jas 1:1; 1 Pet 1:1). He also mentions that those to whom he wrote had heard and received the commandment from the beginning (1 John 2:7). The word took residence among the Jews, but this was not true of the Gentiles. Remember, too, that the Jew thought only Israel would be saved, so such language would be necessary for the Jew to understand God's plan also for the Gentile.

The apostle's purpose was two-fold: first, to relay a message that would keep the children of God from sinning; second, to provide comfort to those who might sin and who could be in despair that the instance would prove fatal (Barclay 34-35). Saints can tend to forget, when they fall into sin, that they have Someone who pleads their case before the Accuser and ever prevails for them (Bunyan 13-14). Believers can take hope in this consolation, that they do not have to be

frightened because of their iniquities, but rejoice that they have an Advocate who made Himself a propitiation for their sins (Barclay 36-38). What comfort is there in relaying that the Savior perished for legions that will be damned? The ultimate comfort for any lays in the fact that Christ died for him, every one for whom He is the propitiation and an Advocate.

The word "propitiation," hilasmos in the original Greek, is only twice used in the New Testament (1 John 2:2; 4:10), and means appeasement, pacification, and satisfaction of God for sin (McDonald 78; Barclay 38-39). It refers to the separation of enmity and hostility, removing God's wrath toward man (Horton 139). Other New Testament references to propitiation reveal it is strictly limited in scope: "a propitiation by His blood, through faith" (Rom 3:25). Since Jesus is propitiation "through faith," He could not be the propitiation for them who do not have faith.

An Arminian might be locked upon the phrase "the whole world," intimating that it could only be interpreted "all without exception." A brief word-study on the word "world" should clarify any rock-solid interpretations of the word "world" for every instance. Depending on the context, there are as many as seven different meanings of the Greek kosmos in the New Testament (Acts 17:24; John 1:29; 12:31; 13:1; 15:18; Rom 3:19; 11:12). It would then be of utmost importance to take note of the context of the passage in question.

If the "whole world" meant all of mankind, then the first clause and the "also" in the next clause are without meaning. If Christ were the propitiation for all, then it would be pointless to distinguish, "He is the propitiation for our sins

and also for everybody." There could not be the word "also" if He is the propitiation for all humanity. The apostle would have seemingly omitted the first clause and said, "He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world" if he had meant that.

"The world" is a term that is here used in contrast from Israel, for Gentiles too were apart of the plan. This interpretation is cemented through a close comparison of 1 John 2:2 and John 11:51-52. The Apostle John penned both of these passages so his train of thought in one can be used to help interpret the other:

## 1 John 2:2

"He is the propitiation for our  
(believing Israel) sins,"

"and not for ours only"

"but also for the whole world" -  
the Gentile believers scattered  
throughout the world

## John 11:51-52

"he prophesied that Jesus would die for  
the nation,"

"and not for that nation only,"

"but also that He would gather together  
in one the children of God who were  
scattered abroad."

The shedding of the Messiah's blood is the sole thing that rescues any person from the pits of hell, and if many for which the blood made propitiation are in eternal death, then why should the blood be able to redeem anyone?

Another text that has been subject to controversy is 2 Peter 2:1: "there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction."

This verse contains a few uncertain areas that need to be examined. It is uncertain

that the word "Lord" is meant to be the Lord Jesus Christ, the word in the Greek being split between the Father and Him. Another uncertainty is if the purchase of these false teachers is a reference to Christ's work or a deliverance by the goodness of God from the trash of the world (i.e., idolatry) by knowledge of the truth. Yet another uncertainty is whether Peter is speaking of the buying in reality or according to their profession and belief (Owen 250). It is certain that no fruit of salvation can be determined among the false teachers, only common gifts of knowledge (Calvin 346-347; 2 Pet 2:19-21).

It is doubtful whether Christ is here intended by "Lord" or not. Nothing in the text supports such an idea; rather, the opposite seems to fit. The verses following talk of God and His actions toward these, not Christ. The Greek despotes connotes dominion and sovereignty, and is not always given to Jesus in the New Testament (Ryrie 320; Jesus - Jude 4). Christ is usually labeled kurios, but seldom despotes, as is the Father (Owen 251; Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; Rev 6:10). Despotes relays a despotic absolute ruler over subjects, the opposite concept that Christ spoke of in expressing Himself (Sidebottom 112; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:25-27).

Next, it is unclear that the purchasing of the false teachers is by Christ's ransom. The apostle compares these individuals with the wicked in Old Testament times. The word agorazo is used to signify going to market to purchase, and is translated here concerning the redemption of persons (Barbieri 108). Since no reference is made to the blood, death, or sacrifice of Christ, as in other places which use agorazo, this is just a rescue from trouble (Owen 251; Rev

5:9). The apostle tells of the rescue by having "escaped the pollutions of the world (i.e., idolatry, false worship) through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," declaring that their purchase was solely in respect to separation from the world by knowledge of the truth (2 Pet 2:20). He does not mention cleansing through the blood of the Lamb. Simply, there is no reference of buying of these in the context of actual redemption, but deliverance by God imparting the knowledge of the gospel, allowing them to have knowledge about Christ (2 Pet 2:20). Being able to know this information they can disguise themselves as saints, but are hypocrites teaching destructive doctrines. An example should clarify this: the Pharisees were teachers who had great knowledge of the Scriptures. God had allowed these men to be able to have knowledge about His statutes. By this they could escape worshipping falsely because they had the truth. Unfortunately, they were hypocrites and took the truth and perverted it. Just because false teachers said that they denied the One who bought them does not mean in fact that their statements were true.

Neither is it more certain that the buying of the false teachers was a reality or part of their heresies that they taught in outward profession. The Bible tells that Ahaz said, "the gods of the kings of Syria help them," because he thought it to be true (2 Chron 28:23). Could not Peter just be relaying the fact that they thought the Lord bought them? There are candidates today who have professed Christ as their Purchaser, fall away to curse Him, and die in eternal punishment.

This is such an awkward way of presenting the material that both sides have a hard time using the verse to bolster their respective arguments. Actually,

the particular redemption person must explain away this verse, which does not strengthen his argument for a definite atonement. The general redemption individual can interpret this text more naturally at its face value. A burden of proof does fall with those in the universal redemption camp who wish to use this verse to establish their view. They must prove that the "Lord" is meant to be Christ and not God. Also, if the former can be done, they must show that their buying was a spiritual redemption by the blood of the Lamb. And they must prove, if all the above is true, that they were not just counted to be redeemed because that is what they thought and taught to be so. Showing the above to be in fact true would be difficult to do, so neither side boasts much help from this section in Second Peter.

"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and man who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim 2:5-6). It is the phrase "who gave Himself a ransom for all" which draws the attention of those who hold to universal salvation and particular redemption alike. They who grasp the former view argue that if God desires all men to be saved (v4), then Christ died for all so that all are savable. The bulk of their argument lies in the ambiguity of the word "all." Throughout the Holy Writ "all" is used in two ways: all without exception and all without distinction (Pink, Sovereignty 68). Such cases where the word "all" is used in a relative and restricted sense are Mark 1:5, Luke 7:30, and John 8:2. It is this use of the word "all" that best fits as Christ ransomed Himself for people out of every race, distinction, and nationality (Rev

5:9). The limitation in Matthew 20:28 would be quite meaningless without such an interpretation.

Also, the qualifying phrase, "to be testified in due time," must be considered. If the Savior gave Himself for all of humanity, in what sense will this be "testified in due time," since innumerable persons will be lost? But if the test would mean that Christ died for all without distinction, then the qualifying words fit nicely in the test, for in "due time" this will be "testified," or shown forth to be true, in the actual accomplished salvation of each of them (Pink, Sovereignty 70).

### Conclusion

No theories of the atonement are infallible. If that were the case, there would be little argument surrounding this topic. The "potential" theory includes its strong points such as the responsibility of man and the immeasurable love of God. Naturally, if one were to use this magnifying glass to view Christ's work the logical conclusion would be that Christ died for all men, giving all the potential for salvation. Now, in the penal view, the atonement actually accomplishes salvation. Here, all those for whom Christ died will always come to a point where they are regenerated. When men are said to be reconciled by Christ's death, there is an actual reconciliation from God to man through the cross to be demonstrated in conversion. Universalism combines these two thoughts and states that the Bible speaks in terms of Christ's death for all and then His death accomplishing the salvation of everyone.

The Atonement is a concept integral in the Christian faith, for it is through the blood of the Sacrificial Lamb that any are cleansed of their sin. Man is not



able to do anything on his behalf that would help him secure a mansion in Glory. That is why the King of kings established a plan so that man would be able to be saved. Without any bias as to nationality, gender, or affiliation, God included members out of every tribe and tongue in His plan for redemption. God will not allow the precious and costly sacrifice of His Son to fail in accomplishing, completely, all that it was designated to do. Not a drop of that holy blood was shed in vain. The atonement is no failure.

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