

1998 Carson Summer Lecture Series
An Introduction to the Reformed Faith (#9)
Grace Secured: Limited Atonement
August 10, 1998

Limited atonement. Who in their right mind would want to limit the atonement? Why would anyone take the death of Christ and "limit" it? Well, unless you are a universalist, you limit the atonement.

Loraine Boettner,

The reformed view sees a limit in the design of the atonement, it is only for those whom the Father has chosen. The Arminian see a limit in the efficiency of the atonement, it saves only when human faith is added to it.

The reformed view sees a grand picture of the atonement, purchasing all redemptive elements, including my faith. Christ's death = salvation by faith

The Arminian view sees a limited picture of the atonement, making redemption possible, but in the final analysis depending on faith. Christ's death + faith = salvation

I. Introduction

A. Defining the Terms: Particular v.s. Universal

1. Universal atonement is the view that Christ died on behalf of each individual who ever lived, without exception (even those who were already in hell when He died!).
2. Particular atonement (also called definite atonement or particular redemption) is the view that Christ secured the salvation of His people (the elect).

B. What about the "whole world" in 1 Jn. 2:2?

Whole world - Rom. 1:8; Col. 1:6; 1 Jn. 5:19; Rev. 12:9
Jn. 11:49-52; Rev. 5:9; 7:9

II. The Intent of the Atonement

A. The Atonement is Particular or Definite by Nature

"The Bible does not teach that Christ's death created the opportunity for me to be redeemed. It describes His death as 'redemption.' Remember what redemption is. It is 'freedom by the payment of a price.' Freedom! *So Christ's death actually secured freedom for those for whom He died. . .*

Again the Bible does not teach that Christ's death created the opportunity for me to be reconciled to God. It describes His death as 'reconciliation.' And what is reconciliation? It is friendship-friendship in this case between God and man. *So Christ's death actually secured friendship with God for those for whom He died.* Finally the Bible does not teach that Christ's death created the

opportunity for men to have God's wrath turned away from them. It describes His death as 'propitiation.' And what is propitiation? It is the turning away of God's wrath. *So Christ's death actually secured-made certain- that no wrath would fall on those for whom He died.*

*Christ's death did not create opportunities, it established certainties."*¹

B The Covenantal Structure of the Atonement

- 1 In the Old Covenant, on Yom Kippur, was atonement made for the pagan nations or just God's covenant people? (See Lev. 16:34). The sacrifices and the priesthood was on behalf of the covenant people only.
- 2 In the New Covenant is Jesus' priesthood (sacrifice and intercession) for just His covenant people alone? (See John 17:9; Heb. 2:17; 5:3; 7:27; 9:7; 13:12. See also Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 1:5-6; 5:9-10).

C. The Atonement in the Sovereign Purpose of God (Job 42:2; Dan. 4:35)
Did Christ die with the intent of saving all mankind? If He did, did He intend to save those who already perished? If He did, was His purpose already thwarted before it was even accomplished? If so, is He now frustrated in His saving purpose and intent?

"The Father imposed His wrath due unto, and the Son underwent punishment 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.

In which case it may be said:

- a. That if the last be true, all men have some sins to answer for, and so none are saved.
- b. That if the second be true, then Christ, in their stead suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the whole world, and this is the truth
- c. But if the first be the case, why are not all men free from the punishment due unto their sins?

You answer, Because of unbelief? I ask, Is this unbelief a sin, or is it not? If it be, then Christ suffered the punishment due unto it, or

¹Tom Wells, *A Price for a People, The Meaning of Christ's Death* (Banner of Truth, 1992), pgs. 49-50. Italics are added.

He did not. If He did, why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died? If He did not, He did not die for all their sins."

(Dr. John Owen).

D Texts which Support Definite Atonement

1 Sam. 3:14

John 10:14-15, 26-27

Matt. 1:21

Mk. 10:45 [Matt. 20:28]

Mk. 14:24 [Matt. 26:27-28]

Heb. 9:28

Isa. 53:11-12

Acts 20:28

Eph. 5:25-27

Rom. 8:28-34

Rev. 5:9-10 [7:9]

Heb. 9:12 [Heb. 2:17; 5:3; 7:27; 9:7; 13:12]

*Notice the actual, not potential terminology of the salvation passages (e.g. Titus 2:14)

IV. Particular or Universal: What is at Stake?

A The essential doctrine of the atonement is that the substitutionary death of Christ paid the penalty for our sins, redeemed us, propitiated God's wrath against us and reconciled us to God. Only by faith, does one enter into the benefits of the death of Christ.

B The sufficiency of Christ's death is never the issue. Both particularists and universalists agree that Christ's death has efficient power to save without limit.

C Unless one is a universalist (believing that everyone will be saved), then both universalists and particularists believe that the atonement is only efficient for those who believe.

D Definite atonement is an integral part of whether or not God's plans and purposes can be thwarted or frustrated. Either Jesus achieved the Father goal or He did not!

E. Definite atonement is the heart and soul of god's perfect plan of redemption, which is the guarantee or surety of my eternal salvation. It is the basis of my security.

E.g., If Christ died for me in the same way He died for Judas, where is my security?

We believe in an atonement that really atoned, a redemption that really redeems.