

## Definite Atonement as the Foundation and Fountain of Evangelism

Missionary Greg Turner writes,

Everyone has heard it. “If you’re a Calvinist, then you don’t believe in evangelism and missions.” Apparently, if you believe that God is sovereign in salvation, you *can’t* take the Great Commission seriously, and if it happens that you do, your commitment to evangelism and mission must somehow be *despite* your Calvinism. It couldn’t possibly be *because* of it.<sup>1</sup>

As popular as this sentiment is, we must ask, “is it biblical?” That is, does believing a reformed soteriology – especially the doctrine of definite atonement<sup>2</sup> – stymie and stagnate sincere and strategic evangelism?

In this lesson, we are going to look primarily at the example of Jesus Himself to show that not only does the doctrine of definite atonement *allow* for evangelism and missions; it fuels it.

### John 6:35-40

<sup>35</sup> Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst. <sup>36</sup> But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. <sup>37</sup> All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out. <sup>38</sup> For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will but the will of Him who sent Me. <sup>39</sup> And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day. <sup>40</sup> For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.9marks.org/article/believe-in-particular-redemption-then-evangelize-and-send-missionaries-with-abandon/#:~:text=PARTICULAR%20REDEMPTION%20ENCOURAGES%20%26%20IMPELS&text=After%20all%2C%20belief%20in%20particular,the%20ends%20of%20the%20earth.>

<sup>2</sup> Or, as more traditionally known, “limited atonement (the “L” of the acronym *TULIP*). Others prefer to use the designation “particular redemption.”

This section begins and ends with Jesus offering salvation to any and all who come to Him in faith,<sup>3</sup> with the middle section providing both the grounds and foundation, as well as a further explanation.

- Note how the two “this is the will of My Father” statements in verses 39 and 40 are linked, showing that **those whom the Father gave to the Son in eternity past<sup>4</sup> are the very ones who will come<sup>5</sup> to Him and believe in Him for eternal life.**

When we look a little further down in the passage, we see that not only has the Father given a people to His Son in eternity past, He *also* draws them to His Son in time:

“No one is able<sup>6</sup> to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.”  
(**6:44**, RC)

In other words, all those the Father has given to the Son, He will draw to the Son.

### **John 10:11, 14-18**

<sup>11</sup> I AM the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for<sup>7</sup> the sheep...<sup>14</sup> I AM the good shepherd. I know My own and My own know Me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I **must** bring them also, and they **will** listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup> For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from My Father."

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<sup>3</sup> This inclusio emphasizes “believing in” Jesus. Notice John’s parallelism: to “come to” Jesus is to “believe in” Him. Cf. **v.40**, where to “look on” the Son is the same as to “believe in” Him [the participles also share the same definite article], and **1:12**, where “to receive” Jesus is to “believe in” Him. John has many different pictures of what it looks like to believe in Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> The verb is a perfect tense, which highlights a past action with ongoing results. We will see this concept unpacked further by Jesus in John 17.

<sup>5</sup> The future indicative highlights that Jesus is not guessing or hoping that they *might* come to Him, but rather that they *will* (most certainly) do so.

<sup>6</sup> Most translations render the verb (*dunamai*) as “can.” The verb has to do with ability, hence “is able.”

<sup>7</sup> The Greek preposition (*hyper*) often carries the idea of substitution (i.e., “in place of” My sheep). Also, in **v.15**.

In v. **16** we see that Jesus “must”<sup>8</sup> bring all of His sheep to Himself, for this is “the charge” He received from His Father. *This* is why they “will” listen<sup>9</sup> to His voice, that is, believingly come to Him when they “hear His voice.”

It is clear that “the sheep” are those whom the Father “gave” His Son in eternity past. When we look at **verses 25-29**, we see that not everyone belongs to “the flock”:

<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father's name bear witness about Me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not among My sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. <sup>28</sup> I **give** them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of My hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who **has given** them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Notice the order of **v. 26**: being “a sheep” precedes “believing.” The reason why this group of people did not believe in Jesus is “because” they were not “of” His sheep.

The question is, “*HOW* do the sheep “hear” the Good Shepherd’s voice? The answer the apostle gives is found later in his gospel account.

### **John 17:1-11, 14, 17-20**

<sup>1</sup> When Jesus had spoken these words, He lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, <sup>2</sup> since You have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom You have given Him. <sup>3</sup> And this is eternal life, that **they** know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. <sup>4</sup> I glorified You on earth, having accomplished the work that You **gave** Me to do. <sup>5</sup> And now, Father, glorify Me in Your own presence with the glory that I had with You before the world existed. <sup>6</sup> "I have manifested Your name to the people whom You **gave** Me out of the world. Yours they were, and You **gave** them to Me, and they have kept Your word. <sup>7</sup> Now they know that everything that

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<sup>8</sup> Greek, *dei*.

<sup>9</sup> Another future tense verb.

You have **given** Me is from you. <sup>8</sup> For I have **given** them the words that You gave Me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. <sup>9</sup> I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom You have **given** Me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup> All Mine are yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. <sup>11</sup> And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, which You have **given** me, that they may be one, even as we are one...<sup>14</sup> I have **given** them Your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world...<sup>17</sup> Sanctify<sup>10</sup> them in the truth; Your word is truth. <sup>18</sup> As You sent Me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup> And for their sake I consecrate<sup>11</sup> myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth. <sup>20</sup> "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will<sup>12</sup> believe in me through their word.

Here we see John conclude the unfolding notion of HOW the Son will call and save His elect sheep: **through the word.**

- **Just as** the Son – “the Word” (1:1) – was sent into the world to reveal the Father in Himself by word and deed, **so** now with all authority as the Son of God and Son of Man He sends His disciples **to continue the mission of calling the sheep into the kingdom “through” the Word.**<sup>13</sup>
  - Cf. **20:21** – “As<sup>14</sup> the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you.”
  - Cf. **21:24**, where John does this very thing by “bearing witness” to “the Word” in the very gospel account he has written for us – the “those who are going to believe” in Jesus (**17:20**).<sup>15</sup>

## SO WHAT?

<sup>10</sup> NET = “Set them apart”; NLT = “Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth.”

<sup>11</sup> This is the same verb as in v.17 (ἀγιάζω, *hagiadzo*).

<sup>12</sup> Lit. “who are going to believe.” The present tense participle is rightly translated as a future; however, it emphasizes the inevitability of the action coming to pass.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. **Matthew 28:18-20**

<sup>14</sup> Or better, “In the same way the Father has sent Me, I also am sending you.”

<sup>15</sup> He also does this in **1 John** (see especially 1:1-4).

If God the Father has promised to give His Son an elect people, and God the Son has promised to save them, then we should have great confidence that God's "purpose of election" will most certainly come to pass: the elect not only "may" come to Christ; they "must" come to Christ!<sup>16</sup>

In light of this, here are some specific encouragements to propel us into faithful evangelism and missions – both individually and corporately:

1. Definite atonement should make us **BOLD** in evangelism

- **Acts 18:9-10**

- No one is too "hard" or "far gone" or "smart" for God to sovereignly regenerate<sup>17</sup> and save as we preach the gospel.

→ cf. **Acts 9:13-15**<sup>18</sup>; **Romans 9:16**

2. Definite atonement should make us **PATIENT** in evangelism

- Faith that God is supremely sovereign in salvation liberates the evangelist from pressure to produce results by carnal and unworthy methods.

- **2 Timothy 2:24-25**

3. Definite atonement should make us **CONFIDENT** in evangelism

- **Isaiah 55:10-11**

4. Definite atonement should make us **SUBMISSIVE** in evangelism

- For example, though Paul says it was his "heart's desire and prayer to God" for his fellow Jews to be saved (Rom. 10:1), he nevertheless bowed before God's right as God to save whom He would, as well as harden whom He would.

- Cf. **Romans 9:21-24**

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<sup>16</sup> We would attribute the irresistible drawing of the elect to the Son to the work and ministry of God the Holy Spirit. Thus, our salvation is gloriously Trinitarian.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. **James 1:18** (RC) – "'God, by His sovereign plan, gave us birth through the message of truth that we should become the firstfruits of His [new] creation.'"

<sup>18</sup> In v. 15, the Lord Jesus says that Paul is literally, "A vessel of election he is to Me, this one."

5. Definite atonement should make us **HUMBLE** in evangelism

- The doctrine of God's free grace is a barrier against man-centered evangelism, not **God-centered**, God-glorifying evangelism.<sup>19</sup>

6. Definite atonement should make us **UNCOMPROMISING** in evangelism

- **2 Timothy 4:1-5**

NOW WHAT?

The Bible teaches that God, in His sovereignty, not only ordains **the ends**; He *also* ordains **the means**.

- That is, God has not only chosen *WHO* will be saved; He has also chosen *HOW* they will be saved:
  - **Rom. 10:17** (RC) – “So then, *this* faith comes from hearing, and *this* hearing through the preached word of Christ.”<sup>20</sup>
  - The parable of the soils (cf. **Matt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 8**)
    - “The seed is the word.”
  - **1 Cor. 3:5-6** (RC) – “What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, and to each as the Lord gifted. I planted, Apollos watered, but God causes<sup>21</sup> the growth.”

And so, with Timothy, let us prayerfully and faithfully “preach the Word, in season and out of season”; let us uncompromisingly “reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching”<sup>22</sup>; and let us purposefully “do the work of an evangelist,”<sup>23</sup> knowing that one day we will see the One our souls love.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See especially **Romans 11:33-36**.

<sup>20</sup> I have translated the two definite articles (“the”) anaphorically as “this”, as Paul is not talking about any kind of “faith,” but rather true, saving faith; and not any kind of “hearing,” but hearing the *rhema* of/about Christ. Most English translations translate *rhema* as “word.” This is most certainly right. However, Paul usually uses the Greek word *logos* for “word,” whereas *rhema* has to do with a word that is spoken (Friberg = “utterance, saying, proclamation, sermon, speech”; BDAG = that which is said: “declaration, pronouncement, statement”; something that arouses talk: “a matter, thing, event”).

<sup>21</sup> This verb, an imperfect, is highlighted against the previous two aorists (“planted”, “watered”).

<sup>22</sup> **2 Timothy 4:2**

<sup>23</sup> **2 Timothy 4:5**

<sup>24</sup> **2 Timothy 4:7-8**

Right after explaining that a day is coming when the Son will return the love-offering of the elect back to the Father who gave it to Him<sup>25</sup>, the apostle Paul says encourages us to faithful ministry with the following words:

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”<sup>26</sup>

To encourage suffering Christians and persecuted churches to not grow weary in the “good fight for the faith,” the apostle John gives them – and us – a glorious snapshot of the heavenly reality of where everything on earth is unstoppably heading:

- **Revelation 5:6-10** – <sup>6</sup>And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> And He went and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who was seated on the throne. <sup>8</sup> And when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain, and by Your blood You ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, <sup>10</sup> and You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.

### Conclusion:

Jonathan Gibson writes,

When it comes to definite atonement and evangelism, it's not either/or but both/and. Christ made a definite atoning sacrifice for those whom the Father had given to Him; and we are commanded to proclaim Christ indiscriminately to all people. How should we live between these two

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<sup>25</sup> See **1 Corinthians 15:20-28**

<sup>26</sup> **1 Corinthians 15:58**

points of tension? On our knees, as we plead with our triune God to do for others what He has so graciously done for us.<sup>27</sup>

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.crossway.org/articles/does-definite-atonement-undermine-our-zeal-for-evangelism/>