

God is love. I cannot imagine saying this in any pulpit in any church in this country, maybe even around the world, and having any objection to that statement. I may even be able to slip in a Bible verse to support the idea, say, the end of I John 4:8, where these exact words are written. In some of these churches, I might even get away with the next verse, “In this the love of God was manifested (or shown) toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.” In even fewer churches would I get away with verse 10, which says “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Uh-oh, be careful. After all, talking about sin is not in vogue in many of the feel-good, one-sided, all love, no wrath churches that are prevalent today. But if you really want to get in trouble, go to a church here in the deep south and tell people the truth that God’s love is a particular kind of love, that **He** determines to set on people for His own purposes and glory.

Further down in I John 4, verse 19, we read that “We love Him because he first loved us.” That sounds innocuous in and of itself, but we must ask the question....who is the ‘We’ and who is the ‘us’ of that statement? It is God’s children, the redeemed, the believers, His sheep. God’s love is a special, particular, love – directed at specific people. Does it sound scandalous to you that God doesn’t love every person ever born the same way? Is that uncomfortable in any way? Stay tuned, we are coming back to this in a few moments.

Now...How can it be that a holy God could long to forgive any sinner? We were made from dust and couldn’t follow the only commandment that was given, and so He had to die to reconcile us to Himself, to show us the love that He freely gives. It is above our understanding.

Yet, it was all in His plan to begin with – Christ was the Lamb of God slain before the foundation of the world (I Pet 1:20), since God had already planned

on showing forth His glory through his grace. Have you ever considered this? Until recently, I guess the last few years, I really hadn't. I mean, I believed the Scripture and that God sent His Son to ransom me, but I never really thought about why, other than to repeat the phrase, because He loved me. Backing up from that, why did God even create to begin with? He wasn't lonely, He was complete in Himself. He didn't need to prove anything, I mean, who would He be proving it to? This is a God who never learns anything, doesn't need anybody, and is absolutely holy and everlasting. It is hard for us to think in these terms, since we are finite creatures. For instance, when you have a moment, sit and think a few minutes about what we will be doing in heaven, and think about how long that will last. If you're like me, you hope we get to work in heaven – to do something physically demanding, and break a sweat, to enjoy the movement and exercise in a perfect new world. And that might go on for a few months. Then what next? Spend time praising God,

maybe a solid year. Then what? When you start putting these segments of time together, even a few thousand years, they add up to nothing compared to the staggering realization that we have only scratched the surface, and time means nothing anymore. We can't truly conceive of eternity – it is too much for us. And thinking of God's grace isn't any easier. When we ponder His purpose in creation and the garden - we wouldn't know the grace of God had He only given us permissible options. He originally gave man the ability to choose, what we call libertarian free will. Genesis 2:15-17 says **“Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.’”** We know what happened - he chose incorrectly, causing all mankind to be cursed, unable to come to Him, no longer desiring Him on

our own. We have lost our libertarian free will and will never seek Him without something from **outside** of us giving us this inclination. Even more dire is the fact that we are now at war with Him. And this is not the 'Big Man Upstairs' or your grandfather, this is the Righteous, Terrifying, Holy God who hates sin. And not just sin, but those who do sin. As R.C. Sproul aptly stated, he doesn't send sin to hell, but sinners. And A.W. Pink writes, "It has been customary to say that God loves the sinner, though He hates his sin. But that is a meaningless distinction. What is there in a sinner but sin? Is it not true that his 'whole head is sick' and his 'whole heart is faint' and that 'from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in him'? (Isa 1:5-6) Is it true that God loves the one who is despising and rejecting His blessed Son? God is light as well as love, (I John 1:5, 4:8), and therefore His love must be a holy love. To tell the Christ-rejecter that God loves him is to cauterize his conscience as well as to afford him a sense of security in his sins".

The fall was comprehensive, and absolute. And it is because of this immeasurable gap between God and man, and because of His pristine righteousness and our utter inability, and frankly, our complete lack of desire for Him that makes His redeeming love to us, the fallen race of Adam, so much more glorious. Simply put, His glory is magnified in his grace, and it is magnified because of the backdrop or our sinfulness. And that is what Romans 5 is about and why the peace that we now have with God is so amazing! And it becomes obvious when you think of our downfall in this light to see that our redemption had to come from Him – we couldn't and wouldn't have initiated this. (He loved us first).

The more we are able to see His holiness, the more we see ourselves in the truest light. When this is coupled with the way he loves us, prodigals, and runs to forgive His children, it only increases our sense of awe. **How can He be this way?** We wouldn't. Think about someone who has wronged

you. Have you ever looked in the refrigerator for your leftovers and find that they were already eaten? Ever had somebody come on your property and steal something from you? Said something bad about your momma? Them's fighting words. We won't put up with that. How about somebody who hurt your children? Now we're getting serious. Nobody hurts my child and gets away without me doing something about that. How much more offensive are we to God than the worst of sinners against us, another sinner.

The more we know God, the more we see His holiness. The more we see His holiness, the more we see our wretchedness. He never changes. I couldn't change myself. I had no desire for God. This makes me understand that something outside of me had to not only make reconciliation possible, but had to make me desire such a thing to take place. He provides the means **and** gives me the

desire to want Him. How amazing and glorious a God!

Moreover, He runs to me! He is just, the justifier, the cause, the goal, the prize. He is truly worthy of all honor that we could give, and infinitely more. Our best praise falls short – we say along with the hymn writer ‘O for a thousand tongues to sing, my Great Redeemer’s Praise.’

- **Transition**

- To be loved by a God such as this is an immense, underserved blessing, and we need to understand this love. It is inseparably connected to His purposes and plans, and it is, in a word, effective. His love accomplishes its purpose – namely to bring to fruition His everlasting plan. I heard a pastor say one time that “my best idea of a thing isn’t the thing, but it is for God.” Think about that. What we envision doesn’t always pan out, we can’t always pull it off. In contrast, any purpose or plan that **He** has is as true as if it had

already happened. We are constrained by time and energy and ability in a way that God is not. What He desires, He makes happen. He is God.

Now I want to look at a number of passages tonight that emphasize the Purpose of God in redemption, and specifically talk about what we call Particular redemption, the Biblical truth that Christ has died for His people and them alone, and has paid for their sins, and theirs alone, and his death actually accomplished our redemption, didn't just make it possible. So this is a very particular kind of love. As we consider this, you may ask the question, why would God do it this way? My best answer is – because He wanted to, and it suits His purposes, and shows His glory in a way that we may not be able to understand fully. But the Scripture is true, and we want to affirm that and learn what it has to say about His love for us.

Particular redemption is part of a group of points that some folks term 'Calvinism' or the 5 points of Calvinism – Others have referred to these as the doctrines of grace. And while we could spend months talking about these and looking at what God's word has to say about them in much detail, I want to summarize and then talk about the 3rd point, namely Particular Redemption, or as you may have heard it called, Limited Atonement. And I want to make sure we do a couple of things. First, understand what God has to say about this, and then to see how this matters to us today, where we live and work and interact with people, how it changes our worship and our perspective and our behavior.

There is an interesting origin to these five points, and it started way back in 1610 in Holland, just one year after the death of James Arminius, a Dutch seminary professor. A group of his followers, who came to be known as the Arminians, presented the

five articles of faith as a protest to the State of Holland. They insisted in their protest that the Belgic Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism, which was the official expression of the doctrinal position of the Churches of Holland, be changed to conform with the views that they submitted in the protest. They were basically objecting to the doctrines in both the Catechism and the confession relating to divine sovereignty, human inability, unconditional election, particular redemption, irresistible grace, and the perseverance of the saints. The theology of Arminianism really was rooted in two ideas – 1, that divine sovereignty is not compatible with human freedom, nor human responsibility. And 2, that ability limits obligation. In other words, since faith is commanded and you are responsible, it has to be exercised independently of God and the ability to exercise this must be universal. Thus, man must have some ability in himself to respond, Christ's death did not ensure anyone's salvation, only the

provision of such, and it rests with believers to keep themselves in a state of grace. This protest was taken up in the Synod of Dort in 1618, and over 154 sessions from November until May 1619, these topics were discussed and compared with what is in Scripture. There were over 100 representatives from Holland, Germany, Switzerland and England and the protest was unanimously rejected. But they felt a mere rejection wasn't enough, so they determined to set forth a response to those 5 points put forward by the Arminians. This response would come to be known as the 5 points of Calvinism. The name Calvinism, as you probably know, came from John Calvin, who lived from 1509 to 1564, and had done much work in the previous century defending and expounding these confessional views. So, what are these points? Glad you asked! I'll give you some references as we go, but won't read all of them for the sake of time.

- Total Inability or Total Depravity

- Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. (Romans 3, Eph 2) His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature, therefore, he will not, indeed he cannot choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. (Romans 8:8) Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's 'assistance' to bring a sinner to Christ – it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. (John 3) Faith is not something man contributes to salvation, but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation. Salvation is what we call Monergistic, not synergistic, meaning that it is God acting alone, not in combination with us. Faith is a result of being born again, not a cause.

- Unconditional Election – Gods’ choice of certain individuals unto salvation before the foundation of the world rested solely in His own sovereign will (Eph 1, Romans 9). His choice of particular sinners was not based on any foreseen response or obedience on their part, such as faith, repentance, etc. On the contrary, God gives faith and repentance to each individual whom he selected. (Eph 2, I Pet 1) These acts are the result, not the cause of God’s choice. Election therefore was not determined by or conditioned upon any virtuous quality or act foreseen in man. (Rom 9:11-13, I Tim 1:9) Those whom God sovereignly elected He brings through the power of the Spirit to a willing submission to Christ. Thus God’s choice of the sinner, not the sinner’s choice of Christ is the ultimate cause of salvation. (Rev 13:8)

- Particular Redemption or Limited Atonement – I'm going to skip and do this last and talk more about it.
- Efficacious Call of the Spirit, or Irresistible Grace – In addition to the outward general call to salvation which is made to everyone who hears the gospel, the Holy Spirit extends to the elect a special inward call that inevitably brings them to salvation. (John 5:21, Eph 2:1) The external call can be, and often is, rejected; whereas the internal call which is made only to the elect cannot be rejected – it always results in conversion. The Spirit is not limited by man's will nor is he dependent upon cooperation for success. The Spirit graciously causes the elect sinner to cooperate, to believe, to repent, to come freely, and willingly to Christ. God's grace is what you might call invincible, never failing to accomplish what it sets out to do. (Romans 8:30, John 6)

- Perseverance of the Saints – all who were chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved. (John 5:24) They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and thus persevere to the end. (John 10, 1 Thess 5:23-24, II Tim 4:18)

We've only scratched the surface, many more references we could look at, but let's keep going.

- And now for what is commonly listed as the 3rd point, Limited Atonement, or as I like to refer to it, Particular Redemption. Election itself didn't save anyone – it only marked out particular sinners for salvation. So the Father chose and the Son had to redeem those whom the Father had given him. What this means is that Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was a substitutionary atonement of the penalty of sin in the place of certain, specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured

everything necessary for their salvation, including faith and repentance which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, thereby guaranteeing their salvation.

This is not just a provisional death that gives me an opportunity now to take it or leave it. It really pays for something rather than potentially paying for something if only God, sitting in heaven wringing his hands, can somehow convince me, the one really in control, that it is worth it, worth my time to 'accept' Him. No. Christ's death accomplished what He set out to do. When He said 'it is finished' he had completed the work and as Hebrews 10:12-14 says "**But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever** WHO? Those who are being sanctified."

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I do want to say one thing about ‘Calvinism’ as it is called, specifically about recognizing them as a catalogue of 5 points. When we think about the sovereignty of God in all of salvation in this way, we need to remember that these 5 points came about because of a response to the Arminian protest, and we don’t want to obscure the fact that these points are really one larger point that belong together, which is this – God Saves Sinners.

J. I. Packer says it this way:

“God - The triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit three persons working together in sovereign wisdom, love, and power to achieve the salvation of a chosen people – the Father electing, the Son fulfilling the Father’s will by redeeming, the Spirit executing the purpose of Father and Son by renewing. Saves – does everything, first to last, that is involved in bringing man from death in sin to life in glory:

plans, achieves and communicates redemption, calls and keeps, justifies, sanctifies, glorifies. Sinners – men as God finds them, guilty, vile, helpless, powerless, unable to lift a finger to do God’s will or better their spiritual lot. God saves sinners – and the force of this confession may not be weakened by disrupting the unity of the work of the Trinity, or by dividing the achievement of salvation between God and man and making the decisive part man’s own, or by soft-pedaling the sinner’s inability so as to allow him to share the praise of his salvation with his Savior. This is the one point of Calvinistic soteriology which the ‘five point’ are concerned to establish and Arminianism in all its forms to deny: namely, that sinners do not save themselves in any sense at all, but that salvation, first and last, whole and entire, past, present, and future, is of the Lord, to whom be glory forever; amen!” And I add, End quote, turn off the lights, shut the door, go home, goodnight.

Another point to be made is that to think about this differently makes God unjust. For example, let's suppose that Christ died for the sins of all men. But not all men are going to be saved. How can God remain holy and just, and punish men for the sins that Christ has already paid for? A righteous judge doesn't condemn a person for a crime if the penalty has already been paid by another. I Peter 2:24 says "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." If he has borne the sins of all men, why would anyone still have to pay? What about people that died prior to Christ coming that did not believe? Did he pay for the sins of those people that were already IN torment that would never believe? In His work, "The Death of Death in the Death Christ", John Owen writes "I cannot conceive an intention in God that Christ should satisfy his justice for the sin of them that were in hell some thousands of years before, and yet be still resolved to continue their

punishment on them to all eternity.” You are forced into a corner, to say that He died for everyone, and everyone will be saved, or you must believe that He only died for the sins of those who are His, namely His sheep. In their book, “The 5 Points of Calvinism,” Steele and Thomas put it like this: “Since all men will not be saved as the result of Christ’s redeeming work, a limitation must be admitted. Either the atonement was limited in that it was designed to secure salvation for certain sinners but not for others, or it was limited in that it was not intended to secure salvation for any, but was designed only to make it possible for God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe. In other words, one must limit its design either in extent (it was not intended for all) or effectiveness (it did not secure salvation for any). As Lorraine Boettner so aptly observes, for the Calvinist, the atonement is like a narrow bridge which goes all the way across the stream; for the

Arminian it is like a great wide bridge that goes only half-way across.”

Okay, let’s turn to the only real authority on this, God’s word, and look at several passages of Scripture that show how God’s love is a particular love, poured out for His children and them alone. And I what I want to do is to break this up into a couple of different sections and look at the Biblical support for this idea.

1. The Bible describes the Atonement as actual

a. Matthew 1:21 “**21She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.**”

b. Luke 19:10 (story of Zaccheus) “**10For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.**”

c. 2 Cor 5:21 “**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**”

One of my former pastors Pat Abendroth writes about this verse and says “Put

another way, those whose sins Christ bore, will, according to divine purpose (the hina clause) become the righteousness of God in Him! The “our” and the “we” cannot be separated. In case you are wondering, “might” is not in the Greek text so suggesting potentiality is not a good option.”

d. Titus 2:14 **“who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works”**

2. The Bible declares that because of the Atonement, Christ secured reconciliation and justification for His people and they are given the Holy Spirit, who regenerates and sanctifies them.

a. First, Reconciliation

i. Romans 5:10 **“10For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by**

the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

- ii. 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 “**18All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19that is, in Christ God was reconciling^c the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.”** And we know that the word ‘world’ here cannot mean everyone, since not everyone will be saved.
- iii. Colossians 1:21-22 “**21And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 22he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy**

and blameless and above reproach before him”

b. Justification

- i. Romans 3:24 **“and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”**
- ii. Romans 5:8-9 **“but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”**
- iii. Galatians 3:13 **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us”**
- iv. Hebrews 9:12 **“he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”** Again, this is not the language of potentiality, but

rather the language of accomplishment, in this case of redemption and justification. But we don't stop there...

c. Regeneration and Sanctification

Ephesians 1:3-4 says we have been blessed with *every spiritual blessing* due to our being attached to him from the foundation of the world. Philippians 1:29 describes that it has been granted to us not only to believe, but also to suffer (which also accomplishes His purposes in our sanctification). From earlier, Titus 2:14 says that he redeems us to purify for himself a people, Titus 3:5-6 says he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, Hebrews 13:12 says he suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. And in

one of the most clear verses about the inter-trinitarian plan of salvation, Hebrews 9:14 says **“how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our^g conscience from dead works to serve the living God”**

3. The Bible describes what Christ did in terms of fulfilling a pre-determined gracious contract.

a. Jesus was sent into the world by the Father to save the people which the Father had given him. John 6:35-40 **“35Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.**

38For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39And 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. 40For 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.”

b. Jesus laid down His life for ‘his sheep’.

Notice that the Father had given the sheep to Christ. John 10:11 and following **“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, 15just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. 16And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice... So the Jews gathered around him**

and said to him, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” 25Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me, 26but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. 27My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29My Father, who has given them to me,^a is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. 30I and the Father are one. ” So Jesus says what he is doing is for His sheep. He isn’t simply dying and hoping for the best – His father has given them to him, and he is dying for them to fulfill the agreement that he had with the Father – that is why Christ was sent.

Jesus in the high priestly prayer prays for the ones 'given' to him by the Father. John 17 is full of this type of language.

“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,

2since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

3And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

4I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

6“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.

9I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

10All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them.

11... Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.

12While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me.

20"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,

24Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. Do you get the idea that Christ is concerned with the ones that the father had given him? Do you hear the language of agreement here between the Son and the Father about preordained purpose? Absolutely.

4. What about the passages that speak of Christ dying for 'all men' or for the 'world' vs. the ones that speak of his dying for many or a particular people?

Application

- You may be thinking, okay, so what. You've convinced me, but how is this something that God can use in my life on a daily basis? Let me offer you a few ways this can be helpful for you.
- 1. It transforms your worship – When you see how God in his fullness loves you and has worked to accomplish his purpose in you, a hopeless sinner, to set his love on you, to accomplish your reconciliation, and to call you and make you see him and want him, that changes your worship. He becomes greater, you become smaller – the fact that it is all about him becomes more real and you can offer praise and thanks in a way that you can't otherwise. You see things differently, are offended less frequently, see other people in

a new way, have more passion for the lost, the entire way you approach each day becomes more God-focused and that is a good thing. Not to mention when we gather together as a corporate body – studying the word and praying and singing together is more special when you understand this truth, that Christ died for His own. Is your family special to you? No doubt, you love your spouse and children a little differently than you love other families, their kids. To realize that we are loved by Christ in a like manner to the way that we love our own family helps us to have a closer relationship and thankfulness to Him.

2. If understood correctly, it creates humility. I have heard more times than I care to remember someone who doesn't understand the doctrines of grace say something like 'wow, you must really think you're special, to think God chose you.' No, I feel humiliated. I know me. And I know there isn't any good reason why I should be loved by Him. In fact, there are a lot of reasons why I

shouldn't be loved by Him. And the fact that He has opened my eyes to the truth, has taken away my heart of stone and given me a heart of flesh, regenerated me, caused me to love Him, continues to draw me closer to Him, I am so unworthy of this. It is the most humbling thing in the world to be one of God's children, especially in light of what it cost to His own Son to make it happen.

3. It will transform your evangelism – when you see yourself the way God sees you, it helps you to see other people the way God sees them. And knowing that He has died to purchase His bride will allow you to treat others with a respect and love that you wouldn't have if you thought you had to somehow convince them that the gospel is true in order for them to take advantage of the 'possibility' of salvation. Don't get me wrong, we need to passionately call people to repent, but do you see that when you know that Christ has already accomplished salvation for His own that it

changes the way you call people to Him? It would be different if God had simply made it possible and it was now up to us to convince people – God’s for them, the Devil is against them, and now it is ultimately up to them. How could you sleep, knowing that people all around are dying, and their eternity depends on your skills of persuasion? It is important to share the gospel and to speak to men about Christ, absolutely. But **He** cares more than you **ever** will – knowing this allows you to be faithful, obedient, and joyful, knowing that He is never going to lose any that are His, that He has bought and paid for, in agreement with the father, through the working of the Spirit, accomplished by His own powerful, effective, substitutionary atonement and sacrifice. Let’s thank Him for that.