

# The Trinity and the Doctrine of Definite Atonement

Summary: Theologians distinguish between whom God is as Trinity (essentially, ontologically, immanency) and how that same Trinity operates in history (missional/operational/appropriation).

Missional/operational/appropriation:

- Basil of Caesarea: The Father begins, the Son executes, and the Spirit perfects.
- The Nicene Creed: The Father creates, the Son redeems (redemption of creation), and the Spirit sanctifies (re-creates).
- Thomas Aquinas: The Father is the author of adoption, the Son is the model of adoption, and the Spirit is the imprint of adoption.

Each person of the Trinity acts consistently with their eternal relations. Every act of each person of the Trinity excludes no other person, for there is a concurrence of each person in every act since God is one. Each person has a distinct yet inseparable action. No act of any person of the Trinity in history is interchangeable, nor independent, for God is one.

## 1. Salvation Arranged (Father): Ephesians 1:3-6

- The Father (He) chose us (the elect) in Him (Christ) before the foundations of the world (v.4). The Father is the architect, the designer, the planner, and the communicator (missionally) to the Son and the Spirit.
- This election is birthed from Trinitarian love toward each person (Matt. 3:17; John 14:31; Rom. 5:5).

## 2. Salvation Accomplished (Son): John 19:30

To atone: to cover/expiate sin. Includes expiation (removal of sin) and propitiation (God, because of Christ, now reckons sinners, through faith, as righteous).

- A. Amyraut's Hypothetical Universalism/Definite-Potential (Potential): in the death of Christ, the Triune God possibly and/or hypothetically atoned for everyone without exception. Faith secures the application of the atonement.
- B. The Doctrine of Definite (Actual) Atonement: in the death of Jesus Christ, the Triune God achieved the redemption of every person given to the Son by the Father in eternity past. He applied the accomplishments of His sacrifice to each of them by the Spirit. The death of Christ was intended to win salvation for God's people alone: everyone without distinction (race, ethnicity, tribe, language, etc.)

Questions:

1. What is the extent of the atonement? For whom did Christ die? For a *definite* people, or a *potential* people? All without distinction or all without exception?
2. Did Christ intend to atone for the sins of *definite* people whom the Father gave Him, or a *potential* people He is unsure of?
3. Did the atonement make people savable (*potentially*)?
4. If Christ *definitely* atoned for everyone, what of those who will never believe? Can there be *potential* atonement?

5. If the Father gave Christ a *definite* people (John 6:38; 14-16; 16:6-26), why would Christ now make others, whom the Father did not give Him, "savable"?

Are there any conditions to this "finished" work of Christ on the part of the sinner? Forensically, no, since justification, regeneration, and future glorification are all intertwined. The result of the atonement will be saving faith and repentance. Both are gifts from God (Eph. 2:8; 2 Tim. 2:25). God must grant faith and repentance.

*Definite* atonement, for *definite* people, demonstrates the unity of the Father and the Son as one: The Father gives to the Son a people whom the Son redeems. None are lost, and all will come (John 10:14-18; 6-12). But what of the Holy Spirit?

## 3. Salvation Applied (Holy Spirit)

- To whom does the Spirit apply the benefits of the atonement?
- The Holy Spirit as God is coeternal and coequal with the Father and the Son. His mission is to regenerate (John 3:5-8), convert (1 Cor. 12:3), adopt (Gal. 4:6), sanctify (1 Thess. 5:23), and glorify (Rom. 8: 9-11). He is involved in all elements of salvation from start to finish.
- The Holy Spirit is a person Who speaks and is sent/sends (Acts 13:2, 4); He chooses (Acts 20:28), teaches (John 14:26), gives (Isa. 63:14), can be lied to and tested (Acts 5:3, 9), can be resisted (Acts 7:51), grieved (Isa. 63:10; Eph. 4:30) and blasphemed (Matt. 12:31). In every way, He is presented alongside the Father and the Son.
- The Spirit, missionally, is released following Christ's resurrection and ascension (John 16:7) to apply the benefits procured by Christ's death *definitely*.
- The Holy Spirit is the "agent in time" Who applies the benefits of the atonement to the elect's (believer's) account. The "payment" is complete, and He is the messenger that "delivers the good news" by dwelling and remaining in "us."
- In every action of every member of the Trinity, the Spirit is closely conjoined with and inseparable from the Father and the Son, for God is one.
- All the works of the Trinity operate inseparably in creation (Gen. 1:1-5; Ps. 33:6-9), providence (Ps. 104:29-30); Col 1:18; Heb. 1:3), and grace (incarnation, the baptism of Jesus, the cross, and resurrection).
- Redemption rests on the eternal determination of God in which all three persons are engaged (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:4-5; 2 Tim. 2:19). Jesus refers to the Father giving people to Him (John 6:37) and having sent Him (John 3:16; 5:36-37, 43) and fulfilling the work that He had been given to do (John 4:34; 17:4; Heb. 10:5-10). Jesus speaks of the Spirit giving to His people what belongs to Him (John 15:26-27; 16:12-15).
- The Bible proclaims a Triune Creator (Ps. 33:6; John 1:1-3) and a Triune Redeemer (Gal. 4:4-6). We are to baptize in the Triune Name (Matt. 28:19), bless the Triune Name (Eph. 1:3-14), and be blessed in the Triune Name (2 Cor. 13:14).

All elements of salvation, from election, predestination, effectual call, regeneration, justification, positional sanctification, and glorification, are monergistic acts of God, which depend on the personableness, communicative, and loving essentials of the Trinity.