

## *The Two Forms of the Mistaken Formula*

In passing, I have mentioned the ‘sufficiency formula’. It is time to look at it more closely. Putting it simply, it states:

*Christ died for all. He died efficiently or effectively for the elect only, but sufficiently for the whole world.*

This form of words was invented by the Schoolmen,<sup>57</sup> Peter Lombard and Thomas Aquinas. It was a mistake. Even so, it was adapted and adopted by Reformed writers,<sup>58</sup> and many Calvinists have continued to use it.

D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Christ ‘died for the church; he died for nobody else. His death, as Calvin and other expositors remind us, because it was eternal and because he is the Son of God, is sufficient for the whole world; but it is efficient only for the church’.<sup>59</sup> Thomas Boston: ‘Christ did not die a sacrifice for every man and woman in the world. It is true, there was virtue and efficacy enough in his oblation to satisfy offended justice for the sins of the whole world, yes, and of millions of worlds more;<sup>60</sup> for his blood has infinite value, because of the infinite dignity and excellency of his person. And in this sense some [Calvinists]... understand those places of Scripture where he is called the Saviour of the whole world. Yet the efficacy and saving virtue of his sacrifice extends not unto all... To affirm that Christ offered up himself a sacrifice with a design and intention to save all mankind, great absurdities would follow... Christ died for the elect, and for all the elect, and none else. God designed to save [only] some of the lost posterity of Adam... From [various scriptures] we may be fully convinced that Christ died only for the elect’.<sup>61</sup> John Murray: ‘Unless we believe in the final restoration of all men we cannot have an unlimited atonement. If we universalise the extent we limit the efficacy... The doctrine of “limited atonement” which we maintain is the doctrine which limits the atonement to those who are heirs of eternal life, the elect. That limitation ensures its efficacy and conserves its essential character as efficient and

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effective redemption'. On the other hand, 'there must be... a certain universalism belonging to the redemptive events that lays the basis for and warrants the universal proclamation... Many benefits accrue to the non-elect, from the redemptive work of Christ... In this sense, therefore, we may say that Christ died for non-elect persons'.<sup>62</sup> And so say many others.<sup>63</sup> The atonement, they assert, is 'sufficient for all, but efficient only for the elect'.

Advocates of this formula take one of two approaches.<sup>64</sup> Some say God intended the atonement to be general in that he designed it to be efficient for the elect but sufficient for the world, provisional for every sinner, sufficient to save them all – on condition that they believe. This is what God intended by Christ's redemption. I will call this the Amyraldian position. Others say, first of all, there is nothing potential or conditional about Christ's redemption; it is absolute. Then, they say, the atonement, though efficient only for the elect, and not provisional for all, is sufficient for all because of the worth of Christ's person.<sup>65</sup> For simplicity, I will call this the Owenite position, not that it originated with Owen – but taking him as, perhaps, its most thorough exponent.<sup>66</sup>

As I will show, both schemes are wrong. The first, the Amyraldian, is contrary to Scripture; the second, the Owenite, goes beyond Scripture into the realm of speculation, and is, in addition, meaningless.

Take the first.