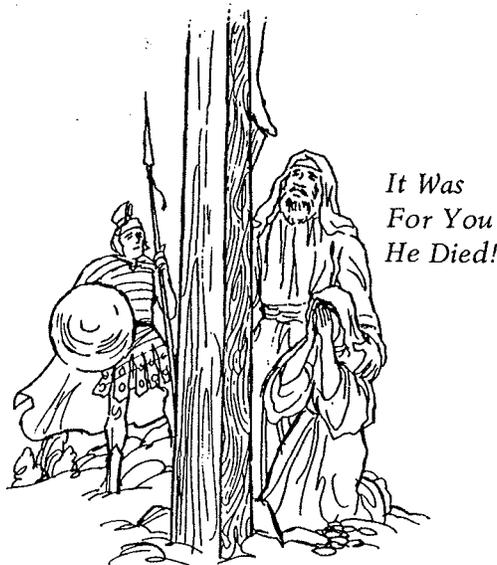


# FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?

## A Defense of Unlimited Atonement



"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have [desires] all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom **for all**, to be testified in due time" (1 Timothy 2:3-6)

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death **for every man**" (Hebrews 2:9).

"And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also **for the sins of the whole world**" (1 John 2:2).

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**Saved by grace alone  
This is all my plea:  
Jesus died for all mankind,  
And Jesus died for me.**

**From the Hymn *Grace! 'tis a Charming Sound***

**Words by P. Doddridge**

\* \* \* \* \*

**“Lord, I believe were sinners more  
Than sands upon the ocean shore,  
Thou hast for all a ransom paid,  
For all a full atonement made.”**

**4th Stanza of JESUS THY BLOOD AND RIGHTEOUSNESS  
by Nikolaus L. von Zinzendorf, 1739**

\* \* \* \* \*

**Then let us all with one accord  
Sing praises to our heavenly Lord,  
That hath made heaven and earth of naught,  
And with His blood mankind hath bought!**

**4<sup>th</sup> stanza of *The First Noel*, Old English Carol**

# For Whom Did Christ Die?

## A Defense of Unlimited Atonement

### 1) FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?

“What saith the Scriptures” (Romans 4:3)

**He died for ALL (1 Tim. 2:6).**

**He died for ALL MEN (Rom. 5:18; 1 Tim. 4:10).**

**He died for US ALL, for ALL OF US (Isa. 53:6).**

**He died for the UNGODLY (Rom. 5:6).**

**He died for CHRIST-DENIERS (2 Peter 2:1).**

**He died for SINNERS (Rom. 5:8).**

**He died for EVERY MAN (Heb. 2:9).**

**He died for MANY (Matthew 20:28).**

**He died for the WORLD (John 6:33,51; John 1:29 and John 3:16).**

**He died for the WHOLE WORLD (1 John 2:2).**

**He died for the WHOLE NATION of Israel (John 11:50-51).**

**He died for the CHURCH (Eph. 5:25).**

**He died for His SHEEP (John 10:11).**

**He died for ME (Gal. 2:20).**

The Scriptures teach that the sacrifice of the Lamb of God involved the sin of the world (John 1:29) and that the Saviour’s work of redemption (1 Tim. 2:6; 2 Pet. 2:1), reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19), and propitiation (1 John 2:2) was accomplished on behalf of all mankind (1 Timothy 4:10a). However, the cross-work of Christ is efficient, effectual and beneficial only for those who believe (1 Tim. 4:10b; John 3:16). To say it another way, Christ died a substitutionary death and made a payment for sins which was SUFFICIENT for all men, EFFICIENT only for the elect. A payment was made and provided for all, but only those who believe on Christ receive the benefits of this payment.

### 2) DEFINITION OF TERMS

It might help to begin by defining some of the terms which will be used in this paper:

**The atonement:** For our purposes here we are using this term to refer to the cross-work of Christ in general, with special emphasis upon Christ’s substitutionary death for our sins.

**Unlimited atonement** (general atonement, universal atonement): This is the doctrine which says that Christ died for the sins of all men, for all mankind, for every person, for the whole world. However, individuals do not benefit from the death of Christ in a saving way until they come to Christ and believe on Him. God's gift has been purchased, offered and extended to all (1 John 5:11), but must be personally received by faith (1 John 5:12; John 1:12).

**Limited atonement** (definite atonement, particular atonement, limited redemption): This is the doctrine which says that Christ died only for the elect. He did not die for those who will eventually be in hell (such as Judas or Pharaoh). This is the third point of 5-point Calvinism, the letter "L" in the term TULIP.

**The Elect:** We use this term to refer to the saved of all ages. The term includes any or all of those who will eventually be in heaven and counted among the redeemed (compare Col. 3:12).

**The Non-elect:** We use this term to refer to those who will eventually perish in hell. It refers to those who persist in their unbelief and reject Christ even to the day they die. They are in hell, not because God elected them to damnation, but because "they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved" (see 2 Thess. 2:10-13). Those who go to heaven have only God to thank; those who go to hell have only themselves to blame.

**Extreme Calvinism** (Hyper-Calvinism, 5-point Calvinism): In this paper this term is simply another way of referring to those who believe in a limited atonement, that Christ died only for the elect.<sup>1</sup>

### 3) AN ANALYSIS OF KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

#### **ISAIAH 53:6**

The term "all we" or "us all" (literally "all of us") is used twice in this verse. It is most natural and normal to assume that this Hebrew term refers to the same company of people each time it is used in verse 6. For whom did Christ die? He died for "all of us" who have gone astray. All men are invited to go in at the first "all" (as they acknowledge their guilt and waywardness), and to come out at the last "all" (receiving their pardon through the atoning sacrifice).

The universal extent of Isaiah 53:6 is felt even by the opponents of unlimited atonement. For

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<sup>1</sup>We recognize that no one likes to refer to themselves as "hyper" or "extreme." Most consider themselves to be quite balanced. When a five-point Calvinist uses the term "hyper-Calvinist" he is referring to an even more extreme group of Calvinists who, for example, may not believe it is necessary to preach the gospel to sinners. They reason that those whom God has chosen will come to faith in Christ whether the gospel is preached or not. William Carey met such an extremist when he proposed his missionary work. His name was Mr. Ryland Sr., and he rebuked Carey with these words: "Young man, sit down! You are an enthusiast. When God pleases to converse with heathen He'll do it without consulting you or me." On the other side were strong Calvinists such as James Morison and Richard Baxter, but because they held firmly to an unlimited atonement and universal redemption, they were labeled as "low Calvinists."

example, John Murray strongly denies that Christ died for every man. Yet this is what he wrote concerning Isaiah 53:6:

*It would be easy to argue that the denotation of the “all” in the last clause is just as extensive as the number of those who have gone astray and have turned everyone to his own way. If so, the conclusion would be that the Lord laid on his Son the iniquity of all men and that He was made an offering for the sin of all.* --article entitled “Redemption” which appeared in the Sword and Trowel.

This is indeed our conclusion and we are sorry that Murray’s theological system has forced him to understand “all of us” to mean “some of us,” in spite of what the text clearly says.

Let us LIMIT Christ’s death in this way: The Lord Jesus died only for those people who HAVE GONE ASTRAY! He did not die for those who are not lost! We have good news for every lost person without exception: Christ died for you!

It is possible that the expression “all of us” could be limited to the nation Israel (Isaiah’s immediate audience), but it is very unlikely that we should limit it even further to refer only “elect Israel.” Many of the Jews that Isaiah ministered to refused to believe and were never saved (compare Isaiah 6:9-10 and 53:1). They would be included in the “all of us.” On the other hand, it is probably better to understand the expression “all of us” to refer to ALL MANKIND because New Testament passages apply Isaiah 53 to all men, not just to Israel (Acts 8:30-35; 1 Peter 2:24-25).

## **JOHN 3:16**

Though John Calvin taught that the term “world” in John 3:16 included “all men without exception” (see his commentary on John 3:16), many of his followers who bear his name try to limit this word so as to include only the elect.

The word “world” [kosmos] is used in some interesting ways in John’s gospel. In John 1:10 we learn that “the world knew Him not.” In 3:17 it is used to describe those who are in desperate need of salvation. In 12:31 and 16:11 it describes that dominion over which Satan is the prince and ruler. In 14:22 it is used in contrast to “us” (the elect disciples): “Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” In 15:18-19 we are told that the world hates believers (see also 17:14). In 16:8-9 the world is convicted of sin “because they (the world) believe not on Me” and thus in this passage the term “world” is nearly synonymous with “unbelievers.” In 16:20 we find the world rejoicing because they have gotten rid of Christ (compare verse 19). If the term “world” is synonymous with “the elect” then John 17:6 could be re-written: “I have manifested Thy Name unto the world.” But this would be the opposite of what it really says. Indeed, in 17:9 the term “world” is used in contrast to the elect (“them which Thou hast given Me”) and in 17:21 the word obviously refers to the unsaved world. In 17:25 it describes those who have not known the Father in contrast to Christ’s own who have known. Such is the normal usage of this word.

The standard lexicons (such as Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich, Thayer, Bullinger, Vine, etc.) are unanimous in saying that kosmos (world) as used in John 3:16 refers to “mankind, the human race.” This is the obvious sense of the word in this context. To say that kosmos in John 3:16 refers to “the world of the elect” is very unnatural. It is a meaning that is forced by one’s theology, not by the text itself, nor by the context. This is why J.C. Ryle said, “It seems to be a violent straining of language to confine the word *world* to the elect...*The world* means the whole race of mankind...without any exception...I have long come to the

conclusion that men may be more systematic in their statements than the Bible, and may be led into grave error by idolatrous veneration of a [theological] system.”

This word does have some unusual usages. For example, in John 12:19: “Behold, the world is gone after Him.” Is this an example where the word does not mean all men? Actually this is an example of hyperbole (extravagant exaggeration). The Pharisees could have said, “Everyone has gone after Him,” and the meaning would have been the same. A universal term is used for the purpose of intentional exaggeration. The meaning of the term is similar in John 3:16--God so loved THE WORLD, that is, EVERYONE! The only difference is that in John 3:16 there is no exaggeration. It actually means everyone, every person, all mankind.

How can we be sure of the meaning of the term “world” in John 3:16? The context of this passage is often overlooked. John 3:16 cannot be fully understood apart from the account of the serpent in the wilderness as given in Numbers 21 (see John 3:14-15). The comparison is obvious. The Israelites were told to look to the bronze serpent, and those who looked lived. The world is told to look to the Saviour hanging on the pole of Calvary’s cross, and those who gaze upon Him with the gaze of faith live.

Did God LIMIT the number of Israelites who could look? Definitely not. The invitation to LOOK was given to all those who had been bitten by the serpents—all those who were dying and perishing, helpless and hopeless. The serpent on the pole was God’s complete provision for *every* Israelite who was bitten and who was perishing. Likewise, by the death of God’s Son, God made a complete provision for *every* perishing sinner. No Israelite would be healed without looking at the bronze snake. Likewise, no perishing sinner will be saved without personal faith in the WORK, WORTH and WORD of God’s Son.

Who is to look upon the Saviour? The WORLD--all those who have been bitten by the serpent of sin, all those who are dying and perishing, all those who are helpless and hopeless. It is these people who are embraced and included in the word WORLD. The Lord Jesus died only for those who are lost and perishing in their sins and who are in a hopeless and helpless condition apart from the cure provided at the cross.

The term “whosoever” in John 3:16 can literally be translated “everyone who believes” or “all who believe.” “Whosoever” is also an accurate rendering of the term. Imagine a generous candy man standing on the street corner passing out free candy and saying, “Boys and girls, Come! Everyone who receives a piece of candy will also receive a free balloon.” Regardless of the response of the children, would not this be a universal offer to all the boys and girls? No one hearing this invitation would be excluded. He could have said, “Whosoever receives a piece of candy will also receive a free balloon” and the meaning would have been the same.

The same Greek expression for “whosoever” is found in the Septuagint (LXX) in Numbers 21:8—“everyone who looks upon it (the bronze serpent) shall live.” Whosoever looks shall live! God so loved the Israelites that He provided a bronze serpent, that whoever should look upon it should not perish, but should live. Among those who believe in limited atonement, few seem to discuss Numbers 21. Apparently its implications are far too universal. John 3:16 cannot be rightly understood apart from its immediate context, and its immediate context involves verse 14 which refers to the serpent in the wilderness.

Here [John 3:14-16] the Saviour speaks of himself as the antitype of the brazen serpent. But the brazen serpent was lifted up for all the serpent-bitten Israelites in the camp, and therefore unless the type was more glorious than the antitype, the Saviour must have been lifted up on the cross for all the sin-bitten sinners in the world. If so, God has loved you, and given up his Son for

you.<sup>2</sup>

The little word “that” is significant in this verse: “God so loved the world THAT [ὥστε] He gave His only begotten Son.” The word “that” [ὥστε] with the indicative (“He gave”) expresses ACTUAL RESULT rather than conceived or intended result (Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, page 286). God not only conceived the plan of salvation in eternity past (Rev. 13:8) but He actually carried out this plan by the giving of His Son on the cross. Not only did God love the world, but He manifested this love (Rom. 5:8) by the actual giving of His Son on the cross *for the world* (John 1:29; 6:51; 1 John 2:2; etc.).

Martin Luther in *Table Talk* commented on John 3:16:

*Moreover, who knows whether I am elected to salvation? Answer: Look at the words [of John 3:16], I beseech you, to determine how and of whom He is speaking. “God so loved the world,” and “that whosoever believeth in Him.” Now, the “world” does not mean Peter and Paul alone but the entire human race, all together. And no one is here excluded. God’s Son was given for all. All should believe, and all who do believe should not perish, etc. Take hold of your own nose, I beseech you, to determine whether you are not a human being (that is, part of the world) and, like any other man, belong to the number of those comprised by the word “all.”*

The extreme Calvinist has a problem understanding how God can love those who are not elect. For example, A.W. Pink argues that the rich young ruler in Mark chapter 10 must have been one of God’s elect and he must have been saved sometime after his interview with the Lord. He concludes this because the Bible says that Jesus loved this man (Mark 10:21) and Pink cannot understand how the Lord can love one who is not elect. The Bible does not say that the rich young ruler ever got saved. Indeed, it implies that he did not. Even though this man most probably was never saved, God loved him. God so loved the world that He gave His Son to die for all men, including the rich young ruler.

## **JOHN CHAPTER 6**

In John chapter 6 the Lord Jesus is speaking to a hostile, unbelieving audience. They did not receive His teaching (verse 60) and they walked away (verses 66-67). We must conclude that these people, for the most part, would never enter heaven: “But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray Him” (John 6:64).

What did the Lord say to these unbelieving Jews? “My Father GIVETH YOU the true bread from heaven” (verse 32). The Lord Jesus told these Jews that the true Bread from heaven was GIVEN to them by the Father. In verse 33 the true Bread from heaven is identified as the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who “giveth life unto the world.” God gave His Son, the Bread of Life, even for these who did not believe (“ye also have seen me, and believe not”--verse 36). This would even include Judas who was in the audience.

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give **for the life of the world**” (John 6:51). This

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<sup>2</sup>James Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1882), p.39.

Bread has particular reference to the Lord's sacrificial death on the cross (see also verses 54-56). This Bread was given for the life of the world.

“The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man *give us* his flesh to eat?” (John 6:52). Notice that these unbelieving Jews understood Jesus to be saying that this Bread was **given to them** to eat. The Lord did not correct them on this. Indeed, He affirmed it by saying (my paraphrase) “I have given my flesh for you to eat but if you do not eat it then you will have no life” (see verse 53).

Verses 53-58 show the necessity of a person personally partaking (by faith) in what Christ did for him on the cross when He gave His life and shed His blood.

Conclusion: THE TRUE BREAD FROM HEAVEN (which is identified as the Lord Jesus Christ with special reference to His sacrificial death on the cross) WAS GIVEN FOR THE WORLD, AND WAS GIVEN EVEN TO THE UNBELIEVING JEWS WHO HEARD THESE WORDS (most of whom we could safely say were non-elect; one in the audience we know for sure was non-elect: Judas!). These unbelieving Jews understood that this Bread was given to them. They must have understood correctly. Jesus did not correct them. The Lord Jesus made it clear, however, that the Bread that was given to them would do them no good unless they would personally partake of it by faith. The Lord's words here in John 6 clearly indicate that Christ's sacrificial death was for all, but effectual only for those who believe. Unbelievers do not benefit from what was so graciously provided for them and so freely offered to them.

## **1 CORINTHIANS 15:3-4**

What was the gospel message which Paul preached to lost men? The Apostle Paul very specifically sets forth the gospel that he preached in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4. In 1 Corinthians 15:3 we learn that the central part of the gospel message is that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” In 1 Corinthians 15:1 Paul says that this is the very gospel which he preached to the Corinthians, and obviously when they first heard the gospel they were unsaved and unregenerate, and Paul did not know which ones in his audience were among the elect. He just knew that God had “much people” in this city (Acts 18:10). To these unsaved Corinthians, including some who would never be saved, Paul preached this gospel: “Christ died for **OUR** sins (yours and mine)!”

Here, then, you have an inspired definition of the object of saving faith—the gospel. It is not merely,—“Christ is able, infinitely able, to save to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him;” but it is,—“Christ died for OUR sins, according to the Scriptures.” Some have ventured to assert that no man is warranted, till after a long life of holiness, to say, “Christ died for *me*;” and preachers have been told by other preachers that they have no right to say to any man, “Christ died for *you*.” It appears, however, that the apostle Paul was of another mind, for he had no scruples in rising up amid the Corinthians, while they were yet heathens and unbelievers, and boldly proclaiming, not merely “Christ died for MY sins,” but “Christ died for OUR sins (that is, for your sins, ye heathen Corinthians, and for mine), according to the Scriptures.”<sup>3</sup>

“Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*.” The heart of the gospel message is Christ's death for our sins, and this message is according to the Old Testament Scriptures. There is one passage which more than any other sets forth the death of Messiah for our sins. This is Isaiah chapter 53. It is in this chapter that we are told that the iniquities of “all of us” were laid upon Christ (verse 6). Christ's death for

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<sup>3</sup>James Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p.23.

our sins, according to the Scriptures, was not limited to the sins of the elect, but it was on behalf of every lost individual: “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6).

In 1 Corinthians 15:2 Paul says that some of those who heard this gospel did not believe it in a saving way. They “believed in vain.” This passage indicates that there will be some people in hell who at one time personally heard Paul tell them the good news, and this good news was that Christ died for their sins!

To the believer in a limited atonement, Paul’s message had a different meaning: “Christ died for our sins!” How does the limited atonement supporter understand Paul’s message? “Paul preached that Christ died for the sins of all of us who are God’s elect. We have good news, but it is only for those in our audience who are elect.” How contrary to the glorious gospel of the blessed God! We have a gospel message that is for all people (compare Luke 2:10), not a gospel that is just for the elect. Paul’s gospel was for “all men everywhere” (Acts 17:30). The tragedy is not that most men do not have a gospel. The tragedy is that most men disobey the gospel by refusing to believe on the One who died for them (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

## **2 CORINTHIANS 5:19-20**

As ambassadors of Christ we are to go to all men with the word of reconciliation. How can we tell lost men and women to be reconciled to God if no such reconciliation has been provided? But if God has indeed reconciled **the world** unto Himself, then we can go to the world with a message of reconciliation. Christ’s act of suffering provides a righteous basis for God to welcome the rebel’s return. For those who are enemies of God and for **all those** who are enemies of God, we have a message of good news! We have a word of reconciliation! We have a message of hope because “He died for all” (2 Cor. 5:14-15). God is the Reconciler of all men (verse 19, “the world”), especially of them that believe (verse 20 where reconciliation is limited to those who respond in faith). Compare 1 Timothy 4:10.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:19 there is a reconciliation declared to be world-wide and wrought wholly of God; yet, in the verse which follows in the context, it is indicated that the individual sinner has the responsibility, in addition to the universal reconciliation wrought of God, to be reconciled himself to God. What God has accomplished has so changed the world in its relation to Himself that He, agreeable to the demands of infinite righteousness, is satisfied with Christ’s death as a solution of the sin question for each one. The *desideratum* is not reached, however, until the individual, already included in the world’s reconciliation, is himself satisfied with that same work of Christ which has satisfied God as the solution of his own sin question. Thus there is a reconciliation which of itself saves no one, but which is a basis for the reconciliation of any and all who will believe. When they believe, they are reconciled experimentally and eternally, and become the children of God through the riches of His grace.<sup>4</sup>

## **1 TIMOTHY 2:6**

This verse declares that Christ gave Himself a ransom **for all**. The term “all” must be defined by its context. In verses 1-2 we are exhorted to pray for **all men**. Why should we pray for **all men**? Because God our Saviour is concerned about **all men**: “God our Saviour who desires **all men** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (verses 3-4). How did God prove that He really desires **all men** to be

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<sup>4</sup>Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, p. 192.

saved? He provided a Mediator between God and man and this Mediator gave Himself a ransom **for all**. In effect the Apostle is here saying, “Pray for all because God desires the salvation of all as evidenced by His death for all.”<sup>5</sup>

James Morison brings home the force of this passage in a unique way:

It will be admitted that Nero was the principal ruler then existing, “the king,” or emperor, contemplated by the apostle in the passage before us [Nero reigned from 54 to 68 A.D.]. Now Nero lived and died a disgrace to all human nature. He was the personified aggregate of all that is savage, disgusting, wicked, and base. *Yet it was for this Nero that Christians were enjoined to pray; and to pray because God willed even this Nero to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, and because* FOR EVEN THIS NERO DID CHRIST GIVE HIMSELF A RANSOM. O how evident is it that “God so loved *the world*, that he gave his only begotten Son, to give himself a ransom for ALL!” Reader, God loved you and Nero! Jesus gave himself a ransom for Nero and for you. You are but Nero in miniature, and under restraint; see that you do not, Nero-like, despise the “riches of grace,” and thus be also Nero-like in your doom!<sup>6</sup>

Charles Spurgeon once preached on this passage and pointed out the folly of saying that the “all men” of 1 Timothy 2:4 does not refer to all humanity. His comments are lengthy but worth quoting. It is an excerpt from a sermon by Charles H. Spurgeon on 1 Timothy 2:3-4, “God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” [Taken from *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 26, 1880, pp. 49-50]:

May God the Holy Ghost guide our meditations to the best practical result this evening, that sinners may be saved and saints stirred up to diligence.

I do not intend to treat my text controversially. It is like the stone which makes the corner of a building, and it looks toward a different side of the gospel from that which is mostly before us. Two sides of the building of truth meet here. In many a village there is a corner where the idle and the quarrelsome gather together; and theology has such corners. It would be very easy indeed to set ourselves in battle array, and during the next half-hour to carry on a fierce attack against those who differ from us in opinion upon points which could be raised from this text. I do not see that any good would come of it, and, as we have very little time to spare, and life is short, we had better spend it upon something that may better tend to our edification. May the good Spirit preserve us from a contentious spirit, and help us really profit by his word.

It is quite certain that when we read that God will have all men to be saved it does not mean that he wills it with the force of a decree or a divine purpose, for, if he did, then all men would be saved. He willed to make the world, and the world was made: he does not so will the salvation of all men, for we know that all men will not be saved. Terrible as the truth is, yet is it certain from holy writ that there are men who, in consequence of their sin and their rejection of the Saviour, will go away into everlasting punishment, where there shall be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

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<sup>5</sup>Reformed men seek to argue that “all men” does not mean ALL MEN WITHOUT EXCEPTION but it merely means ALL MEN WITHOUT DISTINCTION. Thus Jay Adams translates verse 6 this way: “Who gave Himself as a ransom payment for all sorts of persons” (*The Christian Counselor’s New Testament*) and the *New Geneva Study Bible* has this note: “This is probably a reference to all *types* of people.” Thus they try to argue that “all” does not really mean “all,” but that it’s merely a synonym for the elect.

<sup>6</sup>James Morrison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, pages 19-20.

There will at the last be goats upon the left hand as well as sheep on the right, tares to be burned as well as wheat to be garnered, chaff to be blown away as well as corn to be preserved. There will be a dreadful hell as well as a glorious heaven, and there is no decree to the contrary. What then? Shall we try to put another meaning into the text than that which it fairly bears? I trow not. You must, most of you, be acquainted with the general method in which our older Calvinistic friends deal with this text. "All men," say they, "that is, SOME MEN": as if the Holy Ghost could not have said "some men" if he had meant that. "All men," say they, "that is, some of all sorts of men": as if the Lord could not have said "all sorts of men" if he had meant that.

The Holy Ghost by the apostle has written "all men," and unquestionably he means all men. I know how to get rid of the force of the "alls" according to that critical method which some time ago was very current, but I do not see how it can be applied here with due regard to the truth. I was reading just now the exposition of a very able doctor [and he surely means his predecessor John Gill--ed.] who explains the text so as to explain it away; he applies grammatical gunpowder to it, and explodes it by way of expounding it. I thought when I read his exposition that it would have been a very capital comment upon the text if it had read, "Who WILL NOT have all men to be saved, nor come to the knowledge of the truth." Had such been the inspired language every remark of the learned doctor would have been exactly in keeping, but as it happens to say, "Who WILL have all men to be saved," his observations are more than a little out of place.

My love of consistency with my own doctrinal views is not great enough to allow me knowingly to alter a single text of Scripture. I have a great respect for orthodoxy, but my reverence for inspiration is far greater. I would sooner a hundred times over appear to be inconsistent with myself than be inconsistent with the word of God. I never thought it to be any very great crime to seem to be inconsistent with myself, for who am I that I should everlastingly be consistent? But I do think it a great crime to be so inconsistent with the word of God that I should want to lop away a bough or even a twig from so much as a single tree of the forest of Scriptures. God forbid that I should cut or shape, even in the least degree, any divine expression. So runs the text, and so we must read it, "God our Saviour; who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Does not the text mean that it is the wish of God that men should be saved? The word "wish" gives as much force to the original as it really requires, and the passage should run thus--"whose wish it is that all men should be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth." As it is MY wish that it should be so, as it is YOUR wish that it might be so, so it is God's wish that all men should be saved; for, assuredly, he is not less benevolent than we are.

## **1 TIMOTHY 4:10**

This verse poses a problem for those who deny that Christ died for all. The verse teaches that there is a sense in which God is the Saviour of all men and there is a special sense in which God is the Saviour only of those who believe. The key to understanding this has already been set forth by Paul in chapter 2. There is a sense in which God is the Saviour of all men because He desires all men to be saved and He has provided a Saviour for all men who gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:3-6). There is a special sense in which He is the Saviour only of those who actually come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4), and come to the Father through the only Mediator which He has provided (1 Tim. 2:5). For a more detailed study of 1 Timothy 4:10 and the unsatisfying way in which extreme Calvinists explain it, see our paper *The Saviour of All Men* (5¢). John Calvin agreed that God is the Saviour of the entire race: "Let us know, therefore, that to the whole human race there has been manifested and exhibited salvation through Christ . . ." (see *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* by John Calvin, Vol. I, p. 85 (Baker Book House reprint, 1979). In the same volume Calvin writes: ". . .the Lord is the Redeemer of all the world at large . . ." (p. 140, note 1).

Limited Redemptionists raise this objection: "How can God be the Saviour of all men if He does not actually save them?" The answer is simple: They did not receive the Saviour who died for them. They rejected Him (John 1:11). To the Limited Redemptionist we must ask this: How can sinners reject the Saviour if He is not really their Saviour? How can they deny the Lord that bought them (2 Peter 2:1) if He never really bought them? How can they reject the cross-work of Christ if that work was never really for them? How can they receive a gift which was never offered and never provided? How can we tell them to trust a Saviour who did nothing to save them? How can we tell them the good news about salvation if there is no good news for them? How can we tell them that "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3) if He did not really die for their sins?

To any unsaved person we can deliver this good news: "My friend, I want you to know that there is a Saviour for you (compare Luke 2:10-11). He died for you. He did everything necessary for you to be saved. He paid the full penalty for your sins. All you must do is receive Him by faith."

## **HEBREWS 2:9**

The translators of the Authorized Version (KJV) rendered this phrase, "that He...should taste death for **every man**." Other standard versions have done likewise: "for **every one**" (NASV); "for **everyone**" (NIV); "for **every individual person**" (Amplified); "for **every man**" (R.V.); "for **every one**" (RSV), etc. This is a case where those holding to a limited atonement are forced to re-translate. For example, in *The Christian Counselor's New Testament* by Jay Adams, a reformed Christian, the passage is rendered: "that...He might taste death for all sorts of persons." This is a case of amending the text in order to fit one's theology. Likewise the *New Geneva Study Bible* says that "every man" (v.9) refers to the "many sons" of verse 10. This would mean that "every man" does not really mean "every man," but it refers only to the elect. Why do Reformed scholars insist upon this? Because their theological system demands it.

The Greek scholar, Dean Alford, explains the true significance of this term: "If it be asked, why *pantos* (each) rather than *panton* (all), we may safely say that the singular brings out, far more strongly than the plural would, the applicability of Christ's death to each individual man" (*New Testament for English Readers*, p. 1459). Westcott agrees: "Christ tasted death not only for all but for each" (*The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p.46).

## **2 PETER 2:1**

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, **even denying the Lord that BOUGHT them**, and bring upon themselves swift destruction."

This remarkable verse declares that the Saviour even paid redemption's price for Christ-deniers who will be destroyed in hell. The word "bought" is the same word that is found in 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23. Thus there will be unbelievers in hell, who when they were on earth, denied the Christ "who bought them"! The familiar Christmas carol says it this way: "Then let us all with one accord sing praises to our heavenly Lord, that hath made heaven and earth of nought [out of nothing], **and with His blood mankind hath bought**" (*The First Noel*, Old English Carol). He paid the price for their sins even though they did not personally benefit from this payment. Because of their rejection of Christ, His cross-work was never put to their account.

Nothing, O sinner, can be clearer than this,—Jesus Christ has bought you with his precious blood; he paid the price of his blood for your deliverance. But it does not necessarily follow that you shall be delivered. You may, notwithstanding, plunge the dagger of unbelief into your own soul, and “bring upon yourself swift destruction.” If you perish, however, you will be a suicide,—the assassin of your own spirit. The price is paid for you, the blood is shed for you, the work is finished for you, the righteousness is wrought out for you, the glory is waiting for you; but it lies with yourself whether or not you will believe all this, and God’s love infolded in it, or count it all “the baseless fabric of a vision,” and forcibly effect your own murder and damnation. O see that you “deny not the Lord that bought you”!<sup>7</sup>

## **1 JOHN 2:2**

Read this verse to a child and he will tell you that Christ died for all men. He would assume that “the whole world” means just that. Read this verse to an extreme Calvinist and he will tell you that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of the elect Jews, and not for the sins of the elect Jews only, but also for the sins of the elect Gentiles. We are reminded of Matthew 11:25.

John Murray, who denies that Christ died for all, says this about 1 John 2:2--“No text in Scripture presents more plausible support to the doctrine of universal atonement...It must be said that the language John uses here would fit in perfectly with the doctrine of universal atonement if Scripture elsewhere demonstrated that to be the biblical doctrine” (*Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, page 72). Because 1 John 2:2 does not fit in with Murray’s theological system, he tries to make the passage mean something other than what it so obviously says.

To determine the meaning of the pronoun “our” in 1 John 2:2 we must ask who John was writing to. John Owen, strong defender of a limited atonement, believed that 1 John was written about 46 AD and was sent to Jewish Christians. However, most Bible scholars today agree that the letter was probably written towards the end of John’s life and was intended for believers living in Asia Minor, which is where John ministered toward the close of his life. Obviously the churches in Asia Minor toward the close of the first century were composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers, with the Gentiles being in the majority.

Actually John tells us who he is writing to. In 1 John 5:13 he says, “These things have I written UNTO YOU THAT BELIEVE ON THE NAME OF THE SON OF GOD.” He wrote this letter to BELIEVERS. Thus, in 1 John 2:2 Christ is the propitiation for our sins (that is, believers), and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world (that is, unbelievers). That the term “world” is used elsewhere to refer to unbelievers (in contrast to believers) is clear from John 14:22; 16:8-9; 17:9,21.

When John uses the word “our” he is referring to all Christian believers, not just Jewish believers. See 1 John 1:9—“our sins” (it was not just the Jewish believers who were to confess their sins). See also 1 John 1:10—“we,” “us,” (it was not just the Jewish believers that were in danger of saying that they had not sinned). See 1 John 2:1—“we have an advocate” (it was not just the Jewish Christians who had an Advocate, but all believers). There is no reason to say that John wrote this epistle strictly to Jewish believers. The terms “our” and “the whole world” are definitely contrasts between believers and those who are not.

If there is any question about this, let the Bible define its own terms. One should consider the usage

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<sup>7</sup>Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p. 52.

of the term “world” in the book of 1 John (see 1 John 3:1; 3:13; 4:5; 4:9; 4:14; and especially 5:19). This word is certainly not used when referring to elect Gentiles. Especially significant is the usage of this term in 1 John 5:19. John used the expression “the whole world” in only two places: in 1 John 2:2 and 5:19. In 1 John 5:19 we read this: “And we [Christians] know that we [Christians] are of God, and **THE WHOLE WORLD** [non-Christians] lieth in wickedness [in the wicked one].” This is the same meaning that the expression has in 1 John 2:2, though certain Calvinists are forced to deny this because of their theology which tells them that Christ could not have paid the death penalty for any of the non-elect.

To summarize this point, in 1 John 2:2 and 1 John 5:19 the terms that are used both mean the same thing:

“our” “we”	refers to Christians, those to whom John was writing (including both Jewish and Gentile believers)
“whole world”	refers to <u>all</u> the unbelievers who are part of Satan’s world system (this would include both the non-elect and those unsaved who would at some later time respond to the gospel, believe on Christ and be delivered from Satan’s world system).

Thus, 1 John 2:2 teaches that Christ by His death on the cross satisfied the demands of divine justice not only for the sins of believers but for the sins of all the unbelievers who were part of Satan’s kingdom of darkness (the majority of which were non-elect). Thus, saved people are not a part of “the whole world.” Some who are included in “the whole world” could eventually believe the gospel and be saved. The term “world” here in 1 John 2:2 does not mean “all humanity” as in John 3:16. Rather, it means “all humanity” in contrast to “saved humanity.” This is a common usage of the word “world” (see John 17:9,21--Christ prayed for believers, not for the world; however, some who are in the world will believe through the Church’s testimony).

Those who deny the fact that Christ died for all (believers and unbelievers) sometimes try to argue on the basis of a comparison between 1 John 2:2 and John 11:51-52 (see the argument in Gary Long’s book, *Definite Atonement*, p.95). However, John 11:51-52 is actually a strong argument that Christ died for all men and not just for the elect! In verse 50, the high priest Caiaphas (himself unregenerate) made mention of one dying for the people (the Jewish people), so that the WHOLE NATION perish not! Certainly he was thinking of all the Jewish people without exception! If the Romans were to invade Palestine they would seek to destroy all the Jews without exception! Without knowing it, the high priest actually gave a prophecy that Jesus should die for that nation (verse 51). In other words, Jesus died for the whole Jewish nation! Not only did He die for all Jews, but the death of Christ was for the sins of the whole world with the result that God would be able to gather children from the uttermost parts of the earth. John 11:51-52 teaches that Christ died for the whole Jewish nation and 1 John 2:2 teaches that Christ died for the whole world!

## 4) SOME COMMON OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

**“Christ did not ‘pay the penalty of sin’ for those who reject Him, because if He did then they would not have to pay it themselves in hell.”**

Dr. Charles Smith in his booklet *Did Christ Die Only For the Elect?* deals with this objection: “If Christ died for all men, then why must, or how can men be required to pay for their own sins in hell?...Due to the infinite value of His Person, He bore a penalty which was more than equal to the penalty that could be paid by all humans throughout all eternity. Exact equivalence of punishment was unnecessary and impossible. The infinite God paid a greater price in those moments on the cross than all men could ever pay. He did not pay *the* payment which we would otherwise be required to pay. He made a *greater* payment which may be applied to our account *instead* of the penalty that we would have to pay. Though an adequate payment was made on behalf of *all*, the payment is not credited to our account until we respond in faith to the Spirit’s work in our hearts in calling us to Himself” (pages 13-14). Sin’s awful penalty was paid by Christ completely. The death He died was so sufficient that the Scripture even says that Christ “bought” and paid the price for the Christ-denying false teachers (2 Peter 2:1). And yet, the cross-work of Christ does not benefit us personally until we personally appropriate it by faith.

Will the unbeliever have his sins paid for twice (once by Christ on the cross and once by himself in an eternal hell)? No, the payment that Christ made on his behalf never actually became his. The benefits of Christ’s death were never actually put to his account, and to that man the Lord will impute sin (compare Romans 4:8 and John 8:24). The careful student of Scripture must make a difference between REDEMPTION ACCOMPLISHED (by Christ at the cross) and REDEMPTION APPLIED (by the Holy Spirit to the heart of the believing sinner). The benefits of the cross-work of Christ are never put to the account of the sinner unless and until he believes.

Illustration: A billionaire puts money into an account designated for me, with funds ample enough to cover any expenses I might have the rest of my life, not only for me but for my entire family. It could be said that this payment was put to my account, at least potentially. All I need to do is go into the bank, show proper identification, sign certain papers, and the money is then actually put in my account, so that I can use it and draw upon it. If I fail to do this, then the money will not benefit me at all, even though the payment was made for me and it was given sincerely on my behalf. All the sinner needs to do in order to draw upon the rich benefits of Christ's redemptive work is to receive Christ and believe on His Name (John 1:12).

The extreme Calvinist must also distinguish between the cross-work of Christ that was accomplished and the benefits of that cross-work which are applied to the heart of the believing sinner by the Holy Spirit. **Did Christ die for Saul of Tarsus who was persecuting the church of God?** Every Calvinist must say YES to this question. If Christ paid the full penalty for the sins of Saul of Tarsus, then why was Saul not forgiven while he was yet persecuting the church? The answer is that he was still in unbelief and it was not until his conversion that the benefits of the cross-work of Christ were put to his account.

People are not lost because Christ did not die for them. People are lost because they reject the Christ who died for them. If Christ died only for the elect, then we would have a gospel only for the elect. However, those who are lost are not without a gospel. The problem is that they have rejected and disobeyed the gospel that they had. People are not lost because the water of life is not available to them. The springs of living water abound! People are lost because they refuse to drink! “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (Rev. 22:17).

## **“The gospel message has nothing to do with the extent of the atonement.”**

J.I. Packer argues that the extent of the atonement has nothing to do with the gospel: “What has to be said about the cross when preaching the gospel is simply that Christ’s death is the ground on which Christ’s forgiveness is given. And this is all that has to be said. The question of the designed extent of the atonement does not come into the story at all....The gospel is not, ‘believe that Christ died for everybody’s sins, and therefore for yours.’”

Contrary to what Packer says, Paul tells us that the heart of the gospel message which he preached to unsaved Corinthians (including many non-elect Corinthians) was this: “how that Christ died for OUR SINS (yours and mine).” See 1 Corinthians 15:1-3. If this was the gospel Paul preached, should it not be the gospel we preach? We would like to ask J.I. Packer and others who limit the atonement this question: Are you able to approach an unsaved person and say from your heart sincerely, “My friend, I have good news for you. Jesus Christ died for you. He paid the penalty for your sins”?

## **“What About Passages Which Limit Christ’s Death to a Select Group?”**

There are certainly passages which speak of Christ dying for His church, for His sheep, for His own. “Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). “Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us” (Eph. 5:2). “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Such passages cannot be used as arguments that Christ died *only* for the church, and *only* for the elect.<sup>8</sup> In the same way someone could argue from Galatians 2:20 that Christ died *only* for the Apostle Paul. How absurd!

“And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His Name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). This verse is often cited as proof that Christ died only for “His people.” The verse does say that “He shall save HIS PEOPLE from their sins,” but caution must be exercised before we equate “HIS PEOPLE” with the elect. According to Matthew 2:6, “HIS PEOPLE” are Israel, not just elect Israel.<sup>9</sup> Christ came to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew 10:6) and yet many of these lost sheep refused to believe (Matthew 10:14-15). Is it possible for God to call a people “HIS OWN” and have some of them be hardened unbelievers? The answer is found in John 1:11: “He came unto His own, and HIS OWN received Him not.” God’s people, the Jewish people, for the most part rejected their Saviour.

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<sup>8</sup>Richard Baxter, in his book *Universal Redemption of Mankind*, says that “there is not one text of Scripture that saith Christ died not for all, or Christ died only for his Chosen, or any thing equivalent” (p.275). It is not enough for the limited redemptionists to find verses that say that Christ died for the church or for His own., etc. With this we would all agree. To prove a limited atonement they would also need to find verses which clearly state that Christ died *only* for the church and *only* for His own and for no one else. But no such statements exist in the Scriptures.

<sup>9</sup>Commenting on Matthew 1:21, Calvin--contrary to almost all “Calvinists”--understood the “his people” whom Jesus would “save from their sins,” to be the Jewish nation, not the elect (see Calvin’s commentary on the Synoptic Gospels which was one of his last writings, being published originally in 1563 (Calvin died the next year at 54).

But we must never forget that the good news of God's Saviour is "TO ALL PEOPLE" (Luke 2:10-11).<sup>10</sup> Christ will save all people in a provisional sense, for He died to provide salvation for all. In a special sense He will actually save only those who trust in His finished cross-work.

**"Christ died for all men WITHOUT DISTINCTION but He did not die for all men WITHOUT EXCEPTION."**

This is a clever way for those who believe in limited atonement to say that Christ died for all even though they do not really mean that He died for all. When they say that Christ died for all men WITHOUT DISTINCTION they mean that Christ died for all kinds of men. He died for (elect) males and (elect) females. He died for (elect) slaves and (elect) freemen. He died for (elect) Jews and (elect) Gentiles. But they insist that He did not die for all men without exception, because they believe He died only for the elect. Hebrews 2:9 teaches that Christ died for all men without exception. Isaiah 53:6 teaches that on Him were placed the iniquities of **all of us!**

**"Christ died for all men, but His death benefits the non-elect only in a temporal sense. He did not really pay the penalty for their sins."**

This is the position of John MacArthur (see Tape GC 56-19, "Saving Grace"-Part 2, Titus 2:11, distributed by GRACE TO YOU, P.O. Box 4000, Panorama City, CA 91412) and others. It is a way to say that Christ's death was for all without really meaning that He paid sin's penalty for all. John MacArthur does not believe that Christ died as a Substitute for all men: "He [Christ] did not 'pay the penalty of sin' for those who reject Him, because if He did then they would not have to pay it themselves in hell...The atonement is limited in the sense that Christ acted as a substitute only for those who believe in Him" (from a letter from Dave Swavely, personal assistant to John MacArthur, writing on John MacArthur's behalf, 3/20/96). This implies that Christ did not die as a Substitute for those who persist in rejecting Him (those who have not been chosen).

MacArthur (in the tape mentioned above) teaches that the death of Christ is for all men, but the non-elect benefit from Christ's death only in a temporal sense (they are not destroyed instantly, they benefit from the rain and sun, they benefit from "common grace" etc.). However only the elect benefit from the death of Christ as far as an actual payment for their sins.

Swavely, in the same letter mentioned above, explains MacArthur's position in this way: "He did not pay the penalty of sin for those who reject Him...but the ramifications of His sacrifice extend beyond that

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<sup>10</sup>Calvin's comments on Luke 2:10 are of interest. He believed that "all the people" referred to the Jewish people (not to the elect Jews only), and by application "the whole human race." Here are his comments: "God invites all indiscriminately to salvation through the Gospel, but the ingratitude of the world is the reason why this grace, which is equally offered to all, is enjoyed by few. Although this joy is confined to a few persons, yet, with respect to God, it is said to be common. When the angel says that this joy shall be to all the people, he speaks of the chosen people only; but now that 'the middle wall of partition' (Eph. 2:14) has been thrown down, the same passage has reference to the whole human race" (*Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, and Luke* by John Calvin, vol. I, Baker Book House reprint, 1979, pp. 115-116).

primary purpose of securing salvation for the elect. All of God's creatures, including those men and women who reject God, reap many benefits from the death of Christ, not the least of which is life itself. God could have justly destroyed the world immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, but He graciously allowed it to flourish and sustained it by His hand for thousands of years.... So John believes that even the non-elect are affected positively as a result of the atonement of Christ.... The atonement is limited in the sense that Christ acted as a substitute only for those who believe in Him. The atonement is unlimited, however, in the sense that its benefits extend to all of God's creation." *What good are these "temporal benefits" as far as the non-elect are concerned? Would not the non-elect have been better off if God had destroyed the world immediately after Adam and Eve sinned? Jesus told Judas that it would have been better if he had never been born. There is a sense in which this is true for all those who persist in unbelief. Not ever having been born is better than spending eternity in the lake of fire.*

When John MacArthur teaches that Christ died for all men (using verses such as John 3:16; Hebrews 2:9; 1 Timothy 2:6 etc.), what he really means is that there are some temporal blessings that benefit the non-elect. He does not mean that Christ paid sin's penalty for the non-elect. According to Tape GC 56-19 and according to Swavely's letter, John MacArthur believes and teaches that Christ died as a Substitute only for the sins of the elect. This teaching is contrary to the IFCA doctrinal statement, which MacArthur signed, which states the following: "We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross **FOR ALL MANKIND** as a representative, vicarious, substitutionary sacrifice."

The Lord Jesus provided a perfect and eternal salvation for all men. He desires all men to be saved eternally, not just temporally (1 Tim. 2:4). He paid redemption's price to make this possible, even for the sins of the whole world. However, the sinner does not possess these eternal benefits until He believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Only then does he procure that which has been provided at Calvary.

**"If Christ died for all, then the sacrifice of Christ was futile with respect to the non-elect. It did nothing for them."**

If nothing else, the death of Christ serves a condemnatory purpose for those who reject the Saviour. Men are condemned because they have rejected the Person and work of Jesus Christ (John 3:18) and have refused God's only remedy for their sin (John 5:40). They can never say that a provision for their salvation was not made and not offered. They refused to receive the gift which God provided in His Son. Men are not lost because a Saviour was not provided. Men are lost because they have rejected the Saviour who was provided.

In the limited view, the non-elect are not guilty of their rejection of Christ, for they have no Christ to reject; whereas in the unlimited and, we believe, the Biblical view men are guilty before God and will be condemned on the basis of their rejection of Christ (Robert Lightner, *The Death Christ Died*, p. 130).

**"If Christ died for all, then His death for the non-elect would have been a waste. It would never have accomplished their salvation."**

God has done so very much on behalf of those who ultimately reject Him, but His efforts on their behalf are not a waste. The goodness and longsuffering and forbearance of God towards unbelieving men ought to bring them to repentance (Rom. 2:3), but alas, in many cases it does not. God strove with the

unbelieving men prior to the flood (Gen. 6:3), and yet they perished in a watery grave. Yet God's striving with these men was not a waste. In the early church the apostles and disciples shouted forth a message of good news to every creature (Mark 16:15) and yet the great majority rejected their message and even reacted violently against it. Were their efforts a waste? The people in John chapter 6 all walked away from the Lord, except for 12 and one of them was a traitor! The more Jesus preached the more people abandoned Him and went no more after Him. Does this mean His preaching was a waste? Believers are a savor, not only of "life unto life" but also of "death unto death" (2 Cor. 2:14-16). The believer is to be a testimony, not only to those who will be saved, but also to those who will perish, and such a testimony is surely not in vain and is surely not a waste. It is pleasing to God.

There are numerous examples from nature of things that seem to be a waste, but in reality they are part of God's perfect plan for this world. Countless flowers grow and bloom and yet their beauty is never seen by any human eyes. "To what purpose do the fructifying showers fall on the ocean and the desert? To what purpose do a million apples rot untasted, and ten thousand million piles of grass wither unconsumed? To what purpose do innumerable medicinal herbs die unused? Are all these things *in vain* and to no purpose, because, forsooth, such fructifying showers do not fructify, and such nourishing vegetables do not nourish, and such healing herbs do not cure?"<sup>11</sup> Likewise, the death of Christ was not in vain and was not a waste, even though it is despised and mocked and counted as foolishness by the great majority of men.

God has not obscurely made known his intention. He designs, by the death of Christ for all, and by the preaching of it, to set mankind *on a new footing*. He has made the way clear for *all* being saved, by giving his son to die for all; and now he invites all, he commands all, he threatens all, he implores all; and if all do not comply, still the glory of his boundless love is magnified and most illustriously displayed, by the very fact that none have been excluded from salvation but by their own folly.<sup>12</sup>

God's redemptive love as demonstrated on the cross was lavished upon all men, rendering all without excuse. How tragic that there will be those for whom Christ died who will perish. But the reason for this is not that no provision was made and no gift was given. Rather, the gift has been rejected and the love has been spurned. "*Wonderful grace of Jesus, reaching to all the lost!*"

**"Christ's death must do more than simply make men savable. It must infallibly secure their salvation. That is, everyone for whom Christ has died must be saved."**

John Piper states it this way: "We affirm that when Christ died particularly for His bride, He did not simply create a possibility or an opportunity for salvation, but really purchased and infallibly secured for them all that is necessary to get them saved, including the grace of regeneration and the gift of faith."<sup>13</sup> In other words, in Piper's view, the substitutionary death of Christ had a limited purpose, to secure the salvation of every elect person.

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<sup>11</sup>Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, page 89.

<sup>12</sup>Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, page 89.

<sup>13</sup>From the article *What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism*, <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-we-believe-about-the-five-points-of-calvinism#Atonement> [accessed Nov. 10, 2015].

When we humbly bow before all of Scripture, we see that Christ died with a double intention, not just a single narrow intention. He died to make salvation possible to all (unlimited provision/unlimited atonement for all men) and certain to some (definite or particular redemption for His elect).

Christ's atoning death provides the ground and the only possible basis for salvation. This salvation is provided for all but secured individually only by those who trust in the crucified One. Christ's atoning death is not self-applying (which seems to be the meaning that Piper is incorporating into his idea of infallibly "securing").

The death of Christ, *by itself*, does not secure the salvation of the elect. Christ died for Saul of Tarsus, but this great fact in itself did not secure his salvation. Christ's substitutionary death was absolutely necessary in order for Saul of Tarsus to be saved, but other things had to happen as well. In Acts 7, at the time of the stoning of Stephen, Saul of Tarsus was not saved, even though Christ had died for him. He was yet in his sins. In time God would draw this man to Himself, show him his sins, open his heart to the truth of the gospel, and Saul would trust the Saviour, experiencing the miracle of regeneration at the moment of saving faith. The benefits of the work Christ accomplished on the cross are not put to any man's account until that man believes on the Lord Jesus Christ. Only then is he justified fully through Calvary's love!

Keep in mind that our sins are not borne away, removed, blotted out, forgiven until we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Our sins were not blotted out from God's sight when Christ died on the Cross. This takes place through the Holy Spirit's application of the value of Christ's atoning death when we receive Him as Saviour. "Repent therefore and be converted, for the blotting out of your sins" (Acts 3:19, in regard to Israel). "In Whom [i.e., when we are "in Christ," and not before] we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Eph.1:7, in regard to Christians). "To Him who loves us, and has washed us from our sins in His blood" (Rev. 1:5, when the value of that precious blood was applied to us through faith).

Yet, Piper's view of Christ's death "securing" our salvation seems to imply the erroneous notion that the death of Christ, *by itself*, secures our salvation and removes our sins. Christ died for the sins of all men (which speaks of unlimited provision and sufficiency, not of unlimited application and efficiency). However, no one's sins were put away or removed by the Cross in and of itself; such is a matter of the application of the value of the atoning sufferings, death, and bloodshedding of the Lord Jesus Christ, **only** to those who believe on Him, and **only when** they believe on Him.

The value of His atoning death was not applied to the elect 2,000 years ago on the Cross. No one is saved until they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen (Acts 16:31). Then, and only then, is the infinite value of the cross-work applied to the individual, in sovereign grace, by the Spirit of God. Prior to being saved by grace through faith, we were "by nature children of wrath even as the rest" (Eph. 2:3). The elect are not born in this world in a saved or forgiven position, with their sins already borne away, removed, blotted out of God's sight.

"For it is absolutely true that, till they believe, all are alike sons of disobedience, and children of wrath. So the apostle classes himself with the most privileged of mankind, yet declares that 'we also all once had our conversation in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and the thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest.' " (William Kelly, *Bible Treasury*, Vol. 4, New Series, page 190). "But, it is when the soul believes in the efficacy of Christ's death, that the burden of guilt is taken away, and this with the surest warrant of God to every one that believes" (William Kelly on Leviticus 16).

A key question is simply this: Has God provided salvation for all men or do we have a gospel only for the elect? Do we really have a message of good news for every single sinner? It's not enough to say, "Even though the good news is not for everyone, I'll tell them all because I don't know who the elect are." We must preach the good news to every creature (Mark 16:15) which implies that we really do have good news for every creature! We need to have a genuine cure which we can offer to every sin-sick soul. Sinners may reject the remedy and they may reject what the Saviour has accomplished for them. God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4) and this is why He died for all (1 Tim. 2:6). It is clearly stated that Christ loved the rich young ruler even though the man rejected His rich offer (Mark 10:21). But the offer was sincere and genuine. [Note: Arthur Pink believes that the rich young ruler must have put his faith in Christ at a later time because in Pink's theology Christ cannot love anyone but the elect!<sup>14</sup> Of course there is no Scriptural evidence for this. It is a statement driven by Pink's theology, not by God's truth.]

If the five-point Calvinist earnestly preaches Christ crucified to all the lost and urges them to believe in the One who died for them, then in reality he is urging many of them to believe a lie. He is urging the non-elect to believe in a Saviour who did not die for their sins. There can be no genuine salvation offer unless genuine provision has been made. Men are not lost because Christ did not die for them; they are lost because they have refused to believe in the Christ who died for them. "And ye will not come to Me, that ye might have life" (John 5:40).

### **"If Christ bore the iniquity of everyone and died for all, then universal salvation would be the result."**

The great preacher George Whitefield once wrote a lengthy letter to John Wesley on the topic of election. Whitefield wrote in love, but with great passion, seeking to convince Wesley of his doctrinal errors. Sadly, Wesley did hold to certain erroneous doctrines such as sinless perfection and his belief that a saved person could lose his salvation. Wesley also held to what was then called "universal redemption." This was an unfortunate term but it corresponds to what we would now refer to as a belief in an unlimited atonement, that Christ died for all. Whitefield believed in a limited atonement and he wrote to Wesley as follows: "**Universal redemption**, as you set it forth, is really the highest reproach upon the dignity of the Son of God, and the merit of His blood...**Universal redemption**, taken in a literal sense, falls entirely to the ground. For how can all be universally redeemed if all are not finally saved?" Whitefield believed that if Christ died for all, then all must finally be saved. And he believed that the logical outcome of Wesley's teaching would be universalism, that all men would eventually be saved. A more recent theologian, George Boettner, makes the same argument: "**Universal redemption means universal salvation**" (cited by Lightner, p. 96). The believer in a limited atonement believes that Christ must save everyone that He died for.

Note: The term "universal redemption" as used by Whitefield and Boettner can be confusing. Certainly those who believe in an unlimited atonement strongly believe that redemption is not universal, but is limited only to those who by faith have trusted the Redeemer and have been set free from the bondage of sin (Eph. 1:17; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet. 1:18-19). Only those who are saved have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 5:9). However, we also recognize that the Redeemer shed His blood, not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world, and paid a price even for the ungodly (2 Pet. 2:1). And yet, only the saved benefit from Christ's work of redemption.

"If Christ died for everyone, then everyone will be saved." Let's think about the logic of this statement. This would be like saying, "If medicine is available for everyone, then everyone must be healed." This is obviously false. The medicine, though available, will not do any good unless it is taken. "There is

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<sup>14</sup>Arthur Pink, *The Sovereignty of God*, p. 125 [see footnote].

more than enough cool, refreshing water for every thirsty person in the village." Does this mean that every person in the village will have his thirst quenched? Only if every person drinks! We need to make a difference between redemption accomplished and redemption applied.

The Passover lamb was slain but this did not automatically procure deliverance for the Israelites. The blood of the lamb had to be personally applied to the doorposts of each Israeli house. God's redemption is provided for all (1 Tim. 2:6), but individuals are not actually redeemed unless they personally appropriate what Christ has done by faith. Christ gave His flesh *for the world* (John 6:51--universal provision) but no one is actually saved unless he "eats the flesh of the Son of man, and drinks His blood" (John 6:53--personal appropriation by faith). What Christ accomplished on the cross does not benefit anyone until salvation is personally received by faith (John 1:12).

The cross-work of Christ can be rejected by the unbeliever. But in the limited atonement view, how can an unbeliever reject what was never done for Him? The gospel is "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3) but if Christ did not die for those who are not elect, then there is no gospel or good news for them. But the Bible makes it clear that there is good news and there is a Saviour for all men (Luke 2:10-11), and that it is possible for this good news to be rejected and for this gospel to be disobeyed (2 Thess. 1:8). Men do not perish because there was no Saviour who died for them; they perish because they have rejected the Saviour who died for them. He is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe (1 Tim. 4:10).

### **“The Bible says that Christ died for MANY, not ALL.”**

The Bible clearly states that Christ died for ALL in 1 Timothy 2:6, 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 and Isaiah 53:6. See also Hebrews 2:9 where we learn that He died for every man (each individual). It is true, however, that there are passages which teach that Christ died for MANY:

“He bore the sin of **MANY**” (Isaiah 53:12).

“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom **FOR MANY**” (Mark 10:45).

“For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed **FOR MANY** for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

The term “MANY” is most often used, not as a contrast to the word “all,” but as a contrast to the word “few.” The opposite of the word MANY is the word FEW, not the word ALL. This can be seen in Matthew 7:13-14 where MANY are on the broad road to destruction and FEW are on the narrow road to life. See also Matthew 20:16--“for MANY are called, but FEW chosen.” In this verse the MANY includes more than the elect (the chosen ones). A contrast is made between the MANY who are called and the FEW that are chosen.

If MANY is the opposite of FEW, then instead of referring to a small number (few) it refers to a large number (many). There are some cases where this large number is equivalent to ALL. A fifth grader could give out birthday party invitations to all 35 students in his class at school. ALL the students in this class were invited. But only 7 actually show up at the party. MANY (all) were invited but only FEW actually came. A very clear example from the Bible where MANY is equivalent to ALL is found in Romans 5:12--“For as by one man’s disobedience MANY were made sinners.” Compare this with Romans 5:12 and it is

evident that the MANY of verse 19 is the same as the ALL MEN of verse 12.

It is possible for the word MANY to refer to God's elect. Such is the case in Acts 18:10 where the Lord assured Paul by saying, "I have MUCH (MANY) people in this city." Paul was thus encouraged that his labors were not in vain because MANY, not just a few, would come to know Christ in the city of Corinth.

What does the word MANY mean when it is used in connection with the cross-work of Christ? In Isaiah 53 the "many" of verse 12 is defined in the context as referring to ALL OF US:

"He bore the sin of many" (v.12)

"The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all [the iniquity of all of us]" (v.6)

He died, therefore, as a Substitute, not for just a FEW, but for MANY, yea, for all of us!

We find the same to be true when we compare Mark 10:45 with 1 Timothy 2:6:

"to give his life a RANSOM FOR MANY" (Mark 10:45)

"Who gave himself a RANSOM FOR ALL" (1 Tim. 2:6 and see the "all men" of verse 4).

We conclude, therefore, that when the Bible says Christ died for MANY, the meaning is this: He did not die for just a few, He died for many, yea, for all men. Or as John states it, "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and **not for ours only**, but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). We fully agree with Calvin's comment on Mark 14:24: that when Jesus said that His blood was poured out for *many*, He meant "not part of the world only, but the whole human race."

Calvin understood "many" to mean "all" in certain contexts. See his fascinating commentary under Romans 5:15.

For a very significant and helpful discussion about how the word MANY [Greek-πολλοι] is used in relationship to the atonement of Christ, see the article on πολλοι by J. Jeremias in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Kittle), Volume VI, pages 536-545. The author argues that the term "many" in Isaiah 53, Mark 10:45; Matthew 26:28 etc. is to be understood inclusively, following Semitic usage, the meaning being that Christ died on behalf of all.

**"If Christ has died for you, you can never be lost" (Charles Spurgeon, cited by Lightner, p.93).**

People are not lost because Christ did not die for them. They are lost because they have rejected the Christ who died for them. It is better to re-write Spurgeon's quote as follows: "*If you persist in rejecting the Christ who died for you, you can never be saved.*" Also, Spurgeon should have realized that even the elect are LOST before they come to Christ by faith, though Christ died for them.

Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness. If any Israelite perished, it was not because there was no remedy. It was because he refused to look and live.

A.W. Pink said something similar to Spurgeon's quote above: "Not one for whom He [Christ] died

can possibly miss heaven” (cited favorably by Dr. John MacArthur in his Tape GC 80-123 on Hebrews 10:5-18). If this were true then everyone would be saved, because Christ tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9)! No one will ever stand before God and be able to say, “I will miss heaven because the Saviour did not die for me.” On the contrary, every mouth will be stopped because God’s great salvation was both provided at the cross and offered to every sinner. It almost seems blasphemous to blame the doom of sinners on the supposed fact that Christ did not die for them. The fault does not lie with God’s ample provision; it lies with man’s wicked rejection of the Saviour and the so great salvation which He died to provide.

## 5) THE USE OF UNIVERSAL TERMS IN CONNECTION WITH CHRIST’S DEATH

Those who deny that the death of Christ was universal (for all men) must nevertheless admit that universal terms are used in passages which relate to the extent of the atonement. For example, Gary D. Long in his book *Definite Atonement* admits that such universal terms are used and that Christ is spoken of as dying for the “world,” “all,” or “every” (see page 32). Also John Murray in an article entitled “Redemption” in the *Sword and Trowel* admits that the Bible uses expressions which are universal in form such as “world” and “all” and “every one” and “all men.”

If Christ died only for the elect, and if the Bible says that Christ died for “all,” “the world,” “every man,” etc., then we must conclude that the elect are referred to by these universal terms. In other words, we must assume that in such cases terms such as “the world” and “all men” are synonymous with “the elect.”

But this raises a problem. Concerning the doctrine of election, there is not one passage which uses universal terms to signify the elect. If such terms can indeed signify the elect, then why are they never used in key passages which set forth the doctrine of election? To give some examples, why do we never read verses such as these: “*The world* has not chosen me, but I have chosen *the world*” (compare John 15:16). “According as He has chosen *all men* in Him before the foundation of the world” (compare Eph. 1:4). “Who has saved *every man* and called *every man* with a holy calling...according to His own purpose and grace, which was given to *all men* in Christ Jesus before the world began” (compare 2 Timothy 1:9). “But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen *the whole world* to salvation...” (compare 2 Thess. 2:13).

I would argue the universality of the propitiation from the fact, that its extent is spoken of by the inspired writers in language very different from what they employ when they speak of election, justification, sanctification, or glorification . . . They speak of Christ making propitiation for “men,” for “all men,” for “every man,” for “the world,” for “the whole world,” and even for “them who deny him, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.” But where do they speak of God electing “men,” “all men,” “every man,” “the world,” “the whole world,” and even “them who deny Christ, and bring upon themselves swift destruction”? Where do they speak of God justifying, sanctifying, and glorifying, “men,” “all men,” “every man,” “the world,” “the whole world,” and even “them who deny Christ, and bring upon themselves swift destruction”?<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, pages 72-73. The same argument is strongly set forth by Richard Baxter in his book, *Universal Redemption of Mankind*, page 279.

How then do we explain the fact that the Scriptures, in speaking of the death of Christ, frequently make use of general and universal terms, extending it to all, whereas in mentioning divine election, the Bible always uses restrictive terms, limiting it to a few (that is, to believers)? If those for whom Christ died are the same as the elect, then why are not the same terms used to describe both? Why are universal terms used to describe those for whom Christ died but not used to describe the elect if the same group is being referred to? The fact that the Bible uses universal terms to describe those for whom Christ died and never uses such terms to describe the elect is one of the strongest arguments against the doctrine of limited atonement.

### *Understanding the Language of the Bible in a Normal and Natural Way*

How should these universal terms be understood? Those who hold to a limited atonement tell us that “world” (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:19; John 6:51) does not really mean “world” and that “the whole world” (1 John 2:2) does not really mean “the whole world.” Furthermore they insist that “all” (1 Tim. 2:6) does not really mean “all” and that “all men” (1 Tim. 2:4) does not really mean “all men” and that “every man” (Heb. 2:9) does not really mean “every man” and that “us all” (Isa. 53:6) does not really mean “us all.”

Sir Robert Anderson has written the following: “In the early years of my Christian life I was greatly perplexed and distressed by the supposition that the plain and simple words of such Scriptures as John 3:16; 1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:6 were not true, save in a cryptic sense understood only by the initiated. For, I was told, the over-shadowing truth of Divine sovereignty in election barred our taking them literally. But half a century ago a friend of those days—the late Dr. Horatius Bonar—delivered me from this strangely prevalent error. He taught me that truths may seem to us irreconcilable only because our finite minds cannot understand the Infinite; and we must never allow our faulty apprehension of the eternal counsels of God to hinder unquestioning faith in the words of Holy Scripture.”<sup>16</sup>

Dispensationalists have endeavored to follow this rule of Biblical interpretation: *When the plain sense makes good sense seek no other sense lest it result in nonsense!* But others have abandoned a literal approach when it comes to certain areas of Scripture. Limited redemptionists, for example, seem to have followed another rule: *When the plain sense contradicts our theological system seek some other sense lest we end up contradicting our particular brand of Calvinism.*

Over three hundred years ago Richard Baxter wrote the following:

When God telleth us as plain as can be spoken, that Christ died for and tasted death for every man, men will deny it, and to that end subvert the plain sense of the words, merely because they cannot see how this can stand with Christ’s damning men, and with his special Love to his chosen. It is not hard to see the fair and harmonious consistency: But what if you cannot see how two plain Truths of the Gospel should agree? Will you therefore deny one of them when both are plain? Is not that in high pride to prefer your own understandings before the wisdom of the Spirit of God, who indicted the Scriptures? Should not a humble man rather say, doubtless both are true though I cannot reconcile them. So others will deny these plain truths, because they think that [All that Christ died for are certainly Justified and Saved: For whomsoever he died and satisfied Justice for, them he procured Faith to Believe in him: God cannot justly punish those whom Christ hath satisfied for, etc.] But doth the Scripture speak all these or any of these opinions of theirs, as plainly as it saith that Christ died for all and every man? Doth it say, as plainly any where that he died not for all? Doth it any where except any one man, and say Christ died not for him? Doth it say any where that he died *only* for his Sheep,

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<sup>16</sup>Sir Robert Anderson, *Forgotten Truths* (see the Preface).

or his Elect, and exclude the Non-Elect? There is no such word in all the Bible; Should not then the certain truths and the plain texts be the Standard to the uncertain points, and obscure texts? <sup>17</sup>

Richard Baxter then skilfully applied these principles to the case at hand:

Now I would know of any man, would you believe that Christ died for all men if the Scripture plainly speak it? If you would, do but tell me, what words can you devise or would you wish more plain for it than are there used? Is it not enough that Christ is called the Saviour of the World? You'll say, but is it of the whole World? Yes, it saith, He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole World. Will you say, but it is not for All men in the World? Yes it saith he died for All men, as well as for all the World. But will you say, it saith not for every man? Yes it doth say, he tasted death for every man. But you may say, It means all the Elect, if it said so of any Non-Elect I would believe. Yes, it speaks of those that denied the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And yet all this seems nothing to men prejudiced. <sup>18</sup>

I knew of a man who was not committed to the belief that Christ died for all men and yet he made this remarkable concession: "If Christ really did die for all men, then I don't know how the Bible could say it any clearer than it does." How true! This same man later embraced the doctrine of unlimited atonement because he could not deny the clear and plain statements of Scripture.

## 6) DOES IT REALLY MATTER?

The issue of the extent of the atonement is more than a theological issue. It is a very practical question. The Scriptures clearly teach that we have good news for lost men. Is this good news only for the elect? Our understanding of the gospel and the atonement will greatly affect the way in which we present the gospel to lost men. It does make a difference. Dr. Jay Adams, on page 70 of *Competent to Counsel*, shares how he believes Reformed Christians should present the claims of Christ to the unsaved: "They must present the good news that Christ Jesus died on the cross in the place of His own, that he bore the guilt and suffered the penalty for their sins. He died that all whom the Father had given to him might come unto him and have life everlasting. As a reformed Christian, the writer believes that counselors must not tell any unsaved counselee that Christ died for him, for *they cannot say that*. No man knows except Christ himself who are his elect for whom he died" (emphasis mine).<sup>19</sup>

Those who believe that Christ died only for the elect must be very careful, like Jay Adams, in how

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<sup>17</sup>Richard Baxter, *Universal Redemption of Mankind*, pages 282-283.

<sup>18</sup>Richard Baxter, *Universal Redemption of Mankind*, pages 286-287. The verses that are alluded to in this quote are John 4:42; 1 John 2:2; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; Heb. 2:9; 2 Pet. 2:1.

<sup>19</sup>One of the greatest missionaries of the past would strongly differ with Jay Adams. The following is related by James Morison: "One of the greatest missionaries of modern times [Mr. Moffat], one of the most gifted, one of the most devoted, one of the most honoured and successful, when asked by me somewhere about the year 1841, what gospel he preached to his poor Africans, replied that it was a maxim with him and his true yoke-fellows, to tell all and sundry that Christ died for *them* [see Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p. 112].

they present the gospel. I once asked an extreme Calvinist this question: “Who did Christ die for?” He answered in general terms: “Christ died for sinners!” But a believer in limited atonement would even need to be careful in preaching this. If he were to say to an unsaved audience, “I have good news for you! Christ died for sinners!”, even this would be misleading because he might be giving a non-elect person the impression that Christ died for him. He might think, “I know I am a sinner, so the good news must be that Christ died for me!” If the doctrine of limited atonement were true, then we could accurately state the following: *Christ died for sinners, but not all sinners. In fact, He did not die for the great majority of sinners, only for a very few* (compare Matthew 7:13-14 where we learn that only few are saved). Such a message is good news only for a small minority of sinners!

### **SINCERITY IN PRESENTING THE GOSPEL**

How can we sincerely offer to men what has not been provided for them? How can we offer them a free gift if the gift has not been purchased for them? How can we urge them to drink from the fountain of life if no water has been provided for them? How can we tell them to be saved if He provided not for their salvation? How can we say to a person, “Take the medicine and be cured!” if there is no medicine to take and no cure provided? W. Lindsay Alexander says it this way: *On this supposition [that of a limited atonement] the general invitations and promises of the gospel are without an adequate basis, and seem like a mere mockery, an offer, in short, of what has not been provided*” (*A System of Biblical Theology*, 2nd volume, page 111; and see Lightner pages 117-118).

Robert Lightner states the issue clearly: “Unless Christ died for all men, the message of God’s love and Christ’s death must be given with tongue in cheek and with some reservation, because some may hear who are really not to be numbered among those whom God loved and for whom Christ died....Therefore, to tell all men that these things are true and that salvation is available for them is to speak that which is not true if the limited view be accepted” (*The Death Christ Died*, p. 15).

Those who believe in a “Definite Atonement” (Gary Long’s term for limited atonement), if really honest and sincere, are forced into a very *indefinite* presentation of the gospel:

“Perhaps Christ died for you.”

“Maybe God so loved you.”

“Christ shed His blood for you, perhaps.”

“Salvation has been provided for you, maybe.”

“Possibly God commendeth His love toward you.”

“Hopefully He’s the propitiation for your sins.”

“There is a possibility that Christ died as your Substitute.”

“I bring you good news, maybe.”

“It’s possible that Christ died for you. If you get saved then we know that He did die for you, but if you continue to reject Him then He did not die for you.”

“Christ died for you only if you believe that Christ died for you (thus proving you are elect), but if you do not believe this and if you continue in your unbelief until the day you die, then Christ did not die for you.”

Those who hold to a definite or limited atonement do not present the gospel in this way, but would not such a presentation be consistent with their theology? Would it not be a correct and cautious and sincere way of sharing with the unsaved? An extreme Calvinist must be very careful how he presents the cross-work of Christ to an unsaved person because he never really can be sure if Christ has made provision for that person. As Robert Lightner has said, “Belief in limited atonement means that the good news of God’s

saving grace in Christ cannot be personalized. Those who hold to such a position cannot tell someone to whom they are witnessing that Christ died for him because that one may, in fact, not be one for whom Christ died” (Article in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p. 166).

### **DO WE REALLY HAVE A GOSPEL FOR EVERY CREATURE?**

How can we preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15) if Christ did not die for every creature? If the good news of the cross is only for some, then how can we preach it with sincerity to all? As L.S. Chafer asks, “How can a universal gospel be preached if there is no universal provision? To say on the one hand that Christ died only for the elect and on the other hand that His death is the ground on which salvation is offered to all men is perilously near contradiction” (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct-Dec. 1980, p. 315). As C.H. Mackintosh has said, “A disciple of the high school of doctrine will not hear of a world-wide gospel—of God’s love to the world—of glad tidings to every creature under heaven. He has only gotten a gospel for the elect” (in his article, *One-Sided Theology*).

John Bunyan said it this way, “The offer of the Gospel cannot, with God’s allowance, be offered any further than the death of Christ did go; because if it be taken away, there is indeed no Gospel, nor grace to be extended” (Bunyan’s *Works*). In other words, how can you offer the gospel to a person if Christ did not die for that person? How can we offer the sinner what has not been provided? As Lightner has said, “No maxim appears more certain *than that a salvation offered implies a salvation provided*” (p. 114).

The believer in a limited atonement cannot say to an unsaved person: “My friend, the Lord Jesus died on the cross for you. He died as your Substitute, in your stead. He paid the penalty for your sins.” [Read again Jay Adam’s quote given earlier.] The heart of the gospel message is “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3). Beware of any theology that removes the very heart of the gospel.

One way that limited atonement evangelists can handle this problem is to preach the death of Christ in very general terms: “Christ died for sinners. Christ died for the ungodly.” Of course, what they mean is that Christ died for elect sinners and He died for those ungodly ones who are elect. The problem with this approach is that the message of the cross can never be personalized to the individual sinner. What is it that we know for sure about the sinner with whom we are sharing the gospel? We know for sure that he is an ungodly sinner, and we can show him this from the Scripture. Do we know for sure that Christ died for him? There is no way the limited atonement evangelist can know this at the time he presents the gospel to the sinner. “I know you have a problem, but I’m not sure there is a solution to your problem. I know you have a terrible disease, but I am not sure there is a remedy for you.”

### **SHOULD WE COMMEND UNBELIEVERS FOR THEIR UNBELIEF?**

If Christ did not die for all men, then we should be commending the ungodly for their unbelief. Here’s an example. A Christ-denying infidel makes this statement, “I don’t believe Christ died for me!” If what the extreme Calvinists teach is true, then he is correct not to believe that Christ’s death was for him. “I do not believe that Christ did anything to save me.” If Christ did not die for the unbeliever who made this statement, then what he is saying is accurate and we should commend him for his unbelief! Charles Smith said it this way, “One who rejects the eternal life provided for us in Christ has made God a liar. According to God’s Word he has refused to believe the truth. Yet those who teach a limited atonement would have us believe that one who goes to hell goes there because he *does* believe the truth—namely the “truth” that Jesus did *not* die for him!” (*Did Christ Die Only for the Elect?* p. 13). He is correct in not believing that Christ

died for his salvation. How can we condemn this man for rejecting the Saviour, if Christ did nothing to save him?

### ARE THE UNSAVED COMMANDED TO BELIEVE A LIE?

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* is a strong statement of the tenets of Reformed Theology. The Moderator of the Assembly that compiled this confession of faith, Dr. Twisse, had admitted that “every one who hears the gospel (without distinction between elect and reprobate) is bound to believe that Jesus Christ died for him.”<sup>20</sup> But if Jesus Christ did not die for him, is he bound to believe a lie? When we preach the gospel message, what is it that we are urging lost sinners to believe?

When every sinner that hears the gospel is commanded to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” what is it that he is to believe? He is to believe, say “the Marrow of Modern Divinity” [Chap. II, sect. ii] and “the Act of the Associate Presbytery of 1742,” and “be verily persuaded in his heart that Jesus Christ is his, that he shall have life and salvation by him, and that whatsoever he did for the redemption of mankind, he did it for him.” What? Is every hearer of the gospel to believe all this, if it be a fact [as limited redemptionists maintain] that for millions who hear the gospel he did absolutely nothing at all upon Calvary—shed no blood, made no atonement, gave no ransom? Is he to believe a thing that is not true? Is he to believe a LIE? He is invited to do so, he is urged to do so, he is entreated to do so, he is commanded to do so, he is threatened with eternal condemnation if he do not do so, *provided it be indeed a truth that Christ did nothing on Calvary for him.*<sup>21</sup>

No, we are not urging sinners to believe a lie. We are beseeching them, for Christ’s sake, to believe the truth of the gospel, that “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3).

**My friend, Christ died for you.**

**Believe it because it is surely true!**

**Reject this message of His all-embracing love shown at the cross**

**And you will suffer eternal death, everlasting punishment and terrible loss!**

**—GZ**

Sinners do not perish for believing a lie but for rejecting God’s truth. “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because **they received not the love of the truth**, that they might be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10).

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<sup>20</sup>Cited by Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p.61.

<sup>21</sup>Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p. 60.

## 7) HOW CALVINISTIC WAS CALVIN?

How Calvinistic was John Calvin? What did he teach concerning the extent of the atonement? Let us ponder his own words:

On Isaiah 53:12--“I approve of the ordinary reading, that He alone bore the punishment of many, because on Him was laid the guilt of the whole world. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that *many* sometimes denotes *all*.”

On Matthew 20:28--“‘Many’ is used, not for a definite number, but for a large number, in that He sets Himself over against all others. And this is its meaning also in Rom. 5:15, where Paul is not talking of a part of mankind but of the whole human race.”

On Mark 14:24--“The word *many* does not mean a part of the world only, but the whole human race.” In other words, Christ’s blood was shed for the whole human race.

On John 1:29--“And when he says *the sin OF THE WORLD*, He extends this favour indiscriminately to the whole human race....all men without exception are guilty of unrighteousness before God and need to be reconciled to Him....Now our duty is, to embrace the benefit which is offered to all, that each of us may be convinced that there is nothing to hinder him from obtaining reconciliation in Christ, provided that he comes to him by...faith.”

On John 3:16--“He has employed the universal term *whosoever*, both to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life, and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers....He shows Himself to be reconciled to the whole world, when He invites all men without exception to the faith of Christ.”

On Romans 5:18--“He makes this favor common to all, because it is propoundable to all, and not because it is in reality extended to all (i.e. in the experience); for though Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and is offered through God’s benignity indiscriminately to all, yet all do not receive Him.”

On 2 Corinthians 5:19--God “shows Himself to be reconciled to the whole world” and Calvin goes on to say that the “whole world” means “all men without exception.”

On Galatians 5:12--“It is the will of God that we should seek the salvation of all men without exception, as Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world.”

On Colossians 1:15--“This redemption was procured by the blood of Christ, for by the sacrifice of His death all the sins of the world have been expiated.”

On Hebrews 5:9--“He (the writer of Hebrews) has inserted the universal term ‘to all’ to show that no one is excluded from this salvation who proves to be attentive and obedient to the Gospel of Christ.”

Calvin even taught that the lost were purchased by Christ's blood: "It is no small matter to have the souls perish who were bought by the blood of Christ" (The Mystery of Godliness, p. 83).

In fairness, it should be stated that some of Calvin's comments seem to indicate that he held to a limited atonement (see his comments on 1 Timothy 2:4-6, for example, where he says that the "all" refers to all classes or ranks of men, and see his comments on 1 John 2:2 where he says that the word *all* or *whole* does not include the reprobate). However, in his comments on 1 John 2:2 he mentions a phrase commonly used in the schools: "Christ suffered sufficiently for the whole world, but efficiently only for the elect." He then states that he is in basic agreement with this statement and that it is true. Calvin basically taught that the cross-work of Christ was unlimited in its extent, but limited in its application. Only those who believe benefit from it.

For a full discussion of Calvin's views on the extent of the atonement, see *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* by C. Gordon Olson, Appendix E, pages 458-463.

In conclusion, Calvin made some statements which seem to indicate he held to a limited atonement, but he also made many more statements which seem to better harmonize with an unlimited atonement. The best indication of where he stood on this issue, as Norman Duty suggests, should come from his final statement on the matter. Calvin made a statement in his will, drawn up when he was 54, shortly before his death. The year was 1564 and may be regarded as his final judgment concerning the extent of the atonement: "I testify also and profess that I humbly seek from God, that He may so will me to be washed and purified by the great Redeemer's blood, shed for the sins of the human race, that it may be permitted me to stand before His tribunal under the covert of the Redeemer Himself."<sup>22</sup>

## 8) PROPONENTS AND DEFENDERS OF THE FACT THAT CHRIST DIED FOR ALL.

In establishing any doctrine, it is what God says that counts. "Let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). Having already established from the Scriptures that upon Christ were laid the iniquities of all of us, it is of interest to consider what great and godly men of the past have said about this issue of the universal extent of the atonement.

Norman F. Douty, in his excellent book *The Death of Christ*, lists over 70 of the Church's leading teachers, from the early centuries to the modern era, who stood firmly for the doctrine that Christ died on behalf of all men, not the elect only (pages 136-163). Here are some of the names on the list: Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, Athanasius, Chrysostom, Augustine, Martin Luther, Hugh Latimer, Myles Coverdale, Thomas Cranmer, Philip Melancton, Archbishop Ussher, Richard Baxter, John Newton, John Bunyan, Thomas Scott, Henry Alford, Philip Schaff, Alfred Edersheim, H.C.G. Moule, W.H. Griffith Thomas, and A.T. Robertson.

The following quotes are of interest:

"Although the blood of Christ be the ransom of the whole world, yet they are excluded from its benefit, who, being delighted with their captivity, are unwilling to be redeemed by it" (Prosper, who died 463 AD).

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<sup>22</sup>See Douty, *The Death of Christ*, pages 175-176. For an excellent discussion of Calvin's position on the extent of the atonement, see Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, pages 126-128. See also Norman Geisler's *Systematic Theology*, Volume 3, pages 382-387.

“For Christ only, and no man else, merited remission, justification, and eternal felicity, for as many as will believe the same; they that will not believe it, shall not have it, for it is no more but *believe and have*. For Christ shed as much blood for Judas as He did for Peter; Peter believed it, and therefore he was saved; Judas would not believe and therefore he was condemned—the fault being in him only, and in nobody else” (Hugh Latimer, devoted bishop and martyr, 1485-1555).<sup>23</sup>

“Christ died for all, yet, notwithstanding, all do not embrace the benefit of His death...they despise the offered grace” (Benedict Aretius, 1505-1575).

“We may safely conclude that the Lamb of God offering himself a sacrifice for *the sins of the whole world*, intended, by giving sufficient satisfaction to God’s justice, to make the nature of man, which he assumed, a fit subject for mercy, and to prepare a medicine for the sins of the whole world, which should be denied to none that intended to take the benefit of it” (Archbishop Usher, 1581-1656).<sup>24</sup>

James Morison argues that the doctrine of a limited atonement was never taught in the early centuries of church history:

The doctrine of a propitiation for the elect alone is not yet above fourteen hundred years old. Such a doctrine was unheard of during the glorious first three centuries of the Christian era. Nay, it was not known for about two hundred years after that. This surely is a striking fact, and should make some men pause and ponder before they condemn. “I think,” says the illustrious Bishop Davenant, a divine most intimately versed in ecclesiastical history and the writings of the Fathers, “that it may be truly affirmed, that before the dispute between Augustine and Pelagius, there was no question concerning the death of Christ, whether it was to be extended to all mankind, or to be confined only to the elect. For the Fathers, when speaking of the death of Christ, describe it to us as undertaken and endured for the redemption of the human race; and not a word (that I know of) occurs among them of the exclusion of any person by the decree of God. They agree that it is actually beneficial to those only who believe, yet they everywhere confess that Christ died in behalf of all mankind. [He then quotes from Clemens Alexandrinus, Origen, Primasius, Athanasius and Prosper].

Bishop Davenport goes on to give some further details respecting the opinions of Augustine: “We assert, therefore, that Augustine never attempted to impugn that proposition of the Semi-pelagians, that Christ died for the whole human race . . . For neither did Augustine ever oppose as erroneous the proposition ‘that Christ died for the redemption of the whole human race;’ nor did he ever acknowledge or defend as his own, ‘that Christ died, not for all men, but for the pre-destinate alone.’ ”

Augustine died A.D. 429, and up to his time, at least, there is not the slightest evidence that any Christian ever dreamed of a propitiation for the elect alone. Even after him, the doctrine of a limited propitiation was but slowly propagated, and for long but partially received.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Cited in James Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p. 130.

<sup>24</sup>Cited in James Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p. 136.

<sup>25</sup>James Morison, *The Extent of the Atonement*, pages 114-117.

More recent advocates of unlimited atonement are as follows: D.L.Moody, Albert Barnes<sup>26</sup>, L.S.Chafer, John Walvoord, Robert Lightner, William Newell, R.C.H. Lenski, D.Edmond Hiebert, Robert Gromacki, E.Schuyler English, R.A. Torrey, Charles Ryrie and all the members of the Independent Fundamental Churches of America who have made unlimited atonement part and parcel of their doctrinal statement. Unlimited atonement seems also to be the position of the GARBC (Regular Baptists) because the Regular Baptist Press published the original edition of Robert Lightner's book, *The Death Christ Died*, which presents a strong case for unlimited atonement and also David Nettleton's book *Chosen to Salvation*. Nettleton refers to "the erroneous doctrine of limited atonement" and says that "limited atonement is not a necessary corollary of the sovereign election of God" (page 79).

Those who are defenders of a Limited Atonement would include Berkhof, Crawford, Cunningham, Eldersveld, Haldane, Hodge, Lloyd-Jones, John Murray, Owen, Packer, Pink, Smeaton, Spurgeon, Stonehouse and Warfield (see Douty, page 163). To this list can be added John Gerstner, Gary Long, David N. Steele, Custis C. Thomas, W.E. Best, John MacArthur and many others. Though we strongly disagree with such men on this issue, we do not vilify them as Charles Spurgeon seemed to do with respect to those holding to unlimited atonement:

*"There may be men with minds so distorted that they can conceive it possible that Christ should die for a man who afterwards is lost: I say, there may be such. I am sorry to say that there are still to be found such persons whose brains have been so addled in their childhood, that they cannot see that what they hold is both preposterous falsehood and a blasphemous libel....I feel quite shocked in only mentioning such an awful error, and were it not so current as it is, I should certainly pass it by with the contempt that it deserves"* (cited by Norman Duty, *The Death of Christ*, p. 163).

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<sup>26</sup>The noted commentator, Albert Barnes (1798-1870), was an American Presbyterian preacher and Bible expositor. In 1835 he was brought to trial by the Second Presbytery of Philadelphia for his belief in unlimited atonement, but was acquitted. The case continued to stir the denomination and was one of the causes of the split in the Presbyterian church in the United States in 1837. See *The Wycliffe Biographical Dictionary of the Church*, p.29. It's interesting to read Barnes' comments under such passages as John 3:16; John 1:29; Heb. 2:9; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; 1 John 2:2.

## 9) CONCLUDING APPEAL

### **ATTENTION ALL UNSAVED PEOPLE! THE "ALL" INCLUDES YOU!**

ALL have sinned (Romans 3:23) and ALL we like sheep have gone astray, but the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us ALL (Isaiah 53:6). The grace of God has appeared unto ALL men (Titus 2:11). A Saviour has been provided for ALL people (Luke 2:10-11). Salvation has been made possible for ALL (John 3:16-17) and Jesus Christ is the Saviour of ALL men (1 Timothy 4:10). God desires ALL to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4) and the Saviour died for ALL (1 Timothy 2:6; 1 John 2:2). Thus the gospel message is for ALL (Mark 16:15) and God's gracious invitation is extended to ALL (Rom. 10:13; Rev. 22:17). ALL men everywhere are commanded to repent (Acts 17:30). ALL men from ALL nations are commanded to believe the gospel (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Christians are commanded to go to ALL men and to beseech them to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:19-20). Yes, the ALL includes you. Will you personally receive or personally reject ALL that the living God has done for you?

“But as many as received Him [Christ], to them gave He power to become the sons [children] of God, even to them that believe on His Name.”

(John 1:12).

George Zeller (revised 6/96;12/99;10/01; 9/04; 4/05; 1/08; 6/15)

For other website articles dealing with related issues, see

[www.middletonbiblechurch.org](http://www.middletonbiblechurch.org)

## 10) FOR FURTHER STUDY

The following resources are recommended:

- 1) *The Death Christ Died--A Biblical Case For Unlimited Atonement* (Revised Edition, 1998) by Robert P. Lightner [Kregel]. This is an excellent defense of the doctrine of unlimited atonement by a respected Bible teacher and theologian. There is an appendix dealing with the teaching of Dr. John MacArthur on this issue (pages 161-165).
- 2) *Did Christ Die Only for the Elect?—A Treatise on the Extent of Christ's Atonement*, by Norman F. Douty (Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, Oregon). This is a very helpful book written on the extent of the atonement, but I do not endorse everything taught in the book, nor do I necessarily endorse Douty's other books.
- 3) *The Extent of the Atonement* by James Morison (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co., 1882). Excellent well-written study by this Scottish believer of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is available from GOOD BOOKS (2456 Devonshire Rd., Springfield, IL 62703). I have quoted from this work throughout this paper.
- 4) *Universal Redemption of Mankind* by Richard Baxter (printed in London, 1694). A massive study of this issue (502 pages) but written in old English (“s” written as “f”, etc.) and hard to follow. Available from GOOD BOOKS (address given above under #3).

- 5) *Did Christ Die Only for the Elect?* By Charles R. Smith [BMH Books, Winona Lake, Indiana]. This is a helpful booklet which shows the problems with the limited atonement position.
- 6) *For Whom Did Christ Die? Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, by Lewis Sperry Chafer, Chapter X, pages 183-205. This is an excellent discussion of this issue. Chafer looks at the extent of the atonement from the three aspects of Christ's cross-work: redemption (sinward), reconciliation (manward) and propitiation (Godward).
- 7) *The Extent of the Atonement*, Basic Theology by Charles Ryrie, Chapter 55, pages 318-323.
- 8) *Beyond Calvinism and Arminianism* by C. Gordon Olson, his chapter on "For Whom Did Christ Die?" and his appendix on "Quotations from Calvin on General Redemption." This recommendation does not mean that I agree with everything in Olson's book. See also *Getting the Gospel Right* by the same author, Chapter 16, "Christ really died for every sinner" (pages 202-215).
- 9) *Systematic Theology*, Volume Three (Sin and Salvation) by Dr. Norman Geisler, chapter 12 ("The Extent of Salvation—Limited or Unlimited Atonement"), pages 347-388.
- 10) *Redemption Redeemed—A Puritan Defense of Unlimited Atonement*, by John Goodwin (1593-1665), edited by John D. Wagner [Wipf & Stock, Eugene, Oregon, 2004]. A detailed and brilliant defense of unlimited atonement.

**Other Literature on Related Topics:  
Available From the Middletown Bible Church**

- 1) The Dangers of Reformed Theology. 50¢.
- 2) Limited or Unlimited Atonement? 40¢.
- 3) God's Willingness & Man's Unwillingness, 25¢.
- 4) Arthur Pink's Teaching on Saving Faith. 20¢.
- 5) John MacArthur's Position on the Extent of the Atonement (27 pages). \$1.50.
- 6) Saviour of All Men (1 Tim. 4:10). 5¢.
- 7) What is the Believer's Rule of Life? 50¢.
- 8) What is the "Gift of God" in Ephesians 2:8-9. 30¢.
- 9) Does Regeneration Precede Faith? 5¢.
- 10) Shedding Light on Dispensations (128 pages). \$2.00.

**A Complete Literature List is Available Upon Request**