

DISTINCTIVES OF GRACE
Bible Study Notes #6, September 25, 2005

“LIMITED” (DEFINITE OR SPECIFIC) ATONEMENT

The third of the five points of what is known as Calvinistic theology is by far the most controversial, and the most misunderstood!

The term “**atonement**” is from a Hebrew word meaning “cover” or “cancel”, and a Greek root meaning “exchange” or “reconciliation.” So in general, the word atonement refers to the covering over of sin, the reconciliation between God and man, the canceling of the sin debt and its deserved wrath of God, or the great exchange between God and man whereby man receives His righteousness and pardon and Christ receives man’s sin and punishment.

So if the concept of the atonement is clearly Biblical, **why** is this teaching or doctrine so controversial or misunderstood? Is it *more* controversial or misunderstood?

The controversy comes from the adjective “**limited**” which seems to imply a limiting or devaluing of Christ’s work on the cross. But the limiting is in scope or extent of the atonement being efficacious or effectual, or exactly *who* is “atoned”. So the teaching and its controversy is about the specific or definite nature of the atonement, rather than its power or value.

Read quote #51 from C. H. Spurgeon on p. 18 of *2200 Quotations from ...*

Read quote from John MacArthur about his view of “limited atonement”

Before studying the verses below, consider these questions:

1. What was the purpose or design of the atonement of Christ? Why did He do it?
2. Who was His primary concern? Who was his secondary concern?
3. Why is it true that all Christians (unless you consider universalists) limit the atonement in some ways (extent, scope, power, accomplishment, etc.)?
4. Did the Father impose His wrath and the Son undergo punishment for all the sins of all men, all the sins of some men, some of the sins of all men, or some of the sins of some men, or a combination of these things?

Doesn’t *everyone* “**limit**” the atonement in some sense? What are our choices here?

- a. The atonement is unlimited in scope or intent and in power or value
- b. The atonement is limited in scope or intent but unlimited in power or value
- c. The atonement is unlimited in scope or intent but limited in power or value
- d. The atonement is limited in scope or intent and in power or value

The first view would be a **universalist view**, meaning that all men are saved. The last view would be a **meaningless view**, since only some men would have some benefit of the atonement, meaning that God is not only discriminating but also not omnipotent in

His discrimination. SO, there are basically **two views** of the atonement. (Items 2 and 3 above.) The first is called the Calvinist view, or the **Definite or Specific Atonement** view. The second is called the Arminian view, or the **Unlimited or General Atonement** view.

Loraine Bottner said, "The Arminian view of the atonement can be compared to a wide bridge that extends most of the way across a river. In order to reach the other side, the sinner must take the last and final step. The Calvinist, on the other hand, believes that the bridge, while narrow, does reach to the other side. The sinner does not and cannot take any steps. Regeneration is the rapture of the sinner from one kingdom to the other and it is the work of Christ alone."

5. Depending upon which answer you choose to the above, what does that mean about who is saved and who is responsible for that salvation being accomplished?

- Relative to question **#1** above, consider:

Ephes. 1:9-12 (NASB) He made known to us **the mystery of His will**, according to **His kind intention which He purposed in Him** [10] with a view to an administration suitable to the fulness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things upon the earth. In Him [11] also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined **according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will**, [12] to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be **to the praise of His glory**.

- Relative to question **#2** above, consider:

John 6:38 (NASB) "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but **the will of Him who sent Me**.

John 17:4 (NASB) "**I glorified Thee** on the earth, having accomplished **the work which Thou hast given Me to do**.

Romans 5:8 (NASB) But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, **Christ died for us**.

- Relative to questions **#3 - 5** above and the extent of who Christ died for, consider:

Isaiah 53:11-12 (NASB) As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify **the many**, As He will bear their iniquities.

[12] Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the

transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin **of many**, And interceded for the transgressors.

Matthew 20:28 (NASB) just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a **ransom for many**."

Matthew 22:14 (NASB) "For **many** are called, but **few** are chosen."

Rev. 5:9 (NASB) And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men **from every tribe and tongue and people and nation**."

John 10:11, 26-28 (NASB) "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for **the sheep** (*not the wolves or the goats*). [26] "But you do not believe, because you are **not of My sheep**. [27] "**My sheep** hear My voice, and I know **them**, and they follow Me; [28] and I give eternal life to **them**, and **they** shall never perish; and no one shall snatch **them** out of My hand.

- But what about the verses below – Do they contradict the above?

John 3:16 (NASB) "For God so loved **the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

1 John 2:2 (NASB) and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.

1 Tim. 2:3-4 (NASB) This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires **all men** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

2 Peter 2:1 (NASB) But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be **false teachers** among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, **even denying the Master who bought them**, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB) The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for **all** to come to repentance.

2 Cor. 5:19 (NASB) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling **the world** to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

- Remember to interpret the above verses in and based upon **context!**
- Play clip from *Amazing Grace* DVD (Chapter 10, 20833-21200) about hyperbolic figures of speech like "all", "world", etc.

- For further thought, consider for whom did the high priest of Israel offer his sacrifices? (Exo. 28)

Exodus 28:1-43 (NASB) "Then bring near to yourself Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the sons of Israel, to minister as priest to Me-- Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. [2] "And you shall **make holy garments** for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty. [3] "And you shall speak to all the skillful persons whom I have endowed with the spirit of wisdom, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister as priest to Me. [4] "And these are the garments which they shall make: a breastpiece and an ephod and a robe and a tunic of checkered work, a turban and a sash, and they shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother and his sons, that he may minister as priest to Me. [5] "And they shall take the gold and the blue and the purple and the scarlet material and the fine linen.

[6] "They shall also make **the ephod of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material** and fine twisted linen, the work of the skillful workman. [7] "It shall have two shoulder pieces joined to its two ends, that it may be joined. [8] "And the skillfully woven band, which is on it, shall be like its workmanship, of the same material: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen. [9] "And you shall take two onyx stones and engrave on them **the names of the sons of Israel**, [10] six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, according to their birth. [11] "As a jeweler engraves a signet, you shall engrave the two stones according to the names of the sons of Israel; you shall set them in filigree settings of gold. [12] "And you shall put the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, **as stones of memorial for the sons of Israel, and Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord on his two shoulders for a memorial.** [13] "And you shall make filigree settings of gold, [14] and two chains of pure gold; you shall make them of twisted cordage work, and you shall put the corded chains on the filigree settings.

[15] "And you shall make **a breastpiece of judgment**, the work of a skillful workman; like the work of the ephod you shall make it: of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet material and fine twisted linen you shall make it. [16] "It shall be square and folded double, a span in length and a span in width. [17] "And you shall mount on it four rows of stones; the first row shall be a row of ruby, topaz and emerald; [18] and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and a diamond; [19] and the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; [20] and the fourth row a beryl and an onyx and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree. [21] "And **the stones shall be according to the names of the sons of Israel: twelve, according to their names**; they shall be like the engravings of a seal, each according to his name for the twelve tribes. [22] "And you shall make on the breastpiece chains of twisted cordage work in pure gold. [23] "And you shall make on the breastpiece two rings of gold, and shall put the two rings on the two ends of the breastpiece. [24] "And you shall put the two cords of gold on the two rings at the ends of the breastpiece. [25] "And you shall put the other two ends of the two cords on the two filigree settings, and put them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, at the front of it. [26] "And you shall make two rings of gold and shall place them on the two ends of the breastpiece, on the edge of it, which is toward the inner side of the ephod. [27] "And you shall make two rings of gold and put them on the bottom of the two shoulder pieces of the ephod, on the front of it close to the place where it is joined, above the skillfully

woven band of the ephod. [28] "And they shall bind the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, that it may be on the skillfully woven band of the ephod, and that the breastpiece may not come loose from the ephod. [29] "And **Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually.** [30] "And you shall put in the breastpiece of judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron's heart when he goes in before the Lord; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the Lord continually.

[31] "And you shall make **the robe of the ephod** all of blue. [32] "And there shall be an opening at its top in the middle of it; around its opening there shall be a binding of woven work, as it were the opening of a coat of mail, that it may not be torn. [33] "And you shall make on its hem pomegranates of blue and purple and scarlet material, all around on its hem, and bells of gold between them all around: [34] a golden bell and a pomegranate, a golden bell and a pomegranate, all around on the hem of the robe. [35] "And it shall be on Aaron when he ministers; and its tinkling may be heard when he enters and leaves the holy place before the Lord, that he may not die.

[36] "You shall also make **a plate of pure gold and shall engrave on it**, like the engravings of a seal, 'Holy to the Lord.' [37] "And you shall fasten it on a blue cord, and it shall be on the turban; it shall be at the front of the turban. [38] "And **it shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take away the iniquity of the holy things which the sons of Israel consecrate, with regard to all their holy gifts; and it shall always be on his forehead, that they may be accepted before the Lord.** [39] "And you shall weave the tunic of checkered work of fine linen, and shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash, the work of a weaver.

- Also, does Christ make any distinctions in **who He prays for?** (Heb. 7:25; John 17:1-9)

Hebrews 7:25 (NASB) Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since **He always lives to make intercession for them.**

John 17:1-9 (NASB) These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, [2] even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that **to all whom Thou hast given Him**, He may give eternal life. [3] "And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. [4] "I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. [5] "And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was. [6] "I manifested Thy name **to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me**, and they have kept Thy word. [7] "Now they have come to know that everything Thou hast given Me is from Thee; [8] for the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them; and they received them, and truly understood that I came forth from Thee, and they believed that Thou didst send Me. [9] "**I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine;**

- Therefore, neither we nor the Bible always mean “ALL” everytime we use the word “all.” Neither does the word “world” always mean every single person in the entire world!

- **But what about John 3:16?**

What was the *context*? Who was Jesus speaking to? What was the Jewish mindset of that day? So, what does “the world” mean? (Nicodemus would expect a Messiah of, for and by the Jews only!) Would God really “give” His Son for people who reject Him, or punish and kill Him for people who eventually go to hell? Was His coming to earth, His life, and His sacrifice on the cross all wasted for some of “the world?”

- **Read John 10 about His sheep**

John 10:2-6, 14-18, 25-30 (NASB) [2] "But he who enters by the door is **a shepherd of the sheep**. [3] "To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and **he calls his own sheep by name**, and leads them out. [4] "When he puts forth all his own, he goes before them, and **the sheep follow him because they know his voice**. [5] "And a stranger they simply will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers." [6] This figure of speech Jesus spoke to them, but they did not understand what those things were which He had been saying to them.

[14] "**I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me**, [15] even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and **I lay down My life for the sheep**. [16] "And **I have other sheep, which are not of this fold (Israel)**; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become **one flock with one shepherd**. [17] "**For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again**. [18] "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

[25] Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father's name, these bear witness of Me. [26] "But **you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep**. [27] "**My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me**; [28] and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. [29] "My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. [30] "I and the Father are one."

- James Petigru Boyce, founder of the Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, noted:
 1. The sheep are those to whom He will give eternal life
 2. They are those for whom He lays down His life
 3. They are not “all,” because He tells those who are rejecting Him that they are not His sheep
 4. The whole language used implies that the salvation of the sheep alone is the object for which His life is laid down.

“Jesus did not say He laid down His life for the wolves, goats and sheep! He died for a particular people – **My sheep!**”

- But what about (Arminian proof) verses like:

2 Peter 3:9 (NASB) The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for **any** to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Who is Peter writing to? God is not willing for any of *us* or His elect to perish. This is more of a Calvinist proof text!

1 Tim. 2:3-4 (NASB) This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, [4] who desires **all men** to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Paul is justifying or defending his ministry to the Gentiles (as well as the Jews).

2 Peter 2:1 (NASB) But **false prophets** also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying **the Master who bought them**, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

That which is bought falls short of redemption. The word for Lord is *despotes* meaning ruler, master or owner. The word for “bought” is *agorazo*, which implies ownership. Peter is not teaching about the atonement at all, much less a universal atonement (that includes even false teachers!).

- Distinguish between *historic* Arminianism or Arminianism of the Remonstrance and modern Arminianism.

“Arminians teach that Christ suffered for us; that what Christ did He did for every person; therefore what He did could not have been to pay the penalty, since no one would then ever go into eternal perdition.” Dr. J. Kenneth Grider (Nazarene Professor)

This is at least consistent with the Bible, since it clearly uses words like ransom, redemption, propitiation, etc.

- Was the sacrifice of Christ a real and complete **payment** for or a **possibility** of salvation? What does logic or common sense have to do with this issue, if everyone is not saved?