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# The Extent of the Atonement, Part 2

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## Abstract

Intimately entwined within the question as to the extent of Christ's death on the Cross is the discussion concerning what this event actually achieved. In other words, what was its purpose? The author proves, by means of logic and a proper exegesis of the relevant passages, that Jesus died for every individual, yet that does not inevitably lead to the conclusion that all will be saved.

In the last issue of the *CTJ*, the author defined the terms, considered a few Bible passages, and explained Limited Atonement. In this article he examines some passages that defend Unlimited Atonement.

## Letting God Speak Plainly

Reformed Theology has been rightly criticized for its forcing unwilling scriptures to say something quite other than what they appear to say. They revert to a theologically biased hermeneutic when it suits them to do so. Below we shall list some of the most straightforward verses pertaining to the atonement, verses which pose real difficulties for Limited Redemptionists (LR's) if they are allowed their normal meanings. Our method here will be to give the text, then give the plain sense, and then compare it with the novel interpretations offered by the limited redemptionists.

### 1 Timothy 4:10

For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

In this text we see that God is identified as the Savior of all men in a general sense, but of believers in particular. The only way this could be true is if *the provision* was made for the salvation for every man, but the

*application* comes only to them that believe.<sup>1</sup> This further shores up the thought of universal redemption taught throughout the Pastoral Epistles. Five-Point Calvinists must reject the plain sense of this and other verses in order that they may keep limited atonement: For instance, in 1 Timothy 4:10, Reformed interpreters have tended to construe the Greek word for "Savior" (*soter*) as meaning "Preserver." Not only does this seem like a forced interpretation at first sight, it becomes a very suspicious one when it is understood that the word never means "Preserver" elsewhere in the NT! It takes great skill and a fertile imagination to make this verse say anything other than what it says. But here is John Gill to show us how it is done:

To say that Christ is the Saviour of all men, with respect to the impetration [*i.e.* "procurement by entreaty"] of salvation for them, though not with respect to the application of it to them, is a distinction which must, in part, make the death of Christ in vain. ... The words are to be understood of providential goodness and temporal salvation; which all men have a share in... God the Father and not Christ, is here called... *the Saviour of all men*, that is, *the preserver of all men...and especially them that believe.*<sup>2</sup>

We submit that Gill's interpretation shows too clearly how LR's come to the Scriptures with their minds already made up as to what the Holy Spirit can and can not say.

### 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.

<sup>1</sup> Erickson expresses our opinion well: "This is a particularly interesting and significant verse, since it brackets as being saved by God both believers and others, but indicates that a greater degree of salvation attaches to the former group." - *Christian Theology*, 846.

<sup>2</sup> John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth*, (Evansville: Sovereign Grace Book Club, Reprint, n.d.), 52. Italics in original.

In this verse the Lord is said to have “bought” false teachers. These people are lost, as the chapter makes clear. How then could Christ have

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bought [*agorazein*] them? Long answers that *agorazein* should here be forced to mean “created”<sup>3</sup> instead of “bought.” He has persuaded himself that, “Peter intentionally alludes to the phrase “thy father that hath bought [created] thee” in [Deuteronomy 32:17](#).”<sup>4</sup> Long reasons:

Therefore, the point that Peter seems to be making in referring to [Deuteronomy 32:6](#) in [2 Peter 2:1](#) is that just as God had sovereignly acquired Israel out of Egypt... in order to make her a covenant nation spiritually and nationally because He created her for this purpose, so Christ...acquired the false teachers...in order to make them a part of the covenant nation of God in the flesh [*i.e.* the Church] because He had created them...for the purpose of bringing glory to Himself through their foreordination unto condemnation...”<sup>5</sup>

If Long is to be followed in his interpretation of the verse, then the same God who warns Christians about these false teachers ([1 John 4:1–3](#); [Jude 3–5](#)), is the very one who is responsible for introducing them! Thus, God is set against Himself! We think we have a right to demur, and to agree with John Calvin, who simply comments: “They, then, who throw off the bridle, and give themselves up to all kinds of licentiousness, are not unjustly said to deny Christ by whom they have been redeemed.”<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This writer could not find anyone who thought “created” was a proper translation of *agorazo*. Not BAGD, Kittel, Brown, Cremer, Spicq, etc.

<sup>4</sup> Long, *Definite Atonement*, 76. We think the allusion to be a product of Long’s wishful thinking.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>6</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XXII: The Second Epistle of Peter*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, Reprint 1981), 393. There is scarcely any commentator, if any, who follows Long. In addition, one ought to give attention to [Hebrews 10:29](#): “Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done

## 2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

The verse could hardly exhibit more pristine clarity. God does not want any human being to go to hell. Hell was made for the devil and his angels ([Matt. 25:41](#)), not for men. But He will allow sinners to perish if they persist in their willful hatred of Him. There are very many things that happen that are not according to God’s perfect will, but He nonetheless permits them to occur (*e.g.* [Jer. 19:5](#)). For all that, the LR cannot let it stand. R. C. Sproul follows Owen in his handling of the text. His case rests upon the restrictive term “us” in the verse. The “us” are believers. So, “[since 2 Peter is written by a Christian believer to Christian believers and for Christian believers,”<sup>7</sup> the true meaning (in our paraphrase), is that, “God is longsuffering to the elect, not willing that the elect should perish, but that all the elect come to repentance.” To put it another way, Peter was assuring his Christian readers that He did not wish those He had elected to perish. Instead, God wished all those whom He had already elected to come to repentance! That is, at the hands of a Five-Point Calvinist, [2 Peter 3:9](#) is turned into a tautology. Quite why such a non-profundity as this would be allowed entrance into the Canonical Scriptures is hard to conceive.<sup>8</sup>

## Matthew 23:37

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye

despite unto the Spirit of grace?” In this verse the writer says that “the blood of the covenant” *sanctified* a person who goes to hell.

<sup>7</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 170. Of course, this same thing could be said for basically the whole NT. What is this supposed to prove? Does Sproul honestly believe the NT was only written for Christians?

<sup>8</sup> Calvin sides with unlimited redemptionists on the passage.

The meaning of this verse is as straightforward as anything could be. Christ is lamenting over Jerusalem - the city of the Great King, that should have known Him, but was to be the scene of His decease. The will of God for this city as expressed by Jesus Himself: "How often

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would I..., but ye would not." According to the Lord He wanted to save them. Yet He permitted their willful rejection of His Person. As such, this verse reinforces the natural reading of 2 Peter 3:9 (see above), and so shows the intent behind the atonement, at least unless one holds to limited atonement. In which case, the verse must be doctored. James White's efforts will suffice for an example:

Who, then, is "Jerusalem"? It is assumed by Arminian writers that "Jerusalem" represents individual Jews who are, therefore, capable of resisting the work and will of Christ. But upon what warrant do we leap from "Jerusalem" to "individual Jews"? The context would lead us to conclude that this is to be taken in a universal sense. Jesus is condemning the Jewish leaders, and it is to them that He refers here. ... A vitally important point here is that the ones the Lord desired to gather are *not* the ones who "were not willing"! ... The "children" of the leaders would be the Jews who were *hindered* by the Jewish leaders from hearing Christ.<sup>9</sup>

Is it true that the context demands that one understand "Jerusalem" to refer to the Jewish leadership? There are easily as many commentators who think that "Jerusalem" is a metonymy for the whole nation, as those who confine it to the religious leadership. Many of them notice the change in mood from excoriation to lamentation.<sup>10</sup> This

<sup>9</sup> *The Potter's Freedom*, 137–138. White adds [Matthew 23:13](#) as proof. Italics in original.

<sup>10</sup> For example, Hagner agrees that the Pharisees and Scribes were in view, but thinks the verse "is directed primarily to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (cf. [Luke 19:41–44](#))." - Donald A. Hagner, [Matthew 14–28](#), (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 33b, 680. Hagner also thinks Jesus' lament includes these religious leaders.

interpretation is enforced by the verses that follow. Jesus' prediction of coming doom best fits with the view of the city's inhabitants generally. LR's tend to ignore [Matthew 23:38–39](#). For another thing, and citing John Gill with approval, White holds that the "children" (*i.e.*, the Jewish inhabitants minus their leaders) were, in fact, willing to come to Christ. But this causes a problem surely? For if they were willing to hear Christ, and He

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was willing to save them, then *why were not all of them saved*<sup>11</sup> Thus, the problem presented in the verse is only shifted, not avoided.

## 1 John 2:2

And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

John states that Christ is the propitiation for two groups of people, the believers, and "the whole world." (*kosmos*). The *kosmos* is the evil world system that has pitted itself against God and His revelation. This is how John uses this word five more times in the very same chapter ([2:15–17](#)). He continues to use "world" in this sense in [3:1, 13](#), and [17](#).

Actually, the fact is that this is uniformly how John uses *kosmos*, and the only reason it is objected to in [1 John 2:2](#) (and [4:14](#)), is because it's normative meaning explodes limited atonement.<sup>12</sup> Space does not permit any interaction with LR interpretations. As usual, they have to boil the verse down into a trite statement of fact; that Christ is not just the propitiation for the Christians reading John's epistle, but also for Christians the world over. As if the Apostle would express himself in such a clumsy way!

<sup>11</sup> "Gill says that only temporary protection was in Christ's mind. - *The Cause of God and Truth*, 28. Norman Geisler responds to this view by stating that, "it forces us to believe that God's concern for the temporal conditions of all men is greater than that of His concern for their eternal souls!" - Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1999), 200. Some of Geisler's criticisms in this book are telling, even though we think the book has its fair share of problems.

<sup>12</sup> Gary Long completely overlooks John's use of *kosmos* in [1](#), [2](#), and [3](#) John in his appendix dealing with this verse.

## 1 John 4:14

And we have seen and do testify that the father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

Notice how in the context John uses the term “world.” In 4:1 he writes: “... because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”; in verse 3 we read that, “this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world.” In verse 4 John writes: “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the

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world.” The fifth verse says: “They are of the world; therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them.” In verse 17 it says: “because as he is, so are we in this world.” On into chapter 5 and verses 4–5: “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world,... Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” Finally, in 5:19: “And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.” The only place that it cannot sustain the same meaning (according to people like Owen, Gill, Long, etc.) is in 4:14. There the meaning magically changes. We submit that unless limited atonement is first presupposed, or the contexts are ignored, nobody would interpret “the whole world” in 1 John 2:2, and “world” in 1 John 4:14 as synonyms for the elect only.

## 1 Timothy 2:4–6

For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; who will have 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.

The key word here is the meaning of the word “all.” Three main interpretations have been given to it:

- A. All means everyone.
- B. All means all of the elect.
- C. All means all of every sphere (all classes).

Positions B and C are related. The latter is just a more nuanced view which better fits the context. B is too blunt and crude an interpretation to pass muster, although some still cling to it. C basically

says that since the word “all” is used to mean “all kinds of in places (e.g. 1 Cor. 15:22), it can and does mean that here. But there is much that is wrong in this interpretation:

i. The word “all” is used in a universalistic sense (i.e. “all without exception”) in the context. Even the command to pray “for kings and for all in authority” (v. 1) is universalistic. Paul does not say “all elect kings and elect rulers.”

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ii. The plain sense makes sense. And it matches other verses. But the LR interpretation again assails the perspicuity of Scripture by a limitation on the word “all.”

iii. As NT scholar I. Howard Marshall has pointed out, 1 Timothy 2:6 is a partial quotation of Mark 10:45 where Jesus says that He came “to give His life a ransom for many.” In the 1 Timothy passage, Paul swaps all for many, a strange substitution if he believed in limited atonement. Further, the Hebrew word for many “often has the sense of a great many as opposed to a few. ... Thus “all” is the appropriate paraphrase.”<sup>13</sup> And since Jesus is citing Isaiah 53:11–12<sup>14</sup> in Mark 10:45, Paul would naturally have that meaning in mind. Marshall shows this to be typical of Paul by comparing how he alternates “all” with “many” in Romans 5:12–19.<sup>15</sup> (Interestingly,

<sup>13</sup> I. Howard Marshall, “Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles,” in Clark H. Pinnock, General editor, *The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 59. We do not recommend this book! However, though Arminian (and sometimes Open Theist) in orientation, this book contains some trenchant criticisms of Five-Point Calvinism.

<sup>14</sup> There is no room here to address Isaiah 53, but the key verse is verse 6. The verse is categorical. The “all we” of the first clause (which must refer to all Israel at least), is answered by the “us all” of the second clause. Thus, the prophecy proclaims that the iniquity of all people (or all Israel), was laid upon Him. Erickson thinks this verse is difficult to get around. He states, “It is difficult to this passage and not conclude that just as everyone sins, everyone is also atoned for.” - *Christian Theology*, 847.

<sup>15</sup> Long (16–19), tries to make the elect “the Seed of the woman,” and the non-elect “the seed of the serpent.” But the Seed of the woman is Christ, not Christians (Gen. 3:15; Gal. 3:16 cf. Gen. 22:17b). Besides, has he forgotten Ephesians 2:2–3;

Calvin supports this interpretation of “many” in his commentaries).

We conclude with this opinion of Gordon Fee in his commentary:

There is ... a long history of theological urgency...that has been generated by this sentence [i.e. 2:3–40]. Much of it stems from an Augustinian-Calvinist view of election that appears to be at odds

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with the plain sense of the text...Much of this discussion has been carried on quite apart from Paul’s context...” He suspects that sometimes, “an author’s theology has been already in hand before approaching the text, and the discussion has been a kind of skirmish with it. All of this applies to v. 6 as well.<sup>16</sup>

Our conclusion is that these passages speak powerfully and unequivocally of unlimited atonement. The Reformed responses to these texts (where one can find them) usually require a pre-acceptance of Definitive Atonement before they can be swallowed. In other words, the question is begged before the verse is examined. This amounts to deductive theologizing replacing inductive exegesis. The fact is that Unlimited Redemptionists (UR’s) are not forced into fanciful re-interpretations of straightforward passages that don’t fit their theory. Neither do they make “problem texts” out of plain language statements by the apostolic authors. They can comfortably include all of the passages enlisted by LR’s into their broader system. The same definitely cannot be said for the LR’s.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), New International Biblical Commentary Series, 68.

<sup>17</sup> This does not stop them trying. For instance, Long boldly claims that, “there are scriptural statements ... which cannot, by any fair process of interpretation, be reconciled with the doctrine of universal redemption.” - *Definite Atonement*, 32. Elsewhere he calls for “consistent principles of biblical interpretation.” (60). But what he means by this is theological interpretation (cf. 68). Long approaches his “problem texts” (his name for 1 John 2:2; cf. 92), with definite atonement already lodged firmly in his mind. His “exegesis” can only be

## Dispensationalism, Limited Atonement, and Hermeneutics

We hope that by this stage in the study we have shown how those who believe in Limited atonement must find recourse to a theologically charged hermeneutic so as to navigate around those texts which teach both that faith goes before regeneration and that Christ died for all mankind.<sup>18</sup> It is this playing fast and loose with hermeneutics that ought

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to prevent every dispensationalist from becoming a Five-Point Calvinist. Gary Long admits that he employs theological approach (using the “covenant of grace”) to these texts.<sup>19</sup>

For a dispensationalist to permit a grammatical-historical-*theological* hermeneutic in order to explain such passages is tantamount to denying the hermeneutical foundation upon which dispensationalism is built — and thus, amounts to nothing less than a tacit denial of the entire dispensationalist system of theology. As *Five-Point Calvinists define them*, the senses given to each individual part of TULIP (minus Limited atonement) cannot be swallowed whole. As Reformed theologians use Total depravity they have in mind the view that because the unregenerate is a spiritual corpse it is impossible for him to believe the Gospel *unless he is first regenerated?*<sup>20</sup> But if regeneration precedes faith then it stands to reason that particular redemption is true, for the atonement would only comprehend those to whom faith is given and are thus regenerated.<sup>21</sup> John Owen would be right when he states,

deductive *i.e.* eisegesis).

<sup>18</sup> The textbooks generally refer to this as grammatical-historical-theological interpretation. This very same hermeneutic is engaged when dealing with passages that teach a seven-year Tribulation and a Millennium.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Long, 10–25, 68. In the same way the respected Reformed theologian John Murray places theology before exegesis. This allows him to state that, “when we examine the Scripture we find that the glory of the cross is bound up with the effectiveness of its accomplishment.” - John Murray, *Redemption - Accomplished and Applied*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 75.

<sup>20</sup> E. G. Sproul, *Grace Unknown*, 141; White, *The Potter’s Freedom*, 113.

“Salvation, indeed, is bestowed conditionally; but faith, which is the condition, is absolutely procured.”<sup>22</sup> If Christ’s death procured our faith we ought to see the logic and relinquish any belief that Christ died for the non-elect, for otherwise they would be saved; which is to say, elect!

Likewise is it the case with their definition of Unconditional election. Now, no member of the CTS will doubt that God elects certain individuals unconditionally to salvation (2 *Thess.* 2:13). But once depravity has been defined in such terms as the above, election becomes *the basis for definite atonement*. For example, regarding *Rom.* 8:31–34 one writer

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says: “These are *family* promises, given to those whom God chose on the basis of His own mercy and grace from all eternity. And from this we can see testimony to the particular redemption worked out in Christ.”<sup>23</sup>

White here reads particular redemption into particular election. And on the basis of his view of the atonement he is right to. This is why we had better get our definition of the atonement directly from the Scriptures and define unconditional election accordingly.

Again, we believe that God will infallibly bring to salvation His elect (*John* 6:37, 44), but we should not think that Irresistible grace demands that a person is born-again before he believes, either logically or any other wise.

Lastly, dispensationalists should reject the Reformed doctrine of the Perseverance of the saints in favor of the exegetically sound doctrine of Eternal Security, or, if you like, the preservation of the saints. Although some five-pointers will draw no distinction between these terms, it is vital that the dispensationalist realize that what they mean by this term has ramifications for the doctrine of assurance. We hold that our salvation is secure because of the Bible’s testimony. We *have* eternal life; we are bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh; we have

<sup>21</sup> It is important to see how the idea of the Atonement as “definite” controls the definition of Total Depravity. We wish we had more space to expound upon this.

<sup>22</sup> Owen, 123.

<sup>23</sup> White, 237.

been adopted and in God’s sight we are already glorified. But that is not where it ends for the Five-Point Calvinist.

For them the P signifies that *if you are elect you will persevere*. Hence, this leads to the creation of “check-lists” to give assurance that one is truly one of the elect, which finds its terminous in “Lordship Salvation.” The Reformed doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints, which constantly looks for proofs of regeneration, cannot logically lead to simple assurance. We may illustrate this by seeing what a Lordship teacher says is the difference between a true and a false assurance. Ernest Reisinger put the matter this way:

1. *True assurance* begets unfeigned humility.  
*False assurance* begets spiritual pride.

2. *True assurance* leads to increased diligence in the pursuit of holiness.  
*False assurance* leads to sloth and self-indulgence.

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3. *True assurance* leads to candid self-examination and a desire to be searched and corrected by God.

*False assurance* leads to a disposition to be satisfied with appearance and avoid accurate self-examination.

4. *True assurance* leads to constant aspiration after more fellowship with God.

*False assurance* does not aspire after greater intimacy with God.

The author adds, “It is not the *strength* of one’s convictions that proves the validity of his assurance, but the *character* of one’s convictions.”<sup>24</sup>

I must leave the reader to draw his own conclusions. I hope that what has been said demonstrates why a consistent dispensationalist must define his own terms and not borrow blindly from the Reformed definitions. Put simply, Five-Pointers are right to point out that a “four point Calvinist” who

<sup>24</sup> “Ernest C. Reisinger, *Lord and Christ*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 115. That is, assurance is based upon what one sees as the spirituality of one’s convictions. The reader is urged to compare the above with the teaching of Lewis Sperry Chafer’s *Systematic Theology*, Vol. VII, 21–24.

sticks to the Reformed definitions excluding Limited Atonement has an irreconcilable tension in his theology, and that a consistent Five-Point Calvinist will NOT be a dispensationalist.<sup>25</sup> Many think that Limited Atonement is the weak link in the whole system. With respect I think this is a serious misreading of the position. Once accepted, Limited Atonement actually holds all the other points of TULIP together.

### Does “World” Ever Mean “Elect”?

That the term “world” (*kosmos*) is used in both a universal sense and a restricted sense is admitted by all. The question is whether *kosmos* ever takes on a technical connotation signifying the elect. We often hear from our Reformed brethren that when the Bible says “God so loved the

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world” it really means “God so loved the elect in the world.” Is that assertion true?

### The Standard Reference Works

Surely the matter can be resolved by a look at the lexicons and theological dictionaries. These tools define the terms and give their usages in the Bible. The Greek word in question is “*Kosmos*.” The present writer looked this word up in the *Dictionary of NT Theology* (ed. Colin Brown), and could not find any place where it meant anything even like “the world of believers” or “the church.” And this came as no surprise. After all, according to a study done by Norman Douty, no major lexicon or theological dictionary reduces the term *kosmos* to a synonym for the elect. Douty goes on to say:

All of this is disastrous for the advocates of Limited Atonement. They have ventured to set themselves above the combined scholarship of our lexicons, encyclopedias and dictionaries, when they have ascribed a further

<sup>25</sup> It is this writer’s opinion that the reason men like A. W. Pink and S. Lewis Johnson, and many like them; rejected dispensationalism is because they were Five-Point Calvinists. They were already employing two hermeneutical methods - the grammatical-historical, and the grammatical-historical-theological, in order to hold to Limited Atonement and regeneration prior to faith. Quite clearly, something had to give!

significance to the word “*Kosmos*”, which will support their theological system.<sup>26</sup>

When a Limited Redemptionist is willing to ignore the standard reference works, ignore the plain sense of the texts, and ignore the fact that his doctrine is unsupported by a single explicit mention in Scripture, one can be sure that he has come to the Bible with his mind already made up.

### Arguing From John 17

Not a few of the arguments offered by LR’s in defense of their teaching find their beginnings in the soil of Christ’s High Priestly Prayer of [John 17](#). In his sterling defense of limited atonement, John Owen wrote: “Now, by the way, we know that Christ refused to pray for the world, in opposition to his elect. “I pray for them,” saith he: “I pray not for the world, but for them thou hast given me,” [John 17:9](#). And therefore there was no foundation for such an interceding for them, because he was not [*hilasmos*] for them.”<sup>27</sup>

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In the context Owen is dealing with [1 John 2:2](#). He has seconded [John 17:9](#) to deal with it. Since, in [John 17](#) Christ did not intercede for the non-elect, this means that no propitiation could have been made for them. Hence, [1 John 2:2](#) can be tackled with this prior decision.

In our view, the best way to show up this method is to line up the mam verses where “world” (*kosmos*) is a bone of contention:

He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. ([John 1:10](#))

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ([John 3:16](#))

For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. ([John 3:17](#))

And this is the condemnation, that light has

<sup>26</sup> Norman F. Douty, *The Death of Christ*, (Irving: William and Watrous, 1978), 44–45.

<sup>27</sup> Owen, 65. He also notices [John 17:24](#).

come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19)

And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world. (John 4:42)

I am the living Bread which came out of heaven: if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live forever: and the Bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. (John 6:51)

In all these representative verses the meaning of “world” (*kosmos*) is constant. Each verse is easily interpreted by the UR to refer to the rebellious, autonomous, and spiritually darkened world-system of fallen mankind. When one turns to read John 17:9, the question comes up, “Can somebody who believes in UR interpret this verse in the same consistent way, or is he forced to look for another interpretation?” Here is the verse in question: “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me; for they are Thine.” (John 17:9).

From verse 6 we know that Jesus is referring to His disciples, whom God has given to Him “out of the world.” So, when a UR comes to verse 9 he simply understands Jesus to mean that He is interceding specially for His disciples, as opposed to the world of mankind to whom they will be sent, and from whom they will make converts (v. 20). Then comes

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verse 21b: “that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me.” (cf. v. 25).

Now, we ask, what is difficult about all this? Unless limited atonement is presupposed, the term *kosmos* always means the same thing in these passages. F. F. Bruce comments: “If [Jesus] does not pray for the world, it is not because he had no concern for the world (John 4:42; cf. 3:17; 12:47). But the salvation of the world depends on the witness of those whom the Father has given him ‘out of the world’ (see verses 21, 23), and it is they who need his intercession at this junction.”<sup>28</sup>

The person who simply reads the text without

assuming the doctrine of limited atonement does not have to qualify the meaning of any term. But LR’s once more have to tamper with the plain sense of several of these verses so that they can retain their preconceived teaching.

### Does God Love the “World”?

A corollary to this novel usage of “world” to mean “the elect” involves the understanding of John 3:16. Does it mean, “God so loved the elect that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever of the elect believes should not perish, but have everlasting life.”? If it does, then doesn’t it follow that God does *not* love the non-elect? And if that is so, then how can anyone invite a lost person to come to Christ? Perhaps Christ did not die for them, and God does not love them? One thing is for certain, no five-point Calvinist can tell a lost soul that Christ died for them.

For example: “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.”<sup>29</sup>

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Further, as stated previously, if God does not love the non-elect then it follows that it is His will that they reject Christ - who is, after all, not sent to save them anyway. If that is true then verses like John 3:36 are simply incoherent. Condemnation becomes a doctrine grounded in a volutanstic fiat of God that is not based in His character.

### Summary

To summarize our study, we may state that God’s intention was to provide a universal atonement on the basis of which He can “judge the quick and the dead.” The elect were predestined to eternal

<sup>28</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 331. From his comments on other texts it is clear that Bruce believed in unlimited atonement.

<sup>29</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1970), 70. The reader may wish to refer back to our comments on Perseverance of the saints under the sub-heading, “Dispensationalism, Limited Atonement, and Hermeneutics.”



life through faith in Christ, while the non-elect are justly condemned for refusing the knowledge of God revealed in the world ([Rom. 1:18–22](#)), and their guilt increases for rejecting the Gospel of saving grace ([John 3:36](#)). Perhaps it would be useful to display our objections to Limited Atonement in the following way:

- There is no clear reference to Limited Atonement in the Bible. It is an inference from a System of Theology.
- It runs contrary to many explicit statements of Scripture.
- It depends upon a departure from normal grammatical-historical interpretation, and so ought not to be held by dispensationalists.
- In making the atonement the only instrument of securing our salvation it makes salvation “through faith” virtually meaningless.
- By making saving faith an effect, rather than a condition of salvation, Limited Atonement faces the philosophical problem of having God choose to provide salvation for less souls than He could have. This runs the Reformed believer into serious trouble when dealing with the problem of evil and the goodness of God.
- It rides roughshod over all the standard reference works in its singular definition of world (*kosmos*) as “the elect.”
- If Christ only died for the elect then we can’t tell an unsaved person (who may be non-elect) that God loves him, and that Christ died for him. [John 3:16](#) may not refer to him.
- Again, if Limited Atonement is true then plainly the non-elect person, when he rejects Christ, is actually *doing God’s will*. How, then, can God justly condemn him?

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- It makes [John 3:16](#), [1 Timothy 2:4–6](#); [2 Peter 3:9](#), etc. read as pointless tautologies.

Finally, Limited Atonement is not found in any of the Church Fathers until the later Augustine. Most of the Reformers did not hold to it *fe.g.* Luther, Melancthon, Bullinger, Cranmer, Latimer; even Calvin speaks up for unlimited atonement in some passages). Among those who believed in unlimited atonement, a selection would include: Athanasius,

Cyril, Basil, Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, John Preston, John Newton, Alfred Edersheim, J. C. Ryle, Charles Simeon, G. Campbell Morgan, A. T. Robertson, L. S. Chafer, F. F. Bruce. Leon Morris, C. C. Ryrie, John Walvoord, and Millard Erickson. One of the aims of this paper is to show why they were fully justified in holding to this position.

## Conclusion

Limited Atonement rises and falls with the legitimacy of the maxim, “Christ will save all whom he died for.” That may sound good, but it is not taught in Scripture, and it is from Scripture that we must fetch our theology. Christ’s death atoned for the sins of the whole world, but that atonement only becomes definite the moment a sinner repents and believes the Gospel (cf. [2 Cor. 5:19–20](#)). The dispensationalist, whose consistent plain-sense, normative hermeneutic elicits a doctrine of *Unlimited Atonement*, needs to be on the watch for theological formulations which do not comport with his rules of interpretation. Systematic Theology, however ingenious it may become, must never be allowed to dictate to the text of Scripture what it is supposed to say.