







Limited Atonement Defined

Nature of the Question:

1. What was the nature of Christ's atonement?
 - Was it an actual atonement or hypothetical/potential atonement that had to be actualized later?
2. What was the purpose, what did God seek to accomplish?
 - Did it atone for the sins of everyone who ever lived or for a particular people?

Limited Atonement Defined

Confusion in the term "Limited Atonement":

- Both Calvinists and Arminians think the atonement is limited in some sense. It is just the way in which it is limited.
- AKA
 - Particular Redemption, definite atonement, definite redemption

Limited Atonement Defined

Definition:

Christ's atonement was intended by God to secure the redemption of the elect alone.

1. Concerns Christ's atonement/Jesus' death on the cross as a penal substitute.
2. Concerns the divine intention of Christ's atonement.
3. States that Christ's atonement was designed to actually redeem people from sin.
4. Designed to redeem particular people from sin; those whom God elected.

Implications

1. Jesus died for particular people; not for people in general (and no one in particular).
2. Christ's atonement was an actual atonement for sins, not a potential atonement.
3. Christ's atonement was limited in extent, but not limited in efficacy.
4. The redeeming work of Christ is sufficient to save those for whom it was intended.

Limited Atonement Defined

Comparing views:

	Calvinist	Arminian	Universalist
Design / Intent	Elect	Everyone	Everyone
Extent (Who did Christ pay for)	Some (elect)	All	All
Nature (efficacy)	Actual / Full	Potential / Partial	Actual / Full
Outcome	Some (elect)	Some?	All

Misunderstandings

1. Christ's atonement was limited in value or power.
2. God doesn't love the non-elect and doesn't desire their salvation.
3. The gospel invitation (external call) is only for the elect.
4. Whenever the Bible says "world" it really means "the elect".

Scriptural Support

Leviticus 16:16,21,24,33-34

¹⁶ Thus he shall make atonement for the Holy Place, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel and because of their transgressions, all their sins. And so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which dwells with them in the midst of their uncleannesses.

²¹ And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins. And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness.

Leviticus 16:16,21,24,33-34

²⁴ And he shall bathe his body in water in a holy place and put on his garments and come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people and make atonement for himself and for the people.

³³ He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. ³⁴ And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins." And Aaron did as the LORD commanded Moses.

Matthew 1:21

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

Mark 10:45

For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

John 10:11,14-15,26-28

¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life **for the sheep**.

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know **my own** and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life **for the sheep**.

²⁶ but you do not believe because **you are not among my sheep**. ²⁷ **My sheep** hear my voice, and I know **them**, and **they** follow me. ²⁸ I give **them** eternal life, and **they** will never perish, and no one will snatch **them** out of my hand.

John 17:1-26 (esp vv. 9,20)

⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

²⁰ "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,

Acts 20:28

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

Ephesians 5:25-27

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved **the church** and gave himself up **for her**, ²⁶ that he might sanctify **her**, having cleansed **her** by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present **the church** to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that **she** might be holy and without blemish.

Summary Argument/Theological basis 1

1. The persons of the Trinity are united in their redemptive purposes and works.
2. The Father's purpose in election is to save a particular people.
3. The Holy Spirit's purpose in regeneration is to save particular people.
4. Therefore, the Son's purpose in redemption is to save particular people.
5. Therefore, Christ's redemptive work is particular rather than universal in extent.

Summary Argument/Theological basis 2

1. Christ's atonement was a penal substitution.
2. If atonement is made for all of a person's sins, then that person will be saved.
3. Only the elect will be saved.
4. Therefore, Christ's atonement was made only for the sins of the elect.

Objections

1. John 1:29 and 3:16 make it clear that Jesus died for the whole world.
2. 1 Timothy 2:6 states that Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all.
3. 1 John 2:2 says that Jesus atoned for the sins of the whole world.
4. Limited atonement means that we can't confidently say to anyone, "Jesus died for you".
5. Limited atonement implies that God's universal gospel offer isn't sincere.

Application

- LA reinforces the unity of purpose between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- LA reassures us that God's redemptive purposes never fail.
- LA points us both to God's great mercy and to God's perfect justice.
- LA gives us confidence in the perfect, finished cross-work of Christ.
- LA gives us assurance of God's personal and specific concern for our salvation.
- LA means the Savior we proclaim to sinners in the gospel is a Savior who actually saves.
