

Reformation Theology: Limited Atonement

August 20, 2017 - Rev. Brian Hand

1. What was the nature of Christ's atonement? Was it an actual atonement or a potential or hypothetical 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.
 - A. Traditionally known as "Limited Atonement" (the 'L' of TULIP). Definite atonement, definite redemption, particular redemption.
 - Both Calvinists and Arminians think the atonement is limited in some sense, it is just the way in which it is limited. Particular redemption may be a better label.

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. **What was the cross supposed to accomplish?**
Some or all and it didn't work out? Did he intend to actually save or to make it possible?
3. States that Christ's atonement was designed to actually redeem people from sin. **Jesus actually bore the punishment and paid the price for people's sins on the cross.**
4. Designed to redeem particular people from sin; those whom God elected.

***See Westminster Confession of Faith- Chapter 3.6; 8.5,8**

Implications

1. Jesus died for particular people; not for people in general (and no one in particular). **If you are a Christian believer, then Jesus died specifically for you. According to a universal redemption Christ's death did not accomplish anything for you that it did not also accomplish for Judas. Difference between dropping 100's from an airplane and hoping people catch them or putting them in people's hands.**

2. Christ's atonement was an actual atonement for sins, not a potential atonement. If Jesus died for your sins then your sins have actually been atoned for and you cannot be finally lost

3. Christ's atonement was limited in extent, but not limited in efficacy. 1. The label limited atonement is not the best because both Calvinists and Arminians believe there is some limitation to the atonement. Calvinists-intent and extent. Arminians-Efficacy

- a. Analogy: Spurgeon's bridge: General atonement is like a wide bridge with only half an arch, it only goes half way and doesn't transport anyone all the way across, better to have a narrow bridge that goes all the way.

4. The redeeming work of Christ is sufficient to save those for whom it was intended. If Jesus died for you, you will be saved

	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 (who is saved)	Some (elect)	Some?	All

- 1. Note the connection between the intent, the nature, and the extent of the atonement.
 - a. Intent: "What was Jesus' death designed to accomplish?"
 - b. Nature: "What kind of atonement was it?"
 - c. Extent: "For whom exactly did Jesus die?"
 - d. The basic point: the extent of the atonement depends on the intent of the atonement. When you look at the outcome, the Calvinist and Universalist positions are consistent with God's intent. This leads to many Arminian arguments against limited atonement proving too much a heading into Universalist positions. Some have therefore sought views of the atonement different from the penal substitution.

Misunderstandings:

1. Christ's atonement was limited in value or power.

Supposes that this doctrine degrades the atonement. It wasn't limited in value

because it was an atonement of the incarnate Son of God and the life of the incarnate

Son of God is of infinite value. If God had chosen to save all, Jesus would not have had to suffer more, his atonement was already of infinite value because it involved the death of the Son of God. It had the value to pay for all the sins of every person who ever lived. It was not limited in power because it actually accomplish all that God intended it to.

2. God doesn't love the non-elect and doesn't desire their salvation

God has a special love for his elect. Just as we have different kinds of love (wife and kids, friends) God has a unique love within the trinity, a general love for all his creation, a higher general love for mankind made in his image, and a special love for his elect.

3. The gospel invitation (external call) is only for the elect.

Fails to recognize the distinction between the external call and internal call. External for all, internal for the elect only. External call concerns God's preceptive will in which God in some sense wants all to trust him and be saved, to follow his will. The external call also serves as judgement on those who reject him. God is glorified when the gospel is proclaimed whether it is accepted or reject. 2 Cor 2:15-16 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life..

4. Whenever the Bible says "world" it really means "the elect".

Those verses are not concerned with the extent of the atonement but with ethnic identity not just Jews but the world.

Scriptural Support:

Leviticus 16 (esp vv. 16, 21, 24, 33-34

day of atonement. Atonement made for the people of Israel (God's people in covenant with him) not people in general. As a type of Christ's atonement, then it is

logical that Christ's atonement would be made for God's people in covenant with him.

Matthew 1:21

will save **his** people. A particular people

Mark 10:45

give his life as a ransom for **many rather than all**

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

for the sheep, in this passage some are clearly not his sheep

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

I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, ask for those who will believe. Universal Arminian view disconnects Jesus' high priestly prayer from his high priestly offering.

Acts 20:28

I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, ask for those who will believe. Universal view disconnects Jesus' high priestly prayer from his high priestly offering.

Ephesians 5:25-27

as Christ loved the **Church** and gave himself up for **Her**

Additional Scriptures:

Romans 3:25-26; 5:6-11; 8:28-29; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

Summary Argument/ Theological Basis 1:

- 1.The persons of the Trinity are united in their redemptive purposes and works. **The persons of the Trinity work together.**
- 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. **Irresistible grace**
- 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. **Particular redemption/limited atonement goes hand in hand with unconditional election and irresistible grace**

Argument 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. **Arminians agree with this**
- 4.Therefore, Christ's atonement was made only for the sins of the elect. **This leads many Arminian scholars to put forward different views of the atonement than penal substitution.**

Objections:

1. John 1:29 and 3:16 make it clear that Jesus died for the whole world. **Greek kosmos rarely if ever carries the sense of every person who ever lived. In John it never means all people but generally means fallen creation, especially mankind or an ethnic distinction.**

2. 1 Timothy 2:6 states that Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all. **Specifically states that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for "all". All without exception or all without distinction. i.e. not just Jews but gentiles also. Compare with making prayers and supplications for all people. Does Paul mean that we ought to pray for all people without exception (really long prayers) or without distinction.**

3. 1 John 2:2 says that Jesus atoned for the sins of the whole world.

1. **If you use this for a universal atonement (Jesus died for all, different from universalism) it proves too much and goes to universalism. John doesn't make the distinction that this is**

potential atonement but actual, which would imply that every person would be finally saved. Taking this view doesn't prove Arminianism, but universalism.

2. We have already said that John doesn't use "world" to mean every person who ever lived.
3. Good argument can be made that John's primary readers are Jewish believers, thus John is pointing out that Jesus died not just for Jews.
4. John 11:49-52 parallel not only for something but also for something else framework, those scattered abroad.
5. A doctrine of universal redemption would undermine the point John is making, which has to do with assurance of forgiveness of sins for believers. (Verse 1.) So the propitiation or atonement of Christ is connected with the advocacy or intercession of Christ. We looked at John 17. Does Christ intercede for everyone or for his people. Is he an advocate for everyone without exception or for his people? If Christ made atonement for the sins of people who still end up in hell, what kind of assurance does that offer to believers when they sin? The recipients of this letter could say to John, "it's all very well to have Christ as an advocate but if he paid the price for everyone's sins and some people are lost, what assurance is that to me? Bottom line, citing this verse here causes you to face a dilemma. Either John sees it as actual or conditional. If actual, it proves universalism, if conditional then it doesn't offer much assurance to believers when they sin.

4. Limited atonement means that we can't confidently say to anyone, "Jesus died for you".

We never read of anyone in the NT saying "Christ died for you" to people in the audience so clearly this isn't a necessary thing for evangelism. We can say Jesus died so sinners like you and me can be forgiven and reconciled to God and have eternal life. If you will only put your trust in him you will surely receive the salvation he bought for you when he died on the cross.

5. Limited atonement implies that God's universal gospel offer isn't sincere. If Jesus didn't die for everyone then God isn't sincere in offering salvation to everyone. Confuses what the gospel offer actually is. The gospel invitation is "if you repent of your sin and believe in the

Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved." That offer is absolutely valid whether or not you hold to limited atonement. The gospel offer is entirely sincere because it is entirely true.

Importance to the Christian Life

- LA reinforces the unity of purpose between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father elected particular people, the son redeemed particular people, the Spirit converts particular people. So there is a perfect unity in the intentions and actions of the Godhead . Why is this practical? If we have a God who is not united within himself, then we loose all sense of trusting in his faithfulness. Perhaps the Father is faithful but the Son or Spirit don't carry it out. We also loose all sense of assurance for the same reason. Finally, The promise of eternal life is chiefly a promise to be in the presence of the triune God to share in the inter-trinitarian love, joy, and glory. These things do not exist if the Godhead is not united.

- LA reassures us that God's redemptive purposes never fail.

If God sent Jesus to die for you, to redeem you from bondage to sin and death than you will most surely be saved. In no sense did Jesus' death fail to accomplish all that God intended it to accomplish

- LA points us both to God's great mercy and to God's perfect justice.

Mercy- Jesus dies to redeem sinners, not good people. Justice- every sin is only ever punished once and punished fully. Either in the sinner themselves or in Their perfect substitute.

- LA gives us confidence in the perfect, finished cross-work of Christ.

If Christ has died for you then everything is in place to guarantee you final salvation and eternal fellowship with him.

- LA gives us assurance of God's personal and specific concern for our salvation.

It's no exaggeration to say that when in eternity past, the Father Son and HS formulated their plan of redemption, which required the incarnation crucifixion and resurrection of the son , they had you and me specifically in mind. Not just human beings in the abstract in a very general sence but specific people. It is no exaggeration to say that when Jesus died, he had you and me in mind. At least with respect to his divine omniscience of his purpose. The good shepherd died for his sheep and he knows all his sheep by name.

- LA means the Savior we proclaim to sinners in the gospel is a Savior who actually saves.

As we have seen, this doctrine is often viewed as putting us at a disadvantage. It is assumed that a 5pt Calvinist can't say that Jesus died for a particular unbeliever and say to them that Jesus died for their sins. But actually when the evangelistic appeal is stated properly, this doctrine shows Just how powerful the gospel message really is and how powerful the savior offered in that gospel is. Spurgeon, "Tell me then Sir, whom did Christ died for? Will you answer me a question or two and I will tell you whether he died for you. Do you want a Savior? Do you feel that you need a Savior? Are you this morning conscious of sin? Has the Holy Spirit taught you that you are lost? Then Christ died for you and you will be saved. Are you this morning conscious that you have no hope in the world but Christ? Do you feel that you of yourself cannot offer an atonement that can satisfy God's justice? Have you given up all confidence in yourselves? And can you say upon your bended knees, Lord, save or I perish. Christ died for you. If you are saying this morning I am as good as I ought to be, I can get to heaven by my own good works. Then remember, Scripture

says of Jesus, I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. So long as you are in that state, I have no atonement to preach to you. But if this morning you feel guilty, wretched, conscious of your guilt and are ready to take Christ to be your only Savior, I cannot only say to you that you may be saved, but what is better still, that you will be saved.