

# Light for Dark Times

## *You Must be Born Again!*

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***TULIP – The Fundamentals of the Faith by which we are Saved***

***Sermon #5 – Definite Atonement  
– For Whom did Christ Die?***

***January 23, 2022***

**Sermon Text:** John 17

**Scripture Reading:** Acts 8:26-40

2Co 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This morning we want to consider the subject which is found in the “L” of TULIP. Namely – *for whom did Christ die?* Most of us have probably been taught that the answer to this question is very plain and answered definitively by the well-loved verse:

Joh 3:16 “For God so loved the

world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

If God loved the world and gave His only son, then obviously “world” means every human being – Christ died on the cross for the sins of everyone. But as I will show you, that is not the answer which reformed theology gives to this question and, we maintain, it is not the answer the Bible gives to it. We maintain the Christ did not die for all human beings so that some *might possibly be saved*, but that He died *definitely* and *particularly* for His elect and actually accomplished redemption for them, and them alone.

Now, by way of review, let’s recall that we have looked at the “T” which stands for the doctrine of total depravity. The Bible tells us that all human beings were represented by the first Adam and

that when he sinned, we sinned. (see Rom 5:12ff) The result of the Fall was that Adam's progeny are born into this world dead in sin, alienated from and hostile to God, totally unable to contribute in anyway to being put right with Him. The effects of the fall affected every part of man's being. As Adam was cursed, we enter this world in that same condition.

In contrast, we looked at the Bible's teaching that God is holy, holy, holy. God is "other" and unable to even look upon sin, let alone excuse it. So that the sinner can never, ever stand in the presence of the holy God – unless he or she is born again and made into a brand new creation, holy in God's sight.

And last time we looked at the "U" in TULIP and saw that it stands for the doctrine of *unconditional election*. God chose His people in eternity past, He chose those whom He decreed to be saved in Christ, and His choice was UN-conditional, which means that He made His choice based upon His own good pleasure, according to

His perfect will, *absolutely independent of anything to be found in us*. God did not look ahead into the future, see who would believe in Christ, and then choose them! That really is what most evangelicals are taught in the churches today, but just a little thought and a careful consideration of the Bible will expose this as unbiblical and untrue. Such an "election" is no election, no choice at all. It removes salvation from God's hands and places the credit upon man. Furthermore, it would guarantee that no one would be saved because there is only one thing to be found in every sinner – sin, hatred of God, only grounds for condemnation.

Down through church history, errors like this have always plagued the church. One such early false teaching was called Pelagianism, named for a British monk, Pelagius, about 409AD. The Council of Carthage condemned his teachings in 418.

Listen to Augustus Strong, a Baptist theologian of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century:

“According to this theory, every human soul is immediately created by God and created as innocent, as free from depraved tendencies, and as perfectly able to obey God as Adam was at his creation. The only effect of Adam’s sin upon his posterity is the effect of *evil example*; it has in no way corrupted human nature; the only corruption of human nature is that habit of sinning which each individual contracts by persistent transgression of known law.

Adam’s sin, therefore, only injured himself; the sin of Adam is imputed only to Adam – it is imputed in no sense to his descendants; God imputes to each of Adam’s descendants only those acts of sin which he has personally and consciously committed. Men can be saved by the law as well as by the gospel; and some have actually obeyed God perfectly, and have thus been saved. Physical death is therefore not the penalty of sin, but an original law of nature...all incurred eternal death by sinning after Adam’s example.”

Most evangelical’s today are what we would call “semi-pelagian” in their theology. You might recall that R.C. Sproul used this term in describing, for example, Billy Graham. The semi-pelagian holds that salvation is a joint effort between God and man. Reformed theology maintains, and we believe the Bible does as well, that salvation is of the Lord – that it is *monergistic* – a work of God alone so that even our faith with which we believe in Christ to salvation is a gift of God to us.

Let’s come then to this matter of *limited, or better – definite atonement*. What was the purpose and extent of the atonement – of the work of Christ on the cross? We begin by looking at a few of the applicable scriptures and I think the best place to start is to have you follow along as I read from the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John’s Gospel – the High Priestly prayer of Christ right before the Cross.

I have put in boldface here the phrases which apply to our question: for whom did Christ die?

Joh 17:1-26 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, (2) since you have given him authority over all flesh, **to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.** (3) And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

(4) I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. (5) And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

(6) **“I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me,** and they have kept your word.

(7) Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. (8) For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from

you; and they have believed that you sent me.

**(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.**

(10) All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. (11) And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, **keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one.** (12) While I was with them, I kept them in your name, **which you have given me.** I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

(13) But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. (14) **I have given them your word,** and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

(15) I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. (16) They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. (17) Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. (18) As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. (19) **And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.**

(20) **“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,** (21) that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

(22) The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, (23) I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me **and loved them even as you loved me.**

(24) Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my

glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (25) O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. (26) **I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”**

This chapter really answers the question clearly – *for whom did Christ die? He died for those whom the Father had given to Him.* And this is what the “L” means – *limited atonement.* Not limited in the sense of the value or ability of Christ’s sacrifice, but limited in the sense of Christ *definitely accomplishing salvation for His elect.* Christ’s sacrifice in other words did not merely make salvation “possible” – if man chooses to believe – but the Cross actually accomplished salvation for those the Father had given Him. When Christ died, He paid for the sins of His people – our redemption was accomplished – the price was paid – and when we came to faith that redemption was

applied to us. Our salvation was a certainty.

Here is chapter 11:4 of the London Baptist Confession of Faith:

4. God did from all eternity decree to justify all the elect, and Christ did in the fullness of time die for their sins, and rise again for their justification; nevertheless, they are not justified personally, until the Holy Spirit doth in time due actually apply Christ unto them. ( [Galatians 3:8](#); [1 Peter 1:2](#); [1 Timothy 2:6](#); [Romans 4:25](#); [Colossians 1:21,22](#); [Titus 3:4-7](#) )

Let's consider some more Scriptures which teach *definite atonement*:

Heb 10:14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time **those who are being sanctified.**

Joh 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life **for the sheep.**

Joh 10:14-15 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.**

Act 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.**

Eph 5:25-27 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.

Mat 1:21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, **for he will save his people from their sins."**

Rom 8:32-34 He who did not spare his own Son but **gave him up for us all,** how will he not also with

him graciously give us all things?  
(33) **Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?** It is God who justifies. (34) Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Here are some excellent observations on this doctrine by Louis Berkhof. He died in 1957, having had two pastorates and then a long career at Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids (don't take this as my recommendation of Calvin Seminary)-

“The sacrificial work of Christ and His intercessory work are simply two different aspects of His atoning work, and therefore the scope of the one can be no wider than that of the other. **Now Christ very definitely limits His intercessory work** when He says: ‘I pray not for the world, but for those whom thou hast given me.’ John 17:9. Why should He limit His intercessory prayer, if He had actually paid the price for all?”

And again:

It should also be noted that the doctrine that Christ died for the purpose of saving all men, logically leads to absolute universalism, that is, to the doctrine that all men are actually saved. It is impossible that they for whom Christ paid the price, whose guilt He removed, should be lost on account of that guilt. The Arminians cannot stop at their half-way station, but must go all the way.”

“The Bible clearly teaches that the design and effect of the atoning work of Christ is not merely to make salvation possible, but to reconcile God and man, and to put men in actual possession of eternal salvation, a salvation which many fail to obtain....Attention should be called to the fact that the Bible clearly teaches that Christ by His death purchased faith, repentance, and all the other effects of the work of the Holy Spirit, for His people. Consequently these are no conditions of which the fulfilment is simply dependent on the will of man. The atonement also secures

the fulfillment of the conditions that must be met, in order to obtain salvation.”

In other words, even the faith by which we believe and the repentance by which we turn to God is a gift of God and was purchased by Christ for His people on the Cross.

This then is the doctrine of Limited Atonement. There are scriptures which at first glance appear to teach that Christ did die for all human beings, but in light of the texts we have looked at here, terms such as “world,” or “all” often do not have the meaning we might apply to them at first glance. What is the “world,” for instance, in John 3:16? Are we sure – is it really obvious – that it means “every human being who ever lived”?

We also must understand that this doctrine does not mean that we have no ability to genuinely offer the gospel to everyone – some in church history have taught that error. But the Bible at the same time declares this:

Rom 10:11-13 For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” (12) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. (13) For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

“Asking the question, for whom did Christ die? is not asking, to whom should the gospel be preached? ...Instead, the question is, in whose place did Christ stand as a substitutionary sacrifice when He bore the full fury of his Father’s wrath against sin? The answer is, only those who will never bear that wrath themselves, namely, the elect alone.” [Systematic Theology, MacArthur & Mayhew, Crossway]

Let’s end on this point however. *The doctrine of limited atonement should serve as a tremendous encouragement to us.* It means that there ARE people in this world who are God’s elect, some of whom have not yet come to faith in



*Christ, but who most surely will. It is our calling to take the gospel into the world so that they may hear.*

Act 18:9-11 And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, (10) for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for I have many in this city who are my people.” (11) And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.

God has His people. He will most certainly see that the gospel is taken to them, no matter if they are an Ethiopian in a chariot traveling through a desert highway.