

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Christology– Study of Christ– Part 5
The Atonement: The Purpose of the Death of Christ – Extent of the Atonement

Introduction

- This lesson focuses on the extent of the atonement.
 - We previously talked about the Scriptural meaning of the atonement with vocabulary and Scripture.
- Who did Christ die for?
 - For every person in the world or for just the elect?
- Did His death purchase actual redemption for every person He died for, or did it just purchase the possibility of salvation for those who would choose to believe?
- The questions are not so easy to answer because it is possible to construct a list of Scriptures to support both sides.
 - One side is Calvinism, and it holds the position that Christ died for only the elect, and that His death purchased actual redemption.
 - The other side is Arminianism, and it holds the position that Christ died for everyone in the world, and that His death purchased the possibility for salvation.
- Predestination plays a role in this issue.

Arminianism vs. Calvinism

- The two positions are summed up by five points that are juxtaposed to the opposing view.
 - The Arminian five points came first in the *Remonstrance*. In this, they created a five-point straw man argument against Calvinism and then “refuted” it.
- At the Synod of Dort, the Calvinists adopted the five points of the straw man (TULIP), and refined it to accurately reflect their position.
- There is a third view too (Amyraldianism).

Arminian Remonstrance	Calvinist TULIP
1. The need of grace.	1. Total Depravity.
2. Conditional nature of grace and its resistibility.	2. Unconditional Election.
3. Unlimited Atonement.	3. Limited Atonement.
4. Conditional Election.	4. Irresistible Grace.
5. Conditional Security.	5. Perseverance of the Saints.

The Third Point

- Four out of the five points will be discussed in Soteriology. Here, we focus only on the third point.
- It is a discussion of Arminian Unlimited Atonement vs. Calvinist Limited Atonement.
 - They can also be called universal atonement vs. particular atonement.
- We are not debating the sufficiency of Christ’s atoning sacrifice.
 - We all agree His death would be sufficient for everyone.
- We also are not debating whether or not the saving benefits are applied to all.
 - Most agree that they are not.
- What is being debated is whether or not the saving benefits of the cross are applied to all persons in an equal manner.

Particular Atonement

- The arguments for each side will be placed on the table and evaluated.
 - Arguments from Scripture
 - Theological Arguments
 - Philosophical Arguments
- Particular Atonement (Calvinism).
 - Christ died only to save the elect. He did not die for all men.
 - There is a strong Scriptural basis of support for this.
- Matt 1:21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”
 - Salvific work of Christ is narrowed to “His people.” It does not say “all people.”

Particular Atonement

- John limits the atonement.
 - John 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
 - Christ lays down His life specifically for the sheep.
 - John 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.
 - Unbelievers that reject His word are not His sheep.
 - John 10:26-28 but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. 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.
 - His sheep (those for whom He died) hear His voice.

Particular Atonement

- John shows that Christ limits the atonement in other places as well.
- John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.
 - Here Christ says He lays down His life for His friends.
 - Arminians try to counter with vv. 14, "You are my friends if you do what I command you."
 - They say you have to choose obedience to be a friend. Two verses later, however, Jesus destroys their argument.
- John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.
 - Jesus makes it clear that we did not choose Him, but He chose us and that is what causes us to obey and bear fruit.



Particular Atonement

- Luke limits the atonement too.
- 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.
 - God purchased the "church" with His blood. Purchase means to "buy." So those for whom He died are bought. No text says He purchased the world.
- Paul limits the atonement as well.
- Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,
 - There is an intimate relationship between Christ and those for whom He died. He does not have such a relationship with the damned. So He did not die for them.



Particular Atonement

- Romans 8:32 also offers a strong argument.
 - Romans 8:32 – 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?
 - Arminians focus on the "us all," but the context (verses 30-31) define the us all as those who were predestined.
 - Furthermore, it says that those for whom He died will be given "all things." Is God giving unbelievers all things?
 - The next verse also makes it clear that Christ died for the elect.
 - Romans 8:33 – Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.
 - Also, Romans 1:7 lets us know who the "us all" is as well. "To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints."
 - Thus, He gave up His Son for the elect.



Particular Atonement

- Another strong argument comes from Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17:9. It is a prayer for the elect.
 - John 17:9 – I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.
 - Jesus does not pray for the world, but only for those that the Father has "given" to Him.
 - This is a strong indicator that Christ's focus was not on every person in the world, but instead on those given to Him, or the elect.
 - Arminians will counter with John 3:16 and other passages claiming that Christ died for the world.
- John 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."
- Hebrews 2:9 – But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.
- 1John 2:2 – He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

What Does World Mean?

- The word "world" has a number of meanings in the Bible.
 - It could simply mean the mass of land, or it could mean the evil world system.
 - It could also mean every single person who ever lived, or it could mean every type of person who ever lived, meaning every nation.
 - We find all of these meanings many times in Scriptures.
 - So when looking at a passage, we must determine whether the passage speaks of the world without *distinction* or the world without *exception*.
 - The former would stress that the word "world" in a particular passage refers to all nations and the latter would favor all people.
- So what about the three passages?



John 3:16

- John 3:16 does not favor a world without exception interpretation.
- Context: conversation with Jewish religious leader.
 - Look how the Jewish leaders sometimes used the word. Some Jews and Greeks were seeking out Jesus, and the Pharisees complain that the "world" has gone after Him.
 - John 12:19-20 – So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him." 20) Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks.
- Jesus and John's usage of world.
 - John 12:32 – And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."
 - This context limits the "all people" to the Jews and Greeks seeking Him.
- This can help illuminate John 3:16 for us.
 - Nicodemus would understand God's love of the world as being love for Jews and Gentiles together, rather than just Jews.
 - It is an unjustified assumption to assume that Jesus meant that God so loved every single person that He sent His Son.
 - The Calvinist view is justified because this was the Jewish concept of world in the context, and John shows this in other chapters too.

John 3:16

- Arminians have a big problem if “world” means world without exception.
 - American Indians did not hear the gospel for 1500 years after Christ.
 - How could have Christ died for them if they never had a chance to hear the gospel and receive forgiveness?
 - Particular redemption actually fits better into this context because eventually American Indians did hear the gospel and many became Christians.
 - Thus, God did in fact love all types of people in the sending of His Son.
 - To say He loved all people without exception by sending His Son creates a problem for the fifteen centuries of some people never knowing about that love and dying in their sins.
 - Sadly, some Arminians believe God in some way owes salvation to those who never heard the gospel. Have they not read Romans 1-3? All have sinned.



Hebrews 2:9

- In this verse, it said that Jesus tasted death for “everyone.”
 - This too will either mean everyone without exception or everyone without distinction.
 - However, it is important to note that the Greek does not say everyone, but it says “all.”
 - The word “all” can refer to many different things: 1) All within a single category; 2) All within every category; 3) All period.
 - In this text, “all” will either refer to all “types” of people, or all people.
- Context helps greatly here. Look at the next verse.
 - Hebrews 2:10 – For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.
 - Apparently, the suffering (or the death tasted in vv. 9) only brings “many sons to glory.” So the all refers to many.



1 John 2:2

- John said that Jesus is not only propitiation for us, but for the whole world.
- The same type of argument applies here too.
 - If John’s audience was heavily Jewish, then this is cut and dry.
 - Jesus does not only turn wrath away from people of the Jewish nation, but of all nations.
 - If this is not the case, we have a larger problem. Propitiation means “wrath turned away.” If He turned away the wrath for the “world without exception,” then everyone would be saved. Yet Romans 1:18 says God’s wrath is poured out against all godlessness.

Propitiation
The appeasement or turning away of God’s wrath against sinners by means of an atoning sacrifice.
Christ our propitiation



Theological & Philosophical Arguments

- First, it does justice to God’s sovereignty and allows for no contingencies (this agrees with what we saw in Theology Proper).
 - A contingency is defined as something that dependent upon chance or some condition.
 - Particular atonement has our salvation rest upon no contingency.
 - It is not based on random chance working out for our benefit, nor is it conditioned or dependent upon our own wisdom to choose to believe.
 - Instead, it guarantees salvation for the elect, thus rendering it certain that they will believe.
 - Also, since Christ’s work guarantees salvation, no one for whom it is given is lost along the way. Hence eternal security is fully assured.

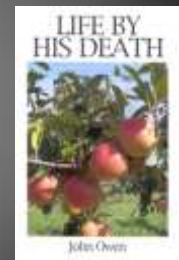


Theological & Philosophical Arguments

- Second, the doctrine of particular redemption is a necessary corollary of the doctrine of election.
 - Election is a biblical concept with a clear definition.
 - If God elected only those whom He foreknew, then redemption only has meaning for those who were elected.
 - It would make no sense to choose some for salvation, and yet die for all people when the death is only going to save those chosen for salvation anyway.
 - Particular atonement best accounts for divine love, which is extended generally to all, but reserved especially for the elect.
 - The sinner receiving sunlight and oxygen everyday is indicative of God’s general love. Each day He gives is one more day possible to repent.
- Third, the particularistic view is the clearest expression of salvation by grace.
 - If you add a condition, then it is no longer grace.
 - Think of how horrible it sounds when the Arminian says God has done everything He can to save you, but the rest is up to you.
 - Who is sovereign, God or man?

Theological & Philosophical Arguments

- Fourth, Calvinists argue that the particular atonement exalts the intrinsic value of the saving work of Christ since He did not die for possibility, but instead for certainty.
 - This exalts the intrinsic value of the cross since it accomplished exactly what it was supposed to without dependence on any other factor.
 - If it accomplished the salvation as an ends, then it also guarantees the means to receive (faith) for those whom the death was given.
 - This ties into the Calvinistic idea that regeneration precedes faith.



Theological & Philosophical Arguments

- Finally, we are told from Scripture that Christ's death actually redeems (Galatians 3:13), which means "release and deliverance."
 - Galatians 3:13 – Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"--
 - If the death of Christ brings deliverance, yet all people are not delivered from the curse of sin, then redemption was not achieved for all.
 - If Christ's death brings redemption due to its substitutionary nature, then only the redeemed were actually substituted for.
 - Since all men are not redeemed, not all men were substituted for.
- Since Christ's death was a "penal substitutionary atonement" it can only refer to those who have in fact been saved. Otherwise, God would be guilty of double jeopardy.
 - If Jesus paid the full penalty for those who are damned, then not only would He have suffered for their sins, but they would then suffer for the same sins in Hell. That would be double jeopardy, which would make God unjust.

Summary of Particular Atonement

- The Calvinist position understands that Jesus died for the elect.
- This is the most scripturally consistent position.
- Furthermore, it actually holds perfectly with the definitions of the 17 vocabulary words for the atonement.
- Consider this as well.
 - The Father predestines the elect.
 - The Holy Spirit regenerates the elect.
 - Does it make sense that the Son (Jesus) would then die for all? That would put the members of the Trinity at odds with each other.
- Next, we will look at the Arminian position.

