

The Doctrines of Grace (7): Sufficient Atonement Hymns 174, A Debtor to Mercy Alone/Before the Throne of God Above, 179

In coming to the L of TULIP, we no doubt come to the most controversial, and in many ways, most difficult of the Doctrines of Grace. The reasons for this difficulty will become apparent as we move forward, but let me suggest, much of the difficulty has been caused by the phrase Limited Atonement.

Other phrases have been suggested that are better, for example, Particular or Definite Atonement. The main point is to underscore the fact that the atonement will of certainty save the elect. The death of Christ is effective to save them, and this without fail. This is one way the Scriptures portray the atonement of Christ.

But this is not the only way that Scripture portrays this atonement. And this is where the difficulty arises. I want to suggest that with all of the five points of Calvinism, there's two-sides to each point (truth).

For example, while Total Depravity maintains that native man can do nothing good religiously, it doesn't deny he can do good socially, and while Irresistible Grace maintains God will effectually call His people, it doesn't deny God generally and truly calls all men in the gospel.

Furthermore, while Perseverance of the Saints holds that every elect person will persevere to the end, this doesn't negate the responsibility for every elect person to endure to the end. Both are true and need stressing.

So too with regards to Limited (Definite) Atonement—while it's true the atonement secured the salvation of the elect, it's also true it was sufficient for the sins of the world. Both are true and equally important. The atonement was sufficient for the sins of the world and efficient (effectual or effective) for the elect.

Thus, what I want to do this morning is talk about how and why the atonement is sufficient for the world, and then return next week and discuss why the atonement is efficient or effective only for the elect.

This brings us to our topic of a Sufficient Atonement, and want to consider it under three headings: Simply Explained, Historically Tested, and Scripturally Verified.

- I. Simply Explained
- II. Historically Tested
- III. Scripturally Verified

I. Simply Explained

1. Here I want to consider an old formula that has been widely accepted by most Christians—while the atonement (or death) of Christ is sufficient for the world it's efficient or effective only for the elect.
2. (1) The atonement is sufficient for the world—by this is meant, Christ suffered sufficiently for the sins of the world.
3. Historically, we view Christ's suffering, while including His life, to specifically refer to His time on the cross.
4. It was for these three hours that our Savior endured in His human soul and body the penalty for our sin.
5. The quality of His suffering, especially for those three hours, was such that it satisfied the justice of God.

6. Remember, our sins deserve eternal punishment, a sentence our Savior satisfied on the cross in three hours.
7. Why? Because of who He was—the reason He could satisfy divine justice in such a short time, was because He's the GodMan.
8. Remember, Christ's sinless human nature was joined to the divine nature, so as to constitute one Person.
9. Thus, Christ, while possessing two distinct natures is one Person, and that one single Person is divine.
10. It's in every way right to say, Christ was and is a divine Person—and it's for this reason His death has infinite value.
11. Now, we mustn't think of His suffering as if He suffered just enough to atone for the sins of His people.
12. For example, let's say if we added up all the sins of the elect, and let's say for the sake of illustration, they amounted to one zillion sins (now, I know this number is very low, but let's keep it simple for the sake of illustration).
13. If one of God's elect committed one more or less sin, He would not have had to suffer a little more or little less.
14. Some Christians think of the atonement in these terms, as if Christ suffered just enough for one zillion sins.
15. But this is not true—Christ would have had to suffer the same amount for a million sins or ten zillion sins.
16. R.L. Dabney—"Had there been one sinner elected by God, this whole divine sacrifice would have been needed to expiate his guilt. Had every sinner of Adam's race been elected, the same one sacrifice would be sufficient for all."
17. To put it plainly—Christ suffered sufficiently for SIN—His death was sufficient for the sin of mankind.
18. Remember, I'm not at this point attempting to prove anything, but I am merely stating my proposition.
19. (2) The atonement is efficient for the elect—the word efficient means effective or effectual (it actually achieves its goal).
20. While Christ suffered sufficiently for the world, He suffered efficiently only for the elect (so as to secure their salvation).
21. Scripture portrays the death of Christ as an actual ransom that actually secures the redemption of a people.
22. Now, I'm going to return to this point next week, but here I simply want to point out they are both true.
23. The death of Christ was not only sufficient for the whole world, but it was also efficient for the elect.
24. Now, because it's rather difficult to harmonize these two facts, many people simply reject one of them.
25. Arminians reject that the atonement is only efficient for the elect, and high Calvinists reject it's sufficient for the world.
26. But both are true just as other things are true that seem, on the surface, to conflict or contradict one another.
27. For example, does God love all men, and yet, at the same time, only love some men with an electing love?
28. Does God call all men to Himself (in what's called the universal call), and yet, only call some with an effectual call?

29. And doesn't God exhort every Christians to persevere to the end, and yet, has promised each one will endure?
30. Or else, in a broader way, doesn't the Scripture describe God as sovereign and yet, man as responsible?
31. Most of us, if not all us, agree that Scripture teaches all of these truths, and all of them are equally important.
32. And if all of these apparent contradictions are maintained, then why not the two related truths of sufficiency and efficacy.
33. Joel Beeke—"We cannot fully grasp with our finite minds how to reconcile a definite, limited atonement with Christ's all sufficient blood and a universal gospel."

II. Historically Tested

1. Here I want to give a brief historical survey to show, the actual sufficiency view is an old and common view.
2. Peter Lombard (1096-1164)—"Christ offered Himself on the altar of the cross not to the devil, but to the triune God, and he did so for all with regard to the sufficiency of the price, but only for the elect with regard to its efficacy, because He brought about salvation only for the predestined."
3. Henry Bullinger (Second Helvetic Confession, 1566, chapter 15)—"For Christ took upon Himself and bore the sins of the world and satisfied the justice of God. God, therefore, is merciful unto our sins, for Christ alone, that suffered and rose again, and does not impute them unto us."
4. John Calvin (John 1:29)—"*The Lamb who takes away the sin of the world.* "He uses the word *sin* in the singular number, for any kind of iniquity; as if he had said, that every kind of unrighteousness which alienates men from God is *taken away* by Christ. And when he says, *the sin OF THE WORLD*, he extends this favor indiscriminately to the whole human race; that the Jews might not think that he had been sent to them alone. John the Baptist, therefore, by speaking generally of the sin of the world, intended to impress upon us the conviction of our own misery, and to exhort us to seek the remedy. Now our duty is, to embrace the benefit which is offered to all, that each of us may be convinced that there is nothing to hinder him from obtaining reconciliation in Christ, provided that he comes to him by the guidance of faith."
5. Canons of Dort (2:3-4)—"The death of the Son of God is the only and most perfect sacrifice and satisfaction for sin, and is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world. This death is of such infinite value and dignity because the person who submitted to it was not only really man and perfectly holy, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit."
6. Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)—"Christ's death is a sufficient sacrifice for all, if all would accept of it, and by faith plead it. It is sufficient for the salvation of all sinners, and the expiation of all sins. The wrath of God was so fully appeased by it, his justice so fully satisfied, that there is no bar to a readmission into his favor, and the enjoyment of the privileges purchased by it, but man's unbelief. It is absolutely sufficient in itself, so that if every son of Adam, from Adam himself to the last man, should by faith seek the benefit of it, it would be conferred up them."
7. Jonathan Edwards—"How and in what sense Christ 'takes away the sin of the world:' not because all the world shall actually be redeemed from sin by Him, but because (1) He has suffered sufficient to answer for the sins of the world, and so to redeem all mankind; (2) He actually does take away the sins of the elect world."
8. I've chosen these quotations because they represent areas of church history—Peter Lombard (medieval era), Bullinger, Calvin, and the Canons (Reformation era), Stephen Charnock and Edwards (Puritan era).

9. And brethren, surely you understand I could easily multiply these quotations and add others to the list.
10. And I admit that we can also find passages in these men that describe the atonement as definite and specific, but that's the whole point (people at times focus only on one side).

III. Scripturally Verified

1. Here I want to provide three broad arguments that prove the death of Christ was sufficient for all men.
2. (1) Common grace argues sufficiency of atonement—common grace refers to God's general kindness to mankind.
3. This is evidenced in His universal tokens of kindness give to man through temporal gifts and blessings.
4. But the greatest display of God's common grace is not the rain and sunshine, but the universal gift of a Savior.
5. You see, the Savior as He is made known in the gospel, is not given for some people, but for all people.
6. Put another way—Christ is the only official Savior of the world—there is no other Savior given to men.
7. 1Tim.4:10—"For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."
8. To say that this text has been variously understood would be an understatement, but let suggest it simply means what it says.
9. Notice, Paul divides humanity into two categories—there's "all men" and there's "those who believe."
10. God is the Savior of them all, but not in the same way—He is the Savior of the world and especially believers.
11. Now, we know how God is the Savior of believers, but the question becomes, how is He the Savior of all men?
12. I suggest, He's the Savior of men in an official way—He provides a Savior for them in the gospel of Christ.
13. Let me illustrate—think of rich and benevolent man who hires and sends a doctor to a sick African village.
14. He sends the doctor with sufficient for the whole village, but the fever has the villagers thinking unclearly (and unwilling to be healed).
15. Thus, the problem is not in the medicine nor in the doctor's willingness to heal, the problem lies in the people.
16. But, let's say for the sake of illustration that the benevolent man was also African and had family in the village.
17. Thus, he sends the doctor with the understanding, he must use force to apply the medicine to certain people.
18. This is similar to the gospel, for if you remember, our Savior told a parable that resembles this illustration.
19. Lk.14:15-24—"A certain man gave a great supper and invited many. But they all made excuses. Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.'"
20. You see, many older Reformed Christians viewed the gift of Christ as a general gift given to mankind lost.

21. This gift was given to all men (without exception) as an expression of God's common grace and love.
22. Thus, God is the Savior of "all men" as He's given all men a gospel in which they can be saved if they believe.
23. 1Jn.4:14—"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son Savior of the world"—in the official compacity of Savior.
24. (2) Gospel promises argue sufficiency of atonement—that is, the very nature of the gospel is that Christ died for our sins.
25. Furthermore, the gospel promises all men, that if they repent and believe on Christ they will be saved.
26. The gospel is often portrayed as a feast, and poor sinners are invited to come and feast upon God's grace.
27. But here's the question—is there really grace for them to feast upon? Does God invite them to an empty table?
28. Prov.9:1-6—"Wisdom has built her house, she has hewn out her seven pillars; she has slaughtered her meat, she has mixed her wine, she has also furnished her table. She has sent out her maidens, 'Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!' 'Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding.'"
29. (a) A preparation—"she has slaughtered her meat, she has mixed her wine, she has also furnished her table."
30. (b) An invitation—"She has sent out her maidens (gospel ministers) ...Come, eat my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed."
31. (c) An exhortation—"Forsake foolishness and live, and go in the way of understanding"—repent and believe.
32. Lk.14:16-17—"Then He said to him, 'A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, Come, for all things are now ready.'"
33. Jn.6:51-54—"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore quarreled among themselves, saying, 'How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?' Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.'"
34. What does it mean to "eat the flesh the Son of Man and drink His blood" but to believe upon Him (v47).
35. He is telling them that they need to believe upon Him as the one who's body would be broken and blood spilt on the cross.
36. They need to believe upon Him as the one who gave His life for them, who gave His life for the world.
37. John Calvin—"Which I shall give for the life of the world. By this He refers to the *giving* which was done on the cross, when He offered Himself as a sacrifice to His Father; for then He delivered Himself up to death for the life of men, and now He invites us to enjoy the fruit of His death."
38. Canons of Dort (2:6)—"And, whereas many who are called by the gospel do not repent nor believe in Christ, but perish in unbelief, this is not owing to any defect or insufficiency in the sacrifice offered by Christ upon the cross, but is wholly to be imputed to themselves."
39. John Calvin (Romans 5:18)—"Paul makes grace common to all men, not because it is fact extends to all, but because it is offered to all. For though Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world, and is offered through God's kindness indiscriminately to all, yet all do not receive him."
40. (3) Increased guilt argues sufficiency of atonement—that is, sinners are extra guilty if they reject the gospel.

41. Why are sinners extra guilty if they reject the gospel, but because they despise God's gift in the gospel.
42. Jn.3:14-18—"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For god so loved the world that he gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."
43. Personally, I find it tragic that a beautiful text such as John 3:16 has become a battleground for Christians.
44. (a) Verses before v16—here I'm thinking of vv14-15 and the imagery of Moses and the brazen serpent.
45. Just as God gave the entire nation the remedy, and only those who looked to the remedy lived, so God has given the entire world the remedy, but only those who believe in Him will be saved.
46. In both cases, the remedy is given to a larger group then will be saved—not all within the nation of Israel were saved, and not all within the world will be saved.
47. But, and this is an important point, just as the remedy was truly given to the nation, so the remedy was truly given to the entire world.
48. (b) Verses after v16—here I'm thinking of vv17-18 and especially our Savior's use of the word "world."
49. God so loved the world (v16, that He sent His Son into the world to save it (v17), but notice how the world is described in v18.
50. V18—"He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."
51. The world is comprised of two types or categories of people—there are those believe and those who do not believe.
52. Those who believed are saved or not condemned, and those who do not believe are increasingly condemned.
53. Why? "Because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"—thus, the condemnation mentioned in v18 is an increased condemnation.
54. Those who believe are saved and those who fail to believe are condemned, because they reject God's gift (v16).
55. Observation 1—The sufficiency of the atonement says something to preachers of the gospel—what is the gospel?
56. The gospel is a message about what God has done for sinners in Christ—it's a message about the person and work of Christ.
57. 1Cor.15:1-3—"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."
58. This is the gospel—it's a message about Christ dying for our sins and being raised for our justification.
59. Furthermore, the gospel always comes with the promise, that if you repent and believe you will be saved.
60. Thus, the death of Christ is at the very heart of the gospel—there is no gospel without the cross of Christ.
61. The gospel is not—Christ died sufficiently if you believe, but, because Christ died sufficiently you should believe.

62. Brethren, sinners are not merely exhorted to believe that Jesus may have died for them if they are elect.
63. They are commanded to believe upon Christ as the Lamb of God who died to reconcile them to God.
64. Now, let me clarify—this doesn't mean that we have to tell every person that Jesus specifically died for them.
65. But surely, we all agree, we must proclaim a Savior who suffered sufficiently for the sins of the world.
66. Isn't this how John introduced our Savior—"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."
67. This is why we can tell any and every sinner—"Jesus suffered on the cross so that you will be saved."
68. Observation 2—The sufficiency of the atonement says something to hearers of the gospel—that is, to sinners.
69. If the death of Christ possesses infinite value, then no sinner should despair they've sinned too much.
70. My dear friends, there is no amount of sinning that can not be atoned for by the blood of God's only Son.
71. Furthermore, this is why every sinner can and should believe the gospel and come to Christ for salvation.
72. Because God loves the world, He's given it a Savior! And this is good news because you are a part of this world!
73. Jn.3:16—"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on Him should not perish but have eternal life."
74. Remember, our Savior originally spoke these words to an unbeliever (Nikodemus), as the great Evangelist.
75. And look what He told him—that God loved the world, and because of this love, He gave it His Son.
76. And then He promised—"whosoever believes on Him will not perish, but will have life that is eternal."
77. Observation 3—The sufficiency of the atonement says something to lovers of the gospel—that is, to saints.
78. And what does this truth say to Christians but this—let us not only share the gospel but relish in it ourselves.
79. I hope to come back in two weeks and talk about the death of Christ is central to how and why we live as Christians.
80. But let me say in closing—just as the earth orbits around the sun, so the Scriptures orbit around the cross.
81. And here's the reason—we are not only saved by the cross, but sanctified, encouraged, and preserved by all that the cross entails.
82. Hymn (177)—"Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand, the shadow of a mighty Rock within a weary land; a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way, from the burning of the noontide heat, and the burden of the day."