

For Whom Did Christ Die? and Why?

These are fundamental questions. They demand clear and unequivocal answers. Here are mine: Christ did not die to make redemption a possibility, to provide²⁵ redemption, to make sinners redeemable. Christ died as a substitute for sinners to accomplish eternal redemption, a guaranteed redemption, and he did it for all the elect, and only for the elect. There are many passages of Scripture which make this very clear (Matt. 1:21; John 10:11,15; Acts 20:28; Rom. 8:31-39; 1 Cor. 15:3; Eph. 5:25; 1 Thess. 5:9-10; Tit. 2:14; 1 John 3:5,16; 4:10; Rev. 5:9 *etc.*) From this, plainly, I hold to a limited atonement, a particular redemption, a definite accomplished redemption.²⁶ But what of those passages which seem to speak of a general redemption, a universal atonement? There are several, often involving the word ‘all’ or ‘world’ (Isa. 53:6; John 1:29; 3:16-17; 6:32-33,51; 12:47; Rom. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:14-15,19; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; Heb. 2:9; 1 John 2:2 *etc.*) These, I am convinced, do not teach universal redemption, although, at first glance, it might appear so. Ella, I am sure, is at one with me on this, whereas Clifford takes such passages in a universal sense.²⁷ I will not, however, exegete these passages now²⁸ – this has been exhaustively done by excellent authors, and there is no need to repeat their arguments here.²⁹ After all, I am not at this time setting out to establish that Christ’s redemption was limited – this I take for granted.³⁰ The issue is: How to square this with the free offer? If these passages could be shown to teach universal redemption, the ‘problem’ would vanish.³¹ My point is, they teach particular redemption. The ‘problem’, therefore, remains.

As for the extent of the atonement,³² the question lies, not in the number, but the nature;³³ not in the arithmetic, but the quality.³⁴

It is not merely for whom Christ died; but what did God design by his death, and what did he accomplish by it? So, for example, when we read that ‘the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isa. 53:6), that God ‘did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up for us all’ (Rom. 8:32), that ‘Christ died for our sins’ (1 Cor. 15:3), that ‘God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation

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through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us' (1 Thess. 5:9-10), that 'Christ Jesus... gave himself a ransom for all' (1 Tim. 2:5-6), that he is 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29), and that 'he himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world' (1 John 2:2), then Christ *has* carried the sins of *all* for whom he stood, and *all* for whom he paid the ransom *are* redeemed, and for *all* of them God *is* propitiated. There are five main ways³⁵ of interpreting this:

1. Christ has redeemed all without exception, with no limit on the redemption or the 'all' for whom it was accomplished. This is the view of the Universalist. All men without exception are redeemed; all men without exception will be saved.

2. Christ has redeemed all without exception, but the redemption is conditional. If a man believes, the redemption is effectual; if he does not, it is ineffectual. In other words, the 'all' is without limit, but the redemption is emasculated. This is the Arminian view.

3. Christ has redeemed all without exception, sufficiently but conditional on faith; but for some, the elect, it is an effective redemption. In other words, while there is no limit on the 'all', the redemption is qualified; it is a twofold redemption. For all, God designed and Christ accomplished a provisional redemption, sufficient to redeem them, but conditional on their believing; for the elect, Christ's redemption is effective or efficient. A minority³⁶ of Calvinists take this view. It was the view of Moïse Amyraut.³⁷

4. Christ has redeemed the elect, but his death is sufficient for all. This is the view of perhaps a majority of Calvinists. John Owen was a typical exponent.

5. Christ has redeemed all the elect without exception, and no others. The maxim, 'efficient for the elect, sufficient for all', is not used. This, along with some others,³⁸ is my position.³⁹

As can be seen, apart from the first, all impose some sort of limit on the statement. Either the redemption is in some way or another limited, or the 'all' is; that is, the atonement is limited either in its nature or its extent. Universalist and Arminian views do not concern us here; it is the last three which do.

But, reader, before I move on, I want to clear up a possible misunderstanding about my use of ‘limited atonement’ and my disavowal of ‘sufficiency’.

A nice distinction

As for ‘limited atonement’, I agree with Andrew Fuller: ‘All the limitation I maintain in the death of Christ arises from pure *sovereignty*; it is a limitation of *design*’.⁴⁰ I will return to this.⁴¹ And as for the ‘sufficiency’,⁴² I want to make a nice, but important distinction.⁴³ Let me spell it out. There is a big difference between saying Christ is a perfect, complete, all-sufficient Saviour, and saying Christ’s redemption is sufficient for all. And, though this anticipates the climax of my book, there is a big difference between saying Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour is offered to sinners in the gospel, and saying a redemption sufficient-for-all is the basis of the free offer. To tell sinners: ‘Come to Christ, as God commands you in his word, and you will find him an all-sufficient Saviour’, is one thing; to tell sinners: ‘Christ has provided a redemption sufficient for all, sufficient for you, and this is the basis upon which you are to come’, is quite another.⁴⁴

As to Christ being an all-sufficient Redeemer for all the elect, take Owen:

The first thing that we shall lay down is concerning the dignity, worth, preciousness and infinite value of the blood and death of Jesus Christ... The Scripture... is exceeding full and frequent in setting forth the excellency and dignity of his death and sacrifice... Christ [is]... an all-sufficient Saviour, with whom is plenteous redemption, and who is able to save to the utmost them that come to God by him, and to bear the burden of all weary labouring souls that come by faith to him... [There is] the superabundant sufficiency of the oblation of Christ in itself, for whomsoever (fewer or more) it be intended.⁴⁵

John Bunyan:

Would Jesus Christ have mercy offered in the first place to the biggest sinners...? Then, by this... you must learn to judge of the sufficiency of the merits of Christ; not that the merits of Christ can be comprehended, for that they are beyond the conceptions of the whole world; being called the unsearchable riches of Christ... Consider what offers... he

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makes of his grace to sinners; for to be sure, he will not offer beyond the virtue of his merits; because... his merits are the basis and bounds upon and by which his grace stands good and is let out to sinners... There is a sufficiency in his blood to save the biggest sinners... If he had not been able to have reconciled the biggest sinners to his Father by his blood, he would not have sent to them... the doctrine of remission of sins; for remission of sins is through faith in his blood... Upon the... worthiness of the blood of Christ, grace acts, and offers forgiveness of sin to men... The blood of Christ is of infinite value, for that he offers mercy to the biggest of sinners... Now, the biggest sinners cannot be saved but by an abundance of grace... He has unsearchable riches of grace and worth in himself... He is still as full as ever. He is not a jot the poorer for all the forgivenesses that he has given away to great sinners... Since his grace is extended according to the worth of his merits... there is the same virtue in his merits to save now as there was at the very beginning.

[Again:] The grace that is offered to sinners as sinners... is a sufficiency of righteousness, pardoning grace, and life, laid up in the person of Christ, held forth in the exhortation and word of the gospel, and promised to be theirs that receive it; indeed, I say, in so universal a tender, that not one is by it excluded or checked in the least.⁴⁶

John Gill, too, spoke of the all-sufficiency of Christ for all the elect:

There is a fullness of fitness and abilities in Christ to discharge his work and office as mediator, which greatly lies in his being both God and man, or in the union of the two natures, divine and human, in one person. Hereby he becomes abundantly qualified to be... the mediator... Being God as well as man, there is a sufficient virtue in all his actions and sufferings to answer what they were designed for; in his blood to cleanse from all sin, in his righteousness to justify from it, and in his sacrifice to expiate and atone for it. Being the mighty God, he could travel in the greatness of his strength, draw nigh to God for us, offer up himself to God, bear our sins, and all the punishment due unto them, without failing or being discouraged; his own arm alone was capable of bringing salvation to himself and us; there is nothing wanting in him, to make him a complete Saviour of the body, and head of the church... This fullness is inexhaustible... The grace of our Lord has been abundant, superabundant; it has flowed, and overflowed; there has been a pleonasm,⁴⁷ a redundancy of it in the case of a single believer. O what must the aboundings of it have been to all the saints in all ages, times and places, since the foundation of the world! And still there is enough for the family [of God] on earth yet behind... His grace is still sufficient for them; it is like the author of it, who has

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treasured it up in Christ, it changes not, and, like the subject in whom it dwells, it is the same today, yesterday, and for ever.⁴⁸

But, I repeat, to say that Christ is an all-sufficient Saviour for all the elect is not the same as saying he has provided a redemption sufficient for all without exception, and that this universal sufficiency is the basis upon which sinners are invited to Christ. Not the same at all. Booth was clear on the issue. While he had no doubts about the all-sufficiency of the Saviour and his sacrifice for the elect,⁴⁹ he did not adopt the ‘sufficient for all’ formula:

We cannot perceive any solid reason to conclude that [Christ’s] propitiatory sufferings are sufficient for the expiation of sins which he did not bear, or for the redemption of sinners whom he did not represent as a sponsor when he expired on the cross. For the substitution of Christ, and the imputation of sin to him, are essential to the scriptural doctrine of redemption by our adorable Jesus. We may, therefore, safely conclude that our Lord’s voluntary substitution, and redemption by his vicarious death, are both of them limited to those for whom he was made sin – for whom he was made a curse – and for whose deliverance from final ruin, he actually paid the price of his own blood. Consequently, that redemption is particular, and peculiar to the chosen of God.⁵⁰

Fuller: ‘The death of Christ... [is] a sacrifice of infinite value... his sufferings were of infinite value’.⁵¹ In another place, he spoke of ‘the all-sufficient redemption of Jesus Christ’.⁵²

John Brown:

When we think that those for whom [Christ] died are ‘an innumerable company, out of every kindred, and people and tongue’, and when we reflect on the number, and variety and duration of the blessings which he has secured for every one of these, we cannot help perceiving that if [since] the dignity of his person stamped an infinite value on his sacrifice, the efficacy of that sacrifice reflects a glorious light on the dignity of his person.⁵³

So, reader, I hope I have made myself clear. While I hold to a limited atonement, and do not say that Christ’s redemption is sufficient for all, the limit is simply that which God intended. I do not imply the slightest deficiency in the work of Christ. Certainly not! Perish the thought!

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Let me put it positively, in biblical terms. The worth of Christ's person and work? They are 'indescribable' (2 Cor. 9:15), of 'unspeakable' (AV) perfection and fullness, over which 'words fail'. We are speaking of 'the unsearchable [unfathomable, NASB] riches of Christ' (Eph. 3:8) which 'cannot be traced out... cannot be comprehended'.⁵⁴

Thus I concur with Clifford when he said that the 'intrinsically infinite value' of 'Christ's sacrifice' 'derived from his person', is 'a view shared by all parties'.⁵⁵

And I agree with Dort:

Those who possess Jesus Christ through faith, have complete salvation in him. Therefore, for any to assert that Christ is not sufficient, but that something more is required besides him, would be too gross a blasphemy... All his benefits, which, when become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins... Relying and resting upon the obedience of Christ crucified alone, which becomes ours when we believe in him... is sufficient to cover all our iniquities, and to give us confidence in approaching to God; freeing the conscience of fear, terror and dread.⁵⁶

The worth of Christ's sacrifice? Let the Scriptures sum it up:

'Our Lord Jesus Christ... gave *himself*' (Gal. 1:3-4), 'gave *himself*' (Gal. 2:20), 'has... given *himself*' (Eph. 5:2), 'gave *himself*' (Eph. 5:25), 'gave *himself*' (1 Tim. 2:6), 'gave *himself*' (Tit. 2:14). He came to 'give' *his 'flesh'* (John 6:51), 'to give *his life*' (Matt. 20:28), '*his soul*' (NASB margin), 'gives [lays down] *his life*' (John 10:11,15,17-18). God 'did not spare *his own Son*' (Rom. 8:32), who 'purchased' 'the church of God... with *his own blood*' (Acts 20:28), 'with *his own blood* he entered the Most Holy Place' (Heb. 9:12), 'and washed us from our sins in *his own blood*' (Rev. 1:5).

Reader, God gave his own Son, who gave *himself*, his flesh, his life, his soul, his own blood. What more could he give (John 15:13; Rom. 5:8)? He gave ***himself*** – HIMSELF!

Now to go on.