
Mission 119 Ministries

**DECONSTRUCTING CALVINISM
EPISODE 4: WHAT IS REALLY AT
ISSUE IN LIMITED ATONEMENT?**

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SERIES GOALS

- **Short, focused lessons**
 - **Explain Calvinism**
 - **Address claims of Calvinism**
 - **Exegetically**
 - **Historical**
 - **Philosophically**
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EPIISODE GOAL

- **One of the five core tenets of Calvinism is limited atonement**
 - **But many Calvinists reject limited atonement**
 - **Where does the real debate lay?**
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LIMITED ATONEMENT

Historical or mainline Calvinism has consistently maintained that Christ's redeeming work was definite in *design and accomplishment*—that it was intended to render complete satisfaction for certain specified sinners, and that it actually secured salvation for these individuals and no one else. (David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism*, pp. 39-40)

LIMITED ATONEMENT

- **How you define limited atonement is critical**
 - **Are we saying Jesus died only for the elect?**
 - **Or are we saying MORE — Jesus' death “was intended to render complete satisfaction for certain specified sinners, and that it actually secured salvation for these individuals and no one else”?**
 - **Were you “saved” when you trusted Christ?**
 - **Or were you saved at the moment of the cross?**
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LIMITED ATONEMENT

- **If Jesus died for only some (the “elect”)**
 - **THEN only the elect can be saved and no one else**
 - **THEN everyone else cannot respond in faith to the gospel message (i.e. total depravity)**
 - **THEN no one can on their own resources respond in faith to the gospel message (i.e. total depravity)**
 - **THEN God must do this for some (i.e. irresistible grace)**
 - **THEN God must select some to give faith to (i.e. unconditional election)**
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LIMITED ATONEMENT

- **If Jesus died for all**
 - **THEN what did his death accomplish?**
 - **OPTION 1: universalism**
 - **OPTION 2: some other ingredient is needed for someone to be saved**
 - **BUT OPTION 2 means**
 - **Jesus did not at the cross save anyone**
 - **Jesus provided the possibility only**
 - **Perhaps none would ever be saved**
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LIMITED ATONEMENT

- **BUT OPTION 2 / possible salvation only**
 - **If some other ingredient is needed, who provides it?**
 - **And does this mean Jesus' blood was not enough?**
 - **If the sinner provides the other ingredient — say faith — then is the sinner ultimately saving himself?**
 - **If you say that Jesus' death ACCOMPLISHED salvation, then to AVOID universalism you MUST limit the atonement (to the elect?) — is this conclusion driven by a theological commitment or exegesis?**
 - **But if Jesus' death ACCOMPLISHED salvation for the elect only, then what is the purpose of the gospel / faith?**
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UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

- **Assuming unconditional election is true**
 - **THEN God has to implement a plan to save only the elect**
 - **THEN for the non-elect**
 - **OPTION 1: God makes no provision for them at the cross (aka limited atonement)**
 - **OPTION 2: God makes provision for them at the cross but they are unable to appropriate it —> total depravity —> irresistible grace**
 - **BUT this gets us back to the question of what was accomplished at the cross**
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UNCONDITIONAL ELECTION

- **If Jesus' death 100% secured salvation for some, then why evangelism, gospel, faith?**
 - **Answer would seem to be that we still have total depravity, and so while salvation was accomplished the elect person needs to be regenerated and Spirit-indwelled so they can live right; this view presumes election**
 - **If Jesus' death made salvation available to all, then what is the purpose of election?**
 - **Answer would seem to be that we still have total depravity, and so while salvation is available God has to give the faith to those He wants to save; this view necessitates election**
 - **Obviously what is meant by total depravity is key**
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PUTTING IT TOGETHER

- **The LIMITED ATONEMENT QUESTION puts at issue total depravity, unconditional election, and what did Jesus actually accomplish at the cross**
 - **Everything intertwines, so to a large degree everything rises and falls together**
 - **And those adhering to limited atonement MUST engage in these issues because they have scant exegetical support for limited atonement**
 - **1 John 2:2: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for *the sins of the whole world*.**
 - **The lack of exegetical support is why so many Calvinists reject limited atonement (and the view of what Jesus did at the cross)**
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MIDDLE GROUND

- **The problem is that theological commitments are driving the debate and not exegesis — Calvinists created their inconsistencies, not the Bible**
 - **The Bible AFFIRMS...**
 - **Faith is a necessary prerequisite to salvation**
 - **Faith is NOT A WORK so no one is saving themselves**
 - **But a person is involved in their salvation — they appropriate / receive the gift of salvation by faith**
 - **This allows for an unlimited atonement / provision without universalism**
 - **Because the atonement is not limited, we are not forced to impose unconditional election**
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THE BIBLE SAYS...

John 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

Rom. 3:28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

1Cor. 15:1 ¶ Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

Gal. 3:2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

Gal. 3:14 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.
