THE DOCTRINE OF THE ATONEMENT

Adult Bible Institute | Nov. 15, 2026 | *ECD 275-291*

→ Job's Question & the NT Answer: Job 9:1-2, 32-33 // 1 Tim. 2:5-6: *One Mediator, Jesus the Man!*

→ **Atonement** – *The work of Jesus Christ by which he brings about salvation to the sinner, restoring relationship between a sinful man and holy God (McKitterick).*

- *The [English] theological word "Atonement" was first used in 1526, in the sense of "Reconciliation or the restoration of friendly relations between God and sinners."* (Demarest, 167).
- *It comes from the Hebrew verb kāpar ("make atonement," more than 100 times in the OT)…which means to propitiate God's wrath, expiate sins, and restore fellowship between God and sinners*. (Demarest, 169).

I. The Sufficiency of the Atonement ~ *it is a perfect atonement, lacking in nothing*

a. Sufficient Because of its **Objectivity** ~ *it is external to us, independent from us, and unchanging.*

b. Sufficient Because of its **Finality** ~ *"It is finished!" A single, "once for all", unrepeatable work!*

- Limitations of the OT Sacrificial System (Demarest, pp. 170-71):
  - The sacrifices themselves were unable to fully atone for sin (Ps 51:16)
  - The blood of bulls and goats could not clear the conscience (Heb 9:9-10; 10:4)
  - Offered daily and annually, they could not permanently remove sin (Heb 9:25; 10:11).
  - In contrast, Heb. 9:28 declares that Christ was offered ONCE to bear the sins of many!

c. Sufficient Because of Its **Efficacy** ~ *it accomplished an actual 'effect'—it effected an actual result.*

- Rom. 5:10: …*while we were enemies, we were **reconciled** to God <u>through</u> **the death** of His Son…*
- *"Jesus' death did not make sins <u>forgivable</u>; it <u>accomplished forgiveness</u>." (ECD, p. 276)*

II. The Extent of the Atonement~ *for whom did Christ die? On behalf of whom did Christ satisfy the wrath of God?*

a. Two different categories of answers:

- **General Atonement** ~ *Christ died for the sins of every person ("all", "the world")*
- **Particular Atonement** ~ *Christ died for the sins of the elect*

"When we are dealing with the infinite and glorious reality of the atonement, we are attempting to describe something that cannot be fully understood. Romans 11:33-36 exhorts us to worship as we consider the multifaceted diamond of salvation and it also cautions us from attempting to read the mind of God. We need to trust 1) He has revealed what He wants us to know, 2) He will never contradict Himself in His word, and 3) that our finite minds cannot always get our mental arms around His infinite ways and workings. While we need to ask the hard questions and pursue biblical clarity, we also need to remember we are studying the ways of an infinite God." (McKitterick).

b. A Sampling of Passages that emphasize *Particularity*

- Acts 20:28 "…the church…which he obtained by his own blood"
- Rom 3:24-25 "through redemption…whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood…"
- Rom 5:9 "…justified by his blood…"
- Eph 1:7 "…redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses…"
- Eph 2:13 "brought near by the blood Christ…"
- Heb 9:12 "…by means of his own blood…securing an eternal redemption…"
- 1 Jn 1:7 "the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin"

c. A Sampling of Passages that emphasize *Generality/Universality:*

- Jn. 3:16 ~ …God so loved the world…
- 1 Tim. 2:4 ~ …God desires all men to be saved…
- 1 Tim. 2:6 ~ …Christ gave himself as a ransom for all…
- 2 Pet. 2:1 ~ …false teachers deny the Master who bought them…
- 1 Jn. 2:2 ~…He is the propitiation not only for our sins, but also for *those of* the whole world…
- 1 Tim. 4:10 ~ …God is the Savior of all men, especially of believers…

3 Biblical Realities that Argue for **Particular Atonement**

- The Predestination of the Elect *(Eph. 1:4-5; Rom. 8;29-30, 33; 9:22-23)*
- The Propitiation of God's Wrath *(1 Jn. 3:5; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; Rom. 5:10)*
- The Priestly Work of Christ *(Lev. 16; Heb. 8-9; Jn. 17:9; Rom. 8:32-34).*

1) The Predestination of God's Elect

- God's Word is clear that God has predestined *some,* not *all* for salvation (Eph. 1:4-5; Rom. 8:29-39, 33; 9:22-23)
- God's election is particular, not universal.
- God the Father sent Jesus the Son to accomplish His will—securing this elect people (Jn. 6:39)
- The Father and the Son are perfectly united in the same will (Jn. 4:34)
- John 10 and 17 show that Jesus's salvation was for this *particular group – namely, God's elect.*

  JOHN 10 ~ *for whom does Jesus lay down His life?*
  - For those whom he "calls … by name" (v. 3b), who hear his voice (vv. 3b, 16, 27a), who follow him (v. 27b), who receive eternal life (v. 28a), who are specially cared for (vv. 12–14), and who are preserved to the end (vv. 28b, 29b); Those who prove to be the "sheep" given by the Father to the Son (v. 29a).[1]
  - **Note:** Verses 26–29 confirm this: those who do not hear are not part of the flock for whom Christ has come to lay down his life.[2]

  JOHN 17 ~ *on behalf of whom does Jesus pray in His High Priestly Prayer (related to His sacrificial death)?*
  - those who believe in Jesus (v. 8b), who obey the word (v. 6b), who receive eternal life (v. 2), who are sanctified (v. 17, 19), who are protected from the evil one (vv. 11–12, 15), and those who are glorified (v. 24), those to whom the Son savingly reveals the Father (vv. 6a, 26a).[3]
  - **Note:** Christ explicitly restricts his prayer by saying he is not praying for the world but for those whom the Father has given him (v. 9).[4]

- Argument from Rom. 8:29-39 (cf. *ECD,* pp. 284-85)
  - v. 32 explicitly describes the extent of **the atonement** applying to a particular group—namely, *'for <u>US</u> all"*
  - Who is the us? (look for antecedent). Well, in v. 31 it is the *"us"* whom God is *for. "…God is for us…"*
  - But then vv. 29-30 identify specifically who this "us" group is—namely, those *whom He foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified!*
  - v. 33 then identifies this same group by a specific title: *"God's elect"*

Summary of Argument: *"If the Father's election is particular and not universal, and if the Father and the Son are perfectly united in their saving will and purpose, it is impossible that the Son's atonement should be universal and not particular." (ECD, p. 279)*

2) The Propitiation of God's Wrath

- God's Word is clear that Jesus' death accomplished *propitiation* for *our* sin *(Rom. 5:10; 1 Jn. 3:5; 4:10; Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17)*
- In a biblical understanding of *propitiation*, there is a twofold dynamic taking place:
  - *Sin is being expiated (expunged, cleansed),*
  - *God's wrath is being appeased (satisfied, turned away)*
- Since the **atonement** effectually accomplished the expiation of sin and propitiation of God's wrath, in what way does the atonement extend to unbelievers (if it is general/universal)?

- Key Question: *in whose place did Christ stand as a substitutionary sacrifice when he bore the full fury of his Father's righteous wrath against sin?*
  - Answer: *only those who will never bear that wrath themselves, namely, the elect alone.* (ECD, p. 278)

Summary of Argument: *"Since, then, Christ's atonement is inherently efficacious, and since it is agreed that not all will finally be saved, the extent of the atonement must be limited… If there is a penalty left for the sinner to pay in hell, then that penalty was not paid by Christ on the cross. That leaves only two options: either (1) Christ's sacrifice was impotent and ineffective, or (2) Christ's powerful and efficacious sacrifice was accomplished for a specific number of persons."* (ECD, p. 282)

3) The Priestly Work of Christ

- Heb. 9:23 explicitly states that the OT sacrificial system served as a **pattern** for the perfect, final atonement of Christ.
- The NT expects us to understand Christ's atoning work in light of the OT atonement system—particularly through the lens of *the High Priest's ministry on the Day of Atonement* (Lev. 16).
- On this annual Day of Atonement, the High Priest had a **<u>twofold role</u>** in the accomplishment of atonement (cf. *ECD, p. 283)*:
  - *Sacrificial Slaughter of the Goat (Lev. 16:9)*
  - *Intercessory Sprinkling of its Blood (Lev. 16:15, cf. 18-19)*

---

[1] Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 192.
[2] Carl R. Trueman, "Definite Atonement View," in *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: 3 Views*, 24–25.
[3] Bruce A. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 192.
[4] Carl R. Trueman, "Definite Atonement View," in *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: 3 Views*, 25.

The Inferential Argument: *the **extent** of the priest's sacrificial ministry is identical to his intercessory ministry. The priest would NOT sacrifice the goat on behalf of everyone throughout the Gentile world and then sprinkle its blood only on behalf of Israel. No, the sacrifice and the intercession were two sides of the same atoning coin, both done on behalf of Israel alone. The same principle applies to Christ's priestly work (Heb. 9:24) – His atoning sacrifice is inextricable linked to His intercessory work. (cf. ECD, 283-84).*

Because Christ's intercessory work as High Priest is undeniably particular to the elect (Heb. 4:14-15; 1 Jn. 2:1; Rom. 8:32-34; Jn 17:9), it fits the priestly pattern for His sacrificial atonement as High Priest to also be particular to the elect.

→ While there are other strong biblical realities that should be considered in favor of the Particular Atonement view, these are compelling. Still, *the key that weights things toward this view is understanding the **effectual nature** of the atonement.*

→ Carl Trueman: *the Bible does not present the atonement as limited; it presents it as **effective**, from which limitation is an inference.*[5]

III. The Theological Tension with Universalistic Texts

- The presence of passages that speak of the atonement in universal terms (*see sampling above*) often introduces *theological tension* – and to be exegetically honest, we need to at times learn to live with that tension.
- At the same time, many of those passages that use the language of "all" or "the whole world" do have very reasonable explanations that do not require a universal atonement position.
- And we need keep in mind two primary realities as we consider these passages:
    - *The Reality of Immediate Context*
    - *The Reality of Speech Conventions*
- **The caution:** *"the presence of universal language should not automatically be read to mean 'all without exception'." (ECD, p. 278).*
- Nonetheless, there are still passages that we simply must wrestle with and acknowledge the tension that God does in fact reveal the atonement in universal terms (i.e. 1 John 2:1-2).
- So questions some questions rise like:
    - In what way is Christ the Savior of the world?
        - Answer: *In that He is the only Savior of the world; and the world is the realm of humanity, out which many receive His salvation.*
    - In what way does Christ's atonement benefit unbelievers?
        - Answer: *It is the grounds for God's forbearance and common grace (cf. Rom. 3:25)*

IV. The Doctrine of Atonement Helps us In Our Ongoing Battle with Sin (1 John 2:1-2).

Now, people can fall into 1 of 3 temptations in their relationship to sin.

- There are those who are tempted to be **dangerously indulgent** in sin…
- There are those who are tempted to be **dangerously indifferent** to sin…
- But there are also those who may struggle with being **dangerously introspective** about sin.

Here, the Apostle John brings truth to all three:

- Here in verse 1, he is clearly warning the *indulgent –I'm writing so that you don't keep on sinning!*
- To the *indifferent*, v. 1 also has an embedded warning – *you need to take sin seriously!*
- But then he turns to the one who may be tempted to become *dangerously introspective* about sin, and says (v. 1b): *"And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;"!*

- This is tremendous HOPE – *we have an ADVOCATE!* And John grounds that glorious HOPE in the atoning work of Christ in v. 2: *"…He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world."*

- Guard against the distortion of imagining that God the Father is somehow angry or reluctant and that Jesus is coaxing Him to forgive us…NO!…the atonement is SOURCED in God the Father's LOVE!

- 1 John 4:10 ~"In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the **propitiation** for our sins."

---

[5] Carl R. Trueman, "Definite Atonement View," in *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: 3 Views*, (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2015), 55.