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TULIP – The Fundamentals of the Faith by which we are Saved

Sermon #5 – Definite Atonement – For Whom did Christ Die? (con)

January 30, 2022

Sermon Text: Assorted

Scripture Reading: Acts 16:1-10

Heb 2:14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil,

Christ's sacrifice on the cross *effected* the redemption of His people. As we have seen (John 17) He died for those whom the Father had given Him – in other words, Christ died and accomplished redemption for *the elect* whom the

Father chose in eternity past according to His own good pleasure, not because of anything seen in the person.

This morning I want to continue with this important topic and also examine some of the scriptures that are commonly used to claim that Christ died for every human being, but for no one in particular.

If you have ever watched a vampire movie or read Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula*, you have seen certain weaponry used to thwart the vampire. One such weapon is a crucifix or cross. Hold it up and the vampire cringes. But ultimately the cross proves to be ineffectual. It has no power in itself to save.

That actually serves as a very good illustration of what most professing Christians think about the cross of Christ. Namely, that Christ's death on the cross had some good effect, but its outcome is quite uncertain.

Why? Because most Christians hold to the Pelagian view of man, insisting that the sinner has the ability within himself to choose Christ. The cross, they say, paid for everyone's sin, but to no avail unless the sinner turns in repentance and faith to Christ.

Reformed theology, and in fact the Bible itself, teaches no such thing about the Cross. Scripture says that Christ defeated the devil on the cross, that He propitiated (satisfied) the Father's wrath by meeting fully and finally the demands of the Law and that therefore every single one of those chosen by God have had redemption accomplished for them. Further, that accomplished redemption also includes the means by which that redemption will be applied to them – repentance and faith. There is no uncertainty about it. This is the power of the Cross.

Col 2:13-15 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him,

having forgiven us all our trespasses, (14) by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. (15) He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

In his book, A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith [Thomas Nelson, 1998], Dr. Robert Reymond discusses the Cross, and he has a very good section under the heading “Ten Lines of Evidence for the Doctrine of Particular Redemption.” I cannot do better than he and so let me summarize these 10 points for you, with many thanks to Dr. Reymond:

1. The Bible uses *particularistic* vocabulary for who it is for whom Christ died. The true Israel, His people, His friends, His sheep, His body, the church, and so on.

But it should also be evident that one of these particularizing terms—the “elect”—clearly carries

with it the implication that some are excluded from the saving intention and salvific work of Christ.

And certain details in the other passages suggest that the designated people for whom Christ died stand in a divinely distinguished gracious relationship to him different in kind from the relationship in which other people stand to him, because of which relationship he did his cross work for them.

For example, Christ declared that he, as the good Shepherd, would lay down his life for his sheep (John 10:11, 15). But how does it come about that one is his sheep? By believing on him? Not at all.

Jesus said to the Jews, not (as it is often represented): “You are not my sheep because you do not believe,” but: “You do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to [believe] my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:26–27).⁶ From this we may infer that unless one is already in some sense one of his sheep he

does not believe, and also that it is because one is already in some sense one of his sheep that he believes on him.

But if one is already in some sense one of his sheep prior to faith, on the basis of which prior “shepherd-sheep” relationship Christ does his cross work for the sheep and the sheep in turn believes on him, then that relationship itself can only be the result of distinguishing grace and thus a relationship different from that which the others sustain to him.

Another example is Ephesians 5:25, where Paul teaches, first, that Christ loved the church and gave himself for it. From this juxtaposition of these two verbs, it may be inferred both that the church enjoyed a special existence and a standing before Christ such that he “loved” her prior to his “giving” himself for it, and that his love for his church was the motivating power behind his “giving” himself for it.

A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith . Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

2. God's Redemptive Love is Not Inclusive of Fallen Angels

“It is clear that the Triune God's redemptive love is not unlimited or universal from the undeniable fact that it does not embrace fallen angels (Heb. 2:16). There are “elect angels” (1 Tim. 5:21) who clearly were elected on supra-lapsarian grounds since they were not chosen from a mass of angels viewed as fallen, and accordingly there are fallen angels concerning whose redemption no divine efforts have been or will be expended, although they are creatures as much in need of redemption as are fallen men (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).”

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Let's take a moment at this point to think about the question, “why is

this subject important to us?” The answer, at least in part, is this:

That Christ's sacrifice on the Cross actually accomplished the redemption of His people, provides us with great confidence and a fuller appreciation of so great a salvation. While we were yet sinners, the Father chose us – before we were ever born. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And thus my salvation rests upon Christ alone, not upon my feeble and fickle ability to choose Him and to continue to choose Him.

3. The Irreversible Condition of Lost Men Already in Hell When Christ Died

“Unless one is prepared to say that Christ gave all the dead a second chance to repent (some would say a “first chance”), it is impossible to suppose that Christ died with the intention of saving those whose eternal destiny had already been sealed in death, who were at the time of his death already in hell. He clearly did not die with the

intention of saving them. Through erroneous exegesis of Ephesians 4:8–10 [“He descended into the lower regions of the earth...] and 1 Peter 3:19 [“in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison], some expositors urge that all these dead were given a chance to repent after Christ died, but the author of Hebrews disputes this by the unqualified teaching: “it is appointed unto men once to die and after this [that is, after death] comes the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Jesus’ teaching in his parable of the rich man and Lazarus also strongly suggests that one’s destiny after death is irreversibly final...

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Now, this next point Dr. Reymond makes is one that I have not thought about before directly, though perhaps to some degree when I have considered the common question – “but what about those who never heard of Christ...?”

4. The Limited Number of People, by Divine Arrangement, Who Actually Hear the Gospel

“It is difficult to believe that the Triune God intended Christ’s death for every man, woman and child, the blessing of which is enjoyed upon condition that they believe in him, when he has not arranged for everyone to hear the gospel.

While it is true that Christ has commanded his church to carry the gospel to the nations, it is equally true that many people throughout the course of the centuries have lived and died in spiritual darkness, never having heard the gospel.

And the biblical evidence would indicate that God, by determining as he has the recipients of special revelation and by governing the geographic directions of missionary history, determined that some people would not hear the gospel.

For example, throughout Israel’s history in the Old Testament, God

related himself to that nation in a way which he never did to any of the Gentile nations. He left the Gentile nations “alienated from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world” (Eph. 2:12).

Throughout Old Testament times he “let all the nations go their own way” (Acts 14:16) and “overlooked their ignorance” in the sense that he did nothing directly to overcome it (Acts 17:30). Exclusively to Israel did God entrust the oracles of God (Rom. 3:1–2).

And the Psalmist even evokes praise to the Lord because “he has revealed his word to Jacob, his laws and decrees to Israel. He has done this for no other nation; they do not know his laws. Praise the Lord” (Ps. 147:19–20).

Furthermore, God adopted only Israel as his son (Rom. 9:4). As God declared to Israel through Amos: “You only have I known [“loved covenantally”], of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2).

Accordingly, in their midst alone the Shekinah presence of God dwelt. With them he made his covenants, to them he revealed his law, they alone possessed the temple services which instructed them in the salvific ways of God and the promises of God, and theirs were the patriarchs and from them came the Messiah according to the flesh, who is over all, the ever-blessed God (Rom. 9:4–5).

During his earthly ministry Christ praised his Father, the Lord of heaven and earth, that he had hidden the gospel mysteries from the wise and learned and had revealed them to “little children” (Matt. 11:25), tracing his Father’s actions to his good pleasure (11:26). He also declared that only those to whom he reveals the Father know him (11:27).

On his second missionary journey, Paul and his companions “passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and when they had come to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did

not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas” (Acts 16:6–8).

As a result the gospel spread westward into Europe and not eastward toward Asia, and many Asians died never having heard of Christ.

Clearly, the matter of who hears the gospel is under the providential governance of the sovereign God, and he has so arranged gospel history that many people will never hear about Christ. It is unthinkable to suppose then that God sent his Son to save people who, by the ordering of his own providence, never hear the gospel in order that they may believe and be saved.⁷

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5. Christ’s High Priestly Work is Restricted to the Elect

Joh 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.

6. The Father’s Particular Saving Will and Work

Christ’s work on the cross (Reymond notes), cannot conflict with His Father’s intention. Christ came to do the will of His Father, and the Bible plainly says that God the Father in eternity past chose a people, elected them, for Himself and unto salvation. Christ’s ministry and Cross were carried out for the salvation of those elect. As Reymond says:

“It is unthinkable to believe that Christ would say: “I recognize, Father, that your election and your salvific intentions terminate upon only a portion of mankind, but because my love is more inclusive and expansive than yours, I am not satisfied to die only for those you have elected. I am going to die for everyone.”

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7. The Death to Sin and Resurrection to Newness of Life of all Those for Whom Christ Died

“All those for whom Christ died are said in Scripture, by virtue of their spiritual union with him, to have died with Christ and to have risen with him to newness of life (Rom. 6:5–11; 2 Cor. 5:14–15).”

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Think carefully about these verses in regard to this subject:

Eph 5:25-27 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and **gave himself up for her**, (26) that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, (27) so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

8. The Particularity of the Gift of Faith – a “purchased blessing”

“The Bible teaches that faith in Jesus Christ is an absolutely indispensable necessity for salvation. But such faith is not natural to the fallen human heart (see Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14). (John H. Gerstner declares: “Alongside getting faith out of a heart that is utterly hostile and unbelieving, making a silk purse out of a sow’s ear or getting blood from a turnip is child’s play.”¹⁰)

To the contrary, Scripture makes it clear that faith in Jesus Christ is a spiritual gift traceable to divine grace (Acts 13:48; 16:14; 18:27; Eph. 2:8–9; Phil. 1:29). Moreover, Scripture makes it clear that “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms” that men receive, they receive by virtue of the *en Christo*, relation and Christ’s “procuring” work at the cross (Eph. 1:3; Rom. 8:32; 1 Cor. 4:7; Gal. 3:13–14). As the Westminster Larger Catechism, question 57, declares: “Christ, by his mediation, hath procured redemption, with all other benefits of the covenant of grace.”

We may conclude then that faith in Jesus Christ is one of the saving spiritual graces which Christ's death procured for all for whom he died. (Ibid.)

But not all people repent, nor do all people exercise faith. Why? Because Christ only procured these gifts by His work on the cross. They are part of the redemption He accomplished for His elect.

9. The Intrinsic Efficacy of Christ's work on the Cross is Necessarily Exclusive

The Scriptures make it clear that Christ died not a potentially but an actually sacrificial death on the cross (1 Cor. 5:7; Heb. 9:23, 26; 10:24), becoming there both sin (2 Cor. 5:21) and curse (Gal. 3:13) as the substitute for others (peri—Rom. 8:3; Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:18), as the substitute in behalf of others (hyper—Rom. 5:6–8; 8:32; 14:15; Gal. 2:13, 20; 1 Cor. 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:15; Heb. 2:9), as the substitute for the sake of others (dia—1 Cor. 8:11), and as the substitute in the stead or place of others (anti—

Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45), thereby paying the penalty, bearing the curse, and dying the death for all those for whom he died.

Christ by his death work actually (1) destroyed the works of the devil in behalf of (1 John 3:8; Heb. 2:14–15; Col. 2:14–15), (2) propitiated God's wrath for (by satisfying the demands of divine justice) (Rom. 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), (3) reconciled God to (Rom. 5:10–11; 2 Cor. 5:18–20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20–21), and (4) redeemed from the curse of the law and the guilt and power of sin (Gal. 3:13; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14; Tit. 2:14) all those for whom he died as a sacrifice.

If he did his cross work for all mankind, then the sins of all mankind have been atoned for. But then all mankind would be saved... (Ibid).

In other words, when people insist that Christ died for the sins of every human being, they are necessarily insisting *universalism* – *that everyone is ultimately saved*. Logic demands that conclusion. And in

fact while few professing Christians will openly admit to such a belief, there is no doubt that you see that the talons of this gospel denying error are present in the churches more and more today.

Finally –

10. An Atonement of High Value Necessarily Excludes an Atonement of Universal Extension

What Dr. Reymond means by this is that because what C.H. Spurgeon said is true:

““Christ so died that he infallibly secured [their] salvation ..., who through Christ’s death not only may be saved, but are saved, must be saved, and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved.”

[But if it is maintained that Christ died for everyone, then it must be concluded that]:

...Christ’s death actually procured nothing that guarantees the

salvation of anyone, but only made everyone in some inexplicable way salvable (which, according to Luke 16:26 and Heb. 9:27, is in actuality manifestly impossible in the case of those who were already in hell), whose actual salvation must of necessity be rooted then ultimately in soil other than Christ’s cross work—namely, in the soil of the individual’s own will and work.

But it should be plain to all that this construction eviscerates (ie, guts) Christ’s cross work of its intrinsic infinite saving worth, is Pelagianism and makes salvation ultimately turn on human merit.

As Warfield insists: *The things that we have to choose between, are an atonement of high value, or an atonement of wide extension. The two cannot go together. And this is the real objection of Calvinism to [the universalizing] scheme which presents itself as an improvement on its system: it universalizes the atonement at the cost of its intrinsic value, and Calvinism demands a really substitutive atonement which actually saves.* 14 [Ibid]

We conclude with these great words from a sermon on 2 Cor 5:14-15 by J. Gresham Machen whom Reymond quotes:

It is often urged by Arminian Christians in response to all this that this particularistic teaching is cold and heartless. But in his sermon on 2 Corinthians 5:14–15, J. Gresham Machen observed:

“People say that Calvinism is a dour, hard creed. How broad and comforting, they say, is the doctrine of a universal atonement, the doctrine that Christ died equally for all men there upon the cross! How narrow and harsh, they say, is this Calvinistic doctrine—one of the “five points” of Calvinism—this doctrine of the “limited atonement,” this doctrine that Christ died for the elect of God in a sense in which he did not die for the unsaved!

But do you know, my friends, it is surprising that men say that. It is surprising that they regard the doctrine of a universal atonement

as being a comforting doctrine. In reality it is a very gloomy doctrine indeed. Ah, if it were only a doctrine of a universal salvation, instead of a doctrine of a universal atonement, then it would no doubt be a very comforting doctrine; then no doubt it would conform wonderfully well to what we in our puny wisdom might have thought the course of the world should have been.

But a universal atonement without a universal salvation is a cold, gloomy doctrine indeed. To say that Christ died for all men alike and that then not all men are saved, to say that Christ died for humanity simply in the mass, and that the choice of those who out of that mass are saved depends upon the greater receptivity of some as compared with others—that is a doctrine that takes from the gospel much of its sweetness and much of its joy.

From the cold universalism of that Arminian creed we turn ever again with a new thankfulness to the warm and tender individualism of our Reformed Faith, which we

believe to be in accord with God's holy Word.

Thank God we can say every one, as we contemplate Christ upon the Cross, not just: "He died for the mass of humanity, and how glad I am that I am amid that mass," but: "He loved me and gave Himself for me; my name was written from all eternity upon His heart, and when He hung and suffered there on the Cross He thought of me, even me, as one for whom in His grace He was willing to die." [Ibid]