

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Thinking and Speaking Biblically About the Death of Christ, Part 2:

The Unambiguous and Unified Teaching of Scripture

DARYL WINGERD

1

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus did not intend to merely make all men savable. His purpose was to actually “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). Jesus described His own mission on earth, saying, “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10, also see Ezekiel 34:11-15). And the saving of all of His people, God’s elect, is consistently said not only to be His desire, but also an absolute certainty (see John 6:37-39; 10:14-16; 17:2; etc.). As Isaiah writes prophetically of the death of Christ, “Yet the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief. ... And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. He will see it and be satisfied” (Isaiah 53:10-11). Since it pleased the Father to crush His own Son under His wrath, knowing that Christ’s sacrifice would cause the divine purpose to “prosper,” and if that divine purpose were that all men be saved, how will He be satisfied when only a small percentage of mankind is actually saved? (see Matthew 7:14). Again, Charles Spurgeon rightly commented, “If it were Christ’s intention to save all men, how deplorably has He been disappointed.”¹

Matthew 1:21, briefly mentioned above, is a very revealing passage of Scripture. There, in one brief portion of the angel’s message to Joseph, we are assured of a number of wonderful realities about the purpose and effect of God sending Christ into the world. In the last eight words of the verse, the angel speaks prophetically about Jesus, saying, “He will save His people from their sins.” Those eight words, examined in the light of the rest of the New Testament, show at least two things to be certain:

1. God has a chosen people whom He sent Christ to save.

(He will save *His people* from their sins)

Many Bible teachers and theologians flatly reject the notion that God has a chosen people and that He sent Christ to save *them*, and *only* them. They will vigorously contest the claim that Jesus bore the sins of His people on the cross, but not the sins of *every* person

¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, *2200 Quotations from the Writings of Charles H. Spurgeon*, Tom Carter, compiler (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1988.) 18.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

who has ever lived. Some even claim that such doctrines are heresy. But what does the Bible say? Consider the following passages (I have added italics for emphasis in certain places, as well as a few brief words of commentary):

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up at the last day" (John 6:37-39).

2

While clearly affirming the free offer of the gospel as well as human responsibility (also see v. 40), this passage contains a strong affirmation of God's selective and unchangeable purpose in salvation. Those whom He chose for salvation, He gave to Christ. He sent Jesus to save *them*. If it were the Father's will that all men be saved, He would have given all men to Christ. Jesus also informs us here that His purpose in coming was to accomplish the Father's will, which included His making all necessary provision for every person given to Him to be raised up at the last day. In order to ensure that effect, Jesus fully accomplished the complete salvation of every one of God's elect through His life and death. In other words, there is a one-to-one correspondence between those the Father gave to Christ, those for whom Christ died, and those whom He will raise up at the last day. They are one and the same group of people. And since we know that He fully accomplished the Father's will (see John 17:4; 19:30), we also know that nothing related to the certainty or completeness of the salvation of God's elect was left to *depend* on the later exercise of their faith (see Romans 9:16).

I am the good shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep [elect Gentiles] which are not of this fold [the elect of Israel]; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd (John 10:14-16).

In this passage Jesus clearly says that He *owns* a people (His sheep, God's elect), that *all* of them will believe, and that it was for *them* that He gave His life. He goes on to inform the Pharisees that the reason they did not believe Him was because they were not His sheep (that is, they were not elect—verse 26; also see John 8:43, 45, 47). Every true sheep (that is, every elect person), though lost in unbelief, will believe when found by Christ. As Jim Elliff writes, "Believers do not become sheep. Sheep become believers."²

² Jim Elliff, "Getting It," a copyrighted bulletin insert which may be viewed at www.bulletininserts.org.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, as you gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all who You have given Him, He may give eternal life (John 17:1-2).

Since Jesus was given authority over “all flesh” (all of mankind), He certainly has the ability and authority to give eternal life to every one of them, *if that were the Father’s purpose*. Clearly, however, only *some* are the chosen objects of God’s saving intent, because only some were given to Christ. Later in the same chapter, Jesus prays to the Father, saying, “I do not ask on behalf of the world [the remainder of fallen humanity] but of whom You have given Me; for they are Yours” (v. 9). Having intentionally omitted the non-elect from His intercessory prayer, and having specified that He was only interceding on behalf of believers, He says in verse 19, “For *their* sakes I sanctify myself.” Spoken on the night before Jesus was crucified, the word “sanctify,” in this context, means to set apart as a sacrifice. For whom then did Christ set Himself apart as a sacrifice? For God’s elect in every age (see verse 20)—for all whom the Father had given Him, and not for the rest of “the world,” whom He pointedly omitted from His prayer.

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

This is not an outright denial of universal atonement, but Paul does clearly state here who Christ did purchase by His death. He purchased the church. Many people have tried to deflect the force of this statement by saying that even though Paul did not mention the rest of humanity, Christ could have also purchased every single person everywhere by His death—even those who never believe. But this would be an unnatural way of understanding Paul’s statement. It would be contrary to the way we commonly use words and language to convey meaning. Consider this illustration: If I came home from the grocery store and said, “I purchased this bag of apples,” would any reasonable person conclude that what I actually meant was, “I bought every apple in the store, but only brought these apples home”? Of course not. What I said was what I wanted you to understand. My complete meaning was conveyed clearly enough by telling you what I did purchase, without specifically mentioning what I did not purchase. Technically, my statement did not rule out the possibility of the other meaning. But the plain sense of my words limited my purchase to the one bag of apples. So when God tells us what He *did* purchase, what legitimate reason do we have to expand His meaning?

Additionally, Paul pleaded with the Ephesians elders to protect the church *because* it had been purchased by the blood of Christ. If every person everywhere were purchased by that blood, why did Paul not instruct the elders to protect every person everywhere? Clearly, he assigned a special significance to the church, because the church alone, as a

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

unique subset of humanity, was purchased by Christ. (This verse also aligns perfectly with John 10:15, 15:13-14, and Ephesians 5:25, a verse where the same principle of the natural use of language limits the intended meaning).

For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us (Romans 8:29-34).

In this passage, the same people whom God foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified, are those for whom He sacrificed His Son ("us all"). The same people are also said to be the sure recipients of "all things." So if the Father sent Christ to die for all men everywhere, then all men everywhere can expect to receive "all things." But in verse 33, the same limited group of people are again referred to, this time as "God's elect." And by continuing through verses 38 and 39, one can easily see that the elect, those for whom Christ was delivered over as a sacrifice, are the same ones who can never be separated from the love of God. Again, if Paul were saying that God delivered up Jesus for every single member of mankind, then no one will ever be separated from the love of God. The objects of the atonement and the recipients of God's everlasting love in Christ are both said to be *the same group of people*—the elect.

In reading the above passages, we are left with no uncertainty as to who will *actually* be saved. They are the same people whom God *intended* to save through Christ's redemptive work on the cross. God has chosen a people for salvation out of the mass of fallen humanity. He gave these chosen people to Christ as a bride for Him to save and sanctify. And in perfect keeping with the Father's will, Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice to save *His people* from their sins.

2. The salvation of God's elect was fully accomplished by Christ.

(He will *save* His people from their sins)

When the Son of God came to earth, He came to actually *save* sinners (see Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10; 1 Timothy 1:15). When He died on the cross, Jesus did far more than acquire *potential* salvation for everyone; He actually *saved* His people.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

It is necessary here to distinguish between *secured* salvation and applied salvation. On the cross, Jesus secured redemption, reconciliation, justification,³ and sanctification on behalf of God's elect—benefits that are applied to them through the work of the Holy Spirit *during their lives*. In the case of those who died as believers before Christ's death, or who were alive and believing when He died, the benefits secured by Christ had already been applied to them when He died, based on the divinely-decreed certainty of Christ's redemptive work on their behalf. And for the remainder of God's elect (those who were not yet born or who were alive but had not yet believed when Christ died) the benefits secured by Christ at the cross are applied when they believe. Until they believe, the elect remain under the wrath of the same God who chose them for salvation and sent Christ to redeem them. Christ was set forth as the propitiation for their sins (see Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10), meaning He actually satisfied God's wrath on their behalf. But God has ordained that this propitiation is "to be received by faith" (Romans 3:25, ESV).

Until the moment when faith is granted by God and exercised by the repentant sinner, the propitiation secured by Christ is not an experiential reality. Therefore, until they repent and believe, the elect remain God's real enemies, threatened by His justice and actually subject to destruction. If this were not the case, applied redemption and reconciliation (as opposed to secured redemption and reconciliation) would only appear to bring peace with God when peace was already a reality (see Romans 5:1, 10). Appeals such as "be reconciled to God" (2 Corinthians 5:20), or "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5), would not reflect any real danger and would therefore have no actual meaning for God's elect. The words of John the Baptist—"he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him"—would not apply to the elect, even prior to the time when they believe. None of these gospel warnings could be legitimately and honestly presented as evangelistic appeals. But even though the elect do indeed remain enemies of God (see Romans 5:10) until they believe, their salvation was unalterably predestined by God and fully accomplished by Christ.

Keeping the distinction between *secured* salvation and *applied* salvation in mind, the following passages should make it abundantly clear that when Jesus died on the cross He

³ For clarification, I do not hold to the doctrine of "eternal justification," an aberrant view which A. W. Pink describes as follows: "Some of the older theologians, when expounding this doctrine, contended for the eternal justification of the elect, affirming that God pronounced them righteous before the foundation of the world, and that their justification was then actual and complete, remaining so throughout their history in time, even during the days of their unregeneracy and unbelief; and that the only difference their faith made was in *making manifest* God's eternal justification in their consciences. This is a serious mistake, resulting (again) from failure to distinguish between things which differ." (A. W. Pink, an article entitled, "The Doctrine of Justification," section 7, found at

<http://biblestudy.churches.net/CEEL/P/PINK/JUSTIFIC/JUSTIFIC.HTM>)

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

actually and fully accomplished something; He *secured* the salvation of His people. He secured redemption, reconciliation, justification, and sanctification for them. In other words, He died *as a substitute* for the people whom the Father had chosen.

✱ **On the cross, Jesus secured redemption for God's elect.**

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12, ESV).

✱ **On the cross, Jesus secured reconciliation for God's elect.**

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Romans 5:10).

For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups [Jew and Gentile] into one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity (Ephesians 2:14-16).

And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach (Colossians 1:21-22).

. . . and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed (1 Peter 2:24).

✱ **On the cross, Jesus secured justification for God's elect.**

... the Righteous One, My Servant, [prophetically referring to Christ] will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities (Isaiah 53:11).

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life (Romans 5:8-10).

✱ **On the cross, Jesus secured sanctification for God's elect.**

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her . . . (Ephesians 5:25-26).

. . . looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:13-14).

By [the Father's] will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:10).

Therefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate (Hebrews 13:12).

When Jesus said, “It is finished” (John 19:30) He was speaking of the finality of His work of redemption. He had come to actually *save* His people, and by His death He had fully accomplished their salvation. A potential salvation, on the other hand, one that requires the cooperation of the will of men in order to be effective, one that might even be rejected, is no *finished* work at all. Christ becomes no more significant than one of two sub-contractors who are employed to build a house. Even if one of the contractors finishes his part of the work, even if he does the vast majority of the building, without the completion of the work by the other, the house will *never* be finished.

The Intent and Extent of the Atonement in the Old Testament

Having examined many of the passages in the New Testament related to the intent and extent of the atonement, a brief look at the office and work of the Old Testament high priest, God’s prophetic picture of the person and work of Christ, will serve to reinforce what we have already learned.

In the Old Testament, God chose the Jews to be His people, setting His love on them above all other nations (see Deuteronomy 7:7). Then, through the work of the High priest, He made intercession for *His people*, yet *not* for the people of other nations. We see this clearly in Leviticus 16 once we understand one particular aspect of the intercessory work of the Jewish high priest.

In Exodus 28, Moses was given explicit instructions for crafting the garments that Aaron, the high priest, was to wear when performing his intercessory work. One garment was called the “ephod” (a sort of vest). On the shoulders of the ephod were affixed two onyx stones, each one bearing the engraved names of six of the twelve tribes of Israel. Another garment was called the “breastpiece,” which would hang in the middle of the high

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

priest's chest—over his heart. Attached to the front of the breastpiece were twelve precious stones, each representing one of the twelve tribes (see verses 6-21).

The whole purpose of Aaron entering into the holy of holies with the blood of the sacrificial animal (see Leviticus 16:15) was to “make atonement for himself, and for his household and for all the assembly of Israel” (Leviticus 16:17). This was why God said to Moses, “Aaron shall carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart when he enters the holy place, a memorial before the Lord continually” (Exodus 28:29). The high priest was making intercession for God's chosen people, the Israelites, yet not for the Canaanites, the Jebusites, or the Hitites.

God's pattern is to make atonement for *His chosen people*, not for all people everywhere. Under the New Covenant, God's chosen people are no longer only Jews. They are the believers whom Christ has purchased “out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9). But even though the group of people known as God's people now includes Gentiles, the designation is still limited to those chosen by God for salvation. There is no biblical reason to expand the intent of the intercessory work of the Old Testament high priest and of the blood of the sacrificial animal by saying that it was offered (in a symbolic, prefigured sense—see Hebrews 10:4) on behalf of the Canaanites. Likewise, there is no biblical justification to expand the intercessory work of the eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ, who offered Himself as a sacrifice, by saying that His sacrificial intercession was offered on behalf of the “Canaanites” of our day—those who die in unbelief, whether Jew or Gentile. Christ's high-priestly work of sacrifice and intercession was offered only for God's people—those whom the Father had given Him, those whose names He has always carried and will always carry over His heart of love (see Romans 8:38-39).

We do not degrade, but rather we exalt the work of Christ on the cross when we insist that it was perfectly limited in its intent, perfectly sufficient in its value, and perfectly efficacious in accomplishing its appointed task—the redemption of God's people. It was the perfect sacrifice, accomplishing the perfect redemption of elect sinners by the perfect grace of God.

Conclusion

I realize that God's unconditional election and Christ's definite (or “limited”) atonement are unfamiliar and/or unacceptable doctrines to many Christians. To these brothers and sisters in Christ I offer the Berean challenge: As the Berean Jews did when confronted with Paul's radical teaching about Christ (see Acts 17:11), I urge you to prayerfully search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so. Perhaps you will reach the same

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

conclusion as George Muller, the beloved pastor and evangelist of the 19th century, who wrote the following in his journal:

Before this period, I had been much opposed to the doctrines of election, particular redemption, and final persevering grace. ... But now I was brought to examine these precious truths by the Word of God. Being made willing to have no glory of my own in the conversion of sinners, but to consider myself merely as an instrument, and being also made willing to receive what the Scriptures said, I went to the Word, reading the New Testament from the beginning, with a particular reference to these truths. To my great astonishment, I found that the passages which speak decidedly for election and persevering grace, were about four times as many as those which speak apparently against them; and even those few, shortly after, when I had examined and understood them, served to confirm me in the above doctrines.

George Muller's discovery of the true teaching of Scripture produced far more than doctrinal correctness. As he continues, he assures the reader that his new understanding was greatly beneficial to his soul:

As to the effect which my belief in these truths had on me, I am constrained to state for God's glory, that I have walked more closely with Him since that period, and I may say that I have lived much more for God than before, strengthened by the Lord, in a great measure, through the instrumentality of these doctrines. The electing love of God in Christ—when realized—has been the means of producing holiness, instead of leading me into sin.⁴

In Part 2 of this article, I will attempt to show that George Muller's experience can be repeated by anyone who will carefully and humbly examine the Scriptures, including the *apparently* contradictory passages—the ones commonly thought to refute the doctrines of unconditional election and limited atonement.

© 2022 CCW – Christian Communicators Worldwide, April 9, 2004. Retrieved December 12, 2022.
<https://www.ccwtoday.org/2004/04/thinking-and-speaking-biblically-about-the-death-of-christ-part-2/>

⁴ George Muller, *A Brief Account of the Life and Labors of George Muller*, (Kansas City: Christian Communicators Worldwide, 2005), 35-36.