

† For Whom Did Christ Die? A Look At The Atonement

This lesson is about the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary. *Specifically, did Christ die for everyone or only for those who had been & would be saved (the elect)?* I know this can be a contentious issue, but if you're a Christian, please read all the way through this. I am convinced, when this topic is properly understood, your praise & gratitude for your Savior will increase dramatically.

Died for all theory:

Jesus made a potential atonement for every single person who has or will ever live.

-He waits for the sinner to turn a potential atonement into an actual atonement.

-He died for everyone in general potentially, but no one in particular actually.

-Hell, then, is full of people whose sins were paid for. (Jesus did the exact same thing for people in hell as He did for people in heaven).

-They would be paying for sins unjustly: they were already punished on Christ (or you have to reject substitutionary atonement).

-In effect, people in heaven could spend eternity congratulating themselves for, by their will, turning a potential atonement into an actual one. The sinner in hell didn't make the right call.

-The biblical position is the sinner cannot crawl out of his own spiritual casket 😞.

-This makes the power of salvation in the hands of the sinner.

-Even if you say God does 99% of the work and we have to do 1% (activate the atonement for ourselves by believing), this not only robs God of glory, but at the decisive point of salvation. Also, God's 99% is worthless to you without your 1%, so in reality, your 1% is worth 100%.

-This is critical because if you believe the sinner can respond on his own to "activate" the atonement, you will begin prompting his flesh to respond.

-Also, another problem is Christ dying for those who died in sin before He went to the cross. That is, did Jesus die potentially for Jezebel? Who had long died in her sin or any other pre-cross person who apparently died without being saved (Cain, Esau, everybody **but** Noah and his family in his time). If Jesus died for **all** then He died potentially for people who already rejected God, their destiny had been determined & were already, in some sense, in the process of paying for their own sins. That seems absurd. 😞

-Finally, God is largely unsuccessful in His attempt to save everyone by the work of the cross.

Died only for believers theory:

Jesus made an actual atonement only for the elect.

-Jesus didn't die for everyone in some sort of limited, unactivated way, but for those God has elected, and will call and grant faith and repentance to through the power of the Holy Spirit (or already had).

-Jesus was personally treated as if He had committed the sins of everyone who had ever or will ever believe the revelation required to be saved.

-An actual full payment for the sins of the elect.

-Not a partial atonement to be completed by an act of faith.

-He gave an actual, total, truly substitutionary atonement for the elect.

-The Father's intention in redemption and sending Jesus to the cross was to actually save a particular people and give them to His Son.

-Finally, God perfectly accomplished what He set out to do at the cross.

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Both views believe in a "limited" atonement or everybody would be saved (universalism). The only question is: who limits it..God or the sinner?

So you have one theological system where all of Christ's redemptive work is worthless unless activated by the faith of a sinful, fallen person dead in sin (with the vast majority of His work being wasted)

& another theological system where Christ accomplishes exactly what He set out to do with no dependence upon the will of man.

Which do you believe gives Him more glory? It's no contest...and I always go with that theology. 😊

But, let's look at the Scriptures...

Scriptures for Particular Atonement:

John 10:11- Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd **lays down His life for the sheep**”

John 10:14-15- Jesus says, “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**”

Clearly in these verses Jesus reference to “the sheep” are those that “know Him”: only **believers** know Him in this intimate way. He pays the penalty of sin for **believers**.

Isaiah 53:12- Yet He bore the sin of **many**.

Hebrews 9:28-so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of **many**

Matthew 1:21 An angel of the Lord says to Joseph, “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save **His people** from their sins.”

Mark 10:45- For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for **many**.

Romans 8:31-33- 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. (The “us all” who God gave His Son for is clearly the elect, those who God justifies: a particular people)

So, as you can see, there are several verses that say Christ didn’t die for everybody, but for “many” or a particular group of people; (the sheep, His people...)

Briefly in terms of “activating a potential atonement”-

Matthew 16:15-17 He (Jesus) said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, **because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you**, but My Father who is in heaven”

This clearly illustrates that Peter’s ability to believe that Jesus is the Christ did not come about by the exercise of his personal human will. The flesh counts for nothing in salvation, including having the ability to believe and activate a potential atonement on your own.

Romans 9:15-16- For He says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion”. So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.

This seems to clearly indicate that salvation (activating the atonement for yourself) cannot be obtained by the will of man.

To summarize this point: when the Bible addresses a believer and explains **why they believe**, Scripture **always** teaches the decisive factor is God alone. Not man, not man & God. not ever- for scriptural detail on that, click [here](#).

Scriptures for Died for All:

2 Corinthians 5:14-15- For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf."

When it says that one died for all, it clearly isn't meaning here everyone who has ever or will ever live, but the "all" is identified by the context: Christ died for *all that died*. In the second instance the "all" He died for are "they who live". So all doesn't mean everyone, but refers to what follows it (the all that died & they who live). To summarize, the "all" in these two verses do not refer to everyone in the world, but to those **who die in Christ**, and to those who are **spiritually alive** (believers).

1 John 2:2- and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

Again here, the sins of the "world" cannot mean every individual or salvation would be universal. Here, I believe, it refers to humanity or mankind in general. Or possibly making a point that Christ died not only for Jewish believers, but also for Gentile believers. Or making the point there is only one Savior of the world (not just this local church), and He died for people everywhere. Same concept applies to John 1:29, John 6:51, Heb 2:9. Also, you see in this verse the word "propitiation" which means satisfaction of God's wrath. If that is true of every individual, then salvation would be universal and nobody would have to face God's wrath in hell because it was satisfied. And connecting to the previous verse (v1), this would also mean Christ is advocating for every single individual which we know is certainly not true (John 17:9). And one more point, there are scriptures that elsewhere use the terminology of "the whole world" that most advocates of universal potential atonement would reject as meaning every single individual- (1 John 5:19: "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one"). We know the "whole world" excludes those who are in Christ.

And...2 Corinthians 5:19

namely, that God was in Christ **reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them**, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (If world always meant everyone without exception, everyone would not have their sins counted against them). But often, "world" biblically means everyone without distinction not everyone without exception.

2 Peter 2:1- But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

Deut 32:5-6 might help with this concept. God refers to people of Israel who are “not His children” as people He “bought” in the sense that He physically saved them out of Egypt (but they were not spiritually saved from their sins). So in some sense, these false teachers benefited from being physically involved in church life, yet were not spiritually alive. Hence, the “destruction” to come their way.

Or Peter could be referring to their Christian profession: false teachers always claim to belong to Christ (to be bought by Him), but their doctrine and life deny the One they *claim* bought them (though He actually hasn't).

1 Timothy 2:6- who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. The previous verse might help as well with this. 1 Timothy 2:5- For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

Again the point here is there is only one Savior. Also, in the beginning of this chapter, the context is about praying for all kinds of people: kings and those in authority... So the “all” might refer to all kinds of people (again, everyone without distinction). Or it could refer to all who would believe since this is clearly the biblical requirement for apprehending the atoning work of Christ.

Titus 2:11- For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men.

I brought in this verse to again show that “all” is obviously not always used to refer to every individual (or all would be saved), but referring to humanity in general, as a category.

2 Peter 3:9- The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

This expands beyond particular atonement to the will of God for the salvation of everyone. First, this is written to believers, so it could be that He will bring all believers to repentance. Or it could be that all the elect (saved or not yet) would come to repentance. Or, I personally think, this would just mean it's God's *intended* will that everyone be saved. I separate this from God's ordained will which would be the salvation of the elect. God wants everyone to repent and be saved: all can and should but never will without His effective grace on their hearts (which He does only for the elect). Same thing would apply to 1 Tim 2:3-4.

For more on God's two wills, click [here](#).

Even the popular verse, John 3:16- For God so loved the **world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life- has a qualifier: believers.

Conclusion:

As you can see, the Bible has verses that indicate Christ died for some and that Christ died for all. They both can't be true because the Bible doesn't contradict itself. I hope I have helped sort these out a bit. My closing points **for** particular atonement would be that 1) we all agree that God knew who would be saved when Jesus went to the cross and, therefore, why He would punish Jesus for sins that He knows will be punished on others in hell is incredulous to me. 2) In order to truly and purely believe in substitutionary atonement, you cannot have Christ dying for all without universal salvation because *potential* substitutionary atonement is not substitutionary atonement. And 3) if Jesus died for all, that means even for those before the cross who had died in rebellion against God and are already under His wrath. Again, why would God the Father pour out wrath on the Son for sins that He is **already** pouring out wrath on those who died in sin; or you have to believe these people have a second chance after death to activate the potential atonement of Christ.

It boils down to this: what was the **intention** of the Father when sending the Son into the world and to the cross. I think the best verse that deals with this is John 6:38-39: Jesus says "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 that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day." This clearly says the intention (will) of the Father in sending the Son into the world was to actually & surely save a particular people: only those who the Father has "**given**" to our Lord. The only soteriology where that's possible is if God is ultimately sovereign over salvation, not man.

For a summary on election in general, click [here](#).

For one of the better defenses of Particular Atonement, [here's](#) a good sermon series by Mike Riccardi on Sermon Audio.

*Lesson: Particular Atonement
Scripture NASB*