

The Doctrine of Particular Redemption (Limited Atonement):



A helpful, short video by John MacArthur can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=35poj19FXEg>

(Or open the camera app on your phone and scan the QR code above to access it)

Big Questions: Who did Christ substitute Himself for when He died on the cross and proclaimed “it is finished”? If “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God”, and if “the wages of sin is death” ...Who ultimately gets to decide which hell-deserving sinners are saved by sheer grace and mercy?

Big Idea: The redeeming work of Christ had a particular goal/design in mind- securing the full salvation of those chosen by the Father and given to the Son. In other words, Christ ACTUALLY saves and secures a particular group (the elect) given to Him by His Father. Christ did not die simply to make it possible for God to pardon sinners. Neither does God leave it up to sinners to decide whether or not Christ’s work will be effective for them or not.

Scripture Passages:

- Deuteronomy 7:6–8a *“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. [7] It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, [8] but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers...”*
- Matthew 1:21 *She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.*
- John 6:37–40 *All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. [38] For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. [39] And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. [40] For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”*
- John 17:12 *While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*
- Acts 13:48 *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.*
- 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.” [16] So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.*
- Hebrews 9:11–12 *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) 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.

Helpful Quotes:

John MacArthur: "Well, we know He's the Savior of the world because there's only one Savior for the world. The world has only one Savior but we also know the atonement is limited. We all know that, right? The atonement is limited because people go to hell. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and I will say to them, 'Depart from Me, you workers of iniquity. I never knew you.'" Jesus talked more about hell than He did about heaven.

We know that hell is a reality, and we know people go there and perish forever. So we all believe in a limited atonement, right? Not everybody's going to be saved. You either believe in a limited atonement, or you believe in a universal atonement, and if you believe in a universal atonement, to be logically consistent, then there's no hell and no one will be in hell. Everyone will be in heaven.

If you're going to affirm an unlimited atonement, then you really are going to end up as a universalist, because if He actually died for the whole world then the whole world is saved. So, we don't, we can't go there because there is a hell and it's full of people, in fact, most people. So the atonement is limited. Then the question is, who limits it? Do we limit it or does God limit it? And the answer to that question biblically is crystal clear. God limited it. He limited it to the elect.

Either God determined whom He would save and take the glory or God just threw atonement out there as some nebulous option and hoped some people would grab hold of it and become a part of His redeeming purpose. The Bible does not allow for that. So, you just need to remind yourself you believe in a limited atonement. Now, you ask the question, are men sovereign or is God sovereign? If God's sovereign, then He limited it."

Ligon Duncan: "Everybody limits the atonement. It's either limited in its EXTENT or it's limited in its EFFECT. If you believe that the atonement is for all humanity (Arminianism) and not all humanity is saved, then you believe that the atonement is limited in its effect. If you believe that the atonement is fully capable of saving those who are chosen by God (Calvinism) then you believe in limited atonement. It's fully capable, it's powerful, for providing salvation for those for whom Christ died."

Sean Lucas: One of the questions that church members often ask me is whether the whole idea of limited atonement is biblical. The language is part of our stumbling block because it seems to suggest that there is a limit in the value of the atonement. The question is not a question of value. Of course, Christ's atonement is of unlimited value. The question really is for whom Christ intended to die. Did Christ intend to die for all men indiscriminately, or did Christ intend to die for a particular people?

The intent of what Christ did at the cross was to die specifically for his people; for the elect. As Presbyterians, we believe that Christ died for a particular people. He died for the elect; whom God sees through space and time as his church. [Acts 20:28](#) speaks in terms of God dying for the church; giving himself for his church. The intent of what Christ did at the cross was to die specifically for his people, for the elect. Another piece in the whole question is not simply a question of intention; it is also a question of whether Christ accomplishes something.

Part of the problem with unlimited or general atonement is that if you really believe that Jesus' death accomplishes something, and you believe that it is intended for all people indiscriminately, then, logically, you should be led to universalism – that all men will in fact be saved. That is a more consistent position than the position that many evangelicals hold which is that Christ died for all men indiscriminately, but his death does not actually accomplish their salvation. That is a position that dishonors Christ's death because it holds that Jesus' death does not actually secure salvation.

We would say, as Presbyterians, as those who hold the reformed faith, that Christ's death is our only hope of salvation. It accomplishes the purpose for which Christ intended, which was to save his people. Necessarily, then, if Christ's death accomplishes something, it accomplishes its purpose for which he attends it: he intends to save his chosen ones. That is why it is a particular redemption or a definite atonement. That is why we believe that it is biblical.

Kevin DeYoung: If the atonement is not particularly and only for the sheep, then either we have universalism—Christ died in everyone's place and therefore everyone is saved—or we have something less than full substitution. *"We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ,"* Spurgeon observed, *"because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men, or all men would be saved."* But, Spurgeon argued, it is the view of the atonement that says no one in particular was saved at the cross that actually limits Christ's death. *"We say Christ so died that he infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, 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."*

Christ does not come to us merely saying, "I've done my part. I laid down my life for everyone because I have saving love for everyone in the whole world. Now, if you would only believe and come to me I can save you." Instead he says to us, I was pierced for your transgressions. I was crushed for your iniquities ([Isa. 53:5](#)). I have purchased with my blood men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation ([Rev. 5:9](#)). I myself bore your sins in my body on the tree, so that you might infallibly die to sins and assuredly live for righteousness. For my wounds did not merely make healing available. They healed you ([1 Pet. 2:24](#)).