

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE **(LESSON TWENTY-TWO)**

THE ATONEMENT **(PART FIVE)**

In our previous Lessons, we have defined the Atonement as “**the work accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ in His life, death and resurrection, in order to save lost, unregenerate human beings.**” The most common view of the Atonement is that the Lord Jesus Christ died for the sins of every human being that has ever lived. Such a view may be attractive, but is it in harmony with Scripture? In this Lesson, we will examine the extent of the Atonement.

What was the original purpose of God in sending His Son into the world? Was it the Father’s intent to send His Son to die on the cross to make salvation **possible** for every human being, without actually **guaranteeing** the salvation of any one of them or did God, from all eternity, have a plan of salvation by which, according to the riches of His grace and His eternal election, He designed the Atonement **to ensure** the salvation of all His people? In other words, was the sacrifice of Christ merely intended to make the salvation of all men **possible**, or was it intended to make **certain** the salvation of those who had been given to Him by the Father? (**John 6:37**)

It is my conviction that a careful reading of what the Scriptures say about those for whom Christ died, indicates that in the purposes of God, a full, perfect, and sufficient Atonement was provided and will be effectively applied **only** for the sins of those elected to a saving faith. The sufferings of Christ were not needlessly expended on behalf of those whom the Father foresaw would not avail themselves of the benefits of the Atonement. In other words, the Atonement crafted by God was specifically designed with a view to providing salvation for the elect. Jesus Christ died for His sheep and laid down His life for those the Father had given to Him. The Atonement provided by God was a **definite** Atonement.

Chapter 3, Article 6 of the **Westminster Confession of Faith** (1647), reads as follows: “*As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by his Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by his power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.*”

Every person who calls himself or herself a Christian, believes that Jesus Christ died to make an Atonement possible, but all professing Christians do not believe in the same nature and design of the Atonement. As we noted earlier, the most common view of the Atonement is that when Jesus Christ died, He did not die intending to save any particular person. Those who hold this view, teach that Jesus Christ died to make the salvation of all persons possible, but His death does not secure, beyond doubt, the salvation of any human being. As a consequence, they are forced to admit that if persons will not voluntarily surrender to God’s grace, then the Atonement of Jesus Christ would have been of no benefit for them at all.

They argue that our Lord died as much for those who perished in the Flood of Noah's time, for Pharaoh and for Judas Iscariot, who were all already in Hell, as He died for Peter, Paul and the thief on the Cross! Those who are of this persuasion believe that there was a true and real Atonement made for those who were already suffering in Hell, as for those who were reclining, like Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham.

Brothers and sisters, I do not believe that such a belief is in harmony with the revelation of God's Word. I believe that when Jesus Christ was dying on the Cross, He had a definite purpose in view, and that purpose will certainly be accomplished. I believe in an Atonement that was designed to make **certain** the salvation of all who believe. I believe in an Atonement which actually atones, in that it fully satisfied God for those on whose behalf it was made. I believe that Jesus Christ came into this world with the intention of providing an Atonement for those whom God the Father had chosen in Him *"before the foundation of the world"* (**Ephesians 1:4**), and that as the result of this, every person for whom He died must, beyond the shadow of a doubt, be cleansed from sin, and stand, washed in His blood, before the Father's throne. The blood of Christ was not shed with the intention of saving those whom God foreknew would never be saved, some of whom were already in Hell prior to Him going to Calvary!

The doctrine of **Definite** or **Specific** Atonement necessarily follows from the doctrine of Election. If it is true that from eternity God elected some and not others to eternal life, then it logically follows that the primary purpose of Jesus Christ was to redeem the elect. It seems to be a contradiction to say that His atoning work has equal reference to both the elect and the non-elect, or that He came to die for those whom He knew would never be saved as truly, and in the same sense, as He died for those whom He knew had been elected unto salvation.

The doctrine of **definite** or **specific** Atonement does not mean that any limit can be placed on the **value** or **power** of the Atonement which Christ made. The value of the Atonement is measured by the dignity of the person making it, and since Christ suffered as the God-man, the value of His suffering was infinite. The following passages of Scripture clearly indicate that this is so:

ACTS 3:13-15

*"The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied **the Holy One and the Just**, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed **the Prince of life**, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses."*

ACTS 20:28

*"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of **God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.**"*

1 CORINTHIANS 2:7-8

*"But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified **the Lord of glory.**"*

These passages emphasize that the Atonement was infinitely valuable and precious and might have saved every member of the human race if that had been God's plan. The Atonement was definite in the sense that it was intended for God's elect and is applied to them only. While it is certainly true that the value of the Atonement was **sufficient** to save all mankind, it was **effective** in saving only the elect.

Those who hold the view that Jesus Christ died to provide an Atonement for every single human being, but that His death did not secure the salvation of every person for whom He died, are severely limiting the **power** of the Atonement. They are forced to admit that the Atonement in itself does not actually save anybody. They therefore, limit the Atonement not **quantitatively** but **qualitatively**, for they believe that while it makes the salvation of every person possible it guarantees the salvation of no one. For them, the Atonement is like a great wide bridge which goes **only half-way** across the river. The Bible on the other hand, certainly limits the Atonement quantitatively, but not qualitatively, for while it limits salvation to the elect only, it guarantees their salvation. As far as the Bible is concerned, the Atonement is like a narrow bridge which goes **all the way** across the river.

If those who are of the opinion that our Lord died to redeem every single human being that has ever lived are correct, it would follow, then, that the majority of those for whom Christ died are finally not redeemed, and that salvation is never applied to the majority of those for whom it was earned. This would mean that the greater part of our Lord's suffering for the sins of the human race was to no purpose whatsoever. It would mean that God's purpose and plan to save every human being has been thwarted and defeated by those whom He created and that while He may do according to His will in heaven, He does not do so among the inhabitants of the earth. How, then, can God be regarded as being sovereign if his purpose and plan to save every human being that has ever lived may be so easily and dramatically opposed and overthrown?

As the theologian **Charles Hodge** rightly observed, *"The sin of Adam did not make the condemnation of all men merely possible; it was the ground of their actual condemnation. So the righteousness of Christ did not make the salvation of men merely possible, it secured the actual salvation of those for whom He wrought."*

The "Prince of preachers" **Charles H. Spurgeon** said: *"God will not punish twice for one thing. If God punished Christ for your sins He will not punish you. Payment God's justice cannot twice demand; first, at the bleeding Saviour's hand, and then again at mine. How can God be just if he punished Christ, the substitute, and then man himself afterwards?"*

We say again that the view that Jesus Christ's sacrifice was intended for every human being, would make much of that sacrifice pointless, since so many of those for whom it was made do not in fact avail themselves of it. The triumph of the cross is fatally diminished if only a fragment of its original intention is actually to be realized. If, on the contrary, however, Christ died only for the sins of the elect of God and not for those who are lost, the victory of the cross is total in terms of its intentions. It is hard to believe that Satan has been allowed largely to defeat God's intentions.

Beloved, our Lord did not die to make the salvation of all men merely possible; He died to make the salvation of the elect certain. There was no limit to the worth of His Atonement, but in God's intention there was to be no waste either. The Lord did all that was necessary for the salvation of an elect number whose response was guaranteed by the Father. The original design was and will be entirely fulfilled. The Lord's victory is complete. The completeness of this victory is not dependent upon man's natural inclination to respond to the offer of salvation but upon God's Sovereign Grace in conferring upon the elect, His saving faith.

In **Matthew 20:28**, our Lord stated that He had come "*not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*" He did not say that He had come to give His life a ransom for **all**, but for **many**. The nature of a ransom is such that when it is paid and accepted, it automatically frees the persons for whom it was intended, otherwise, it would not be a true ransom. Justice demands that those for whom it is paid shall be freed from any further obligation. If the suffering and death of Christ was a ransom for all human beings rather than for the elect only, then the merits of His work must be imparted to all human beings alike and the penalty of eternal punishment cannot be justly inflicted on any of them. God would be unjust if He demanded this extreme penalty twice over, first from Jesus Christ the substitute, and then again, from the persons for whom He was the substitute. The conclusion, then, is that the Atonement of Christ does not extend to all men but that it is limited to the elect on whose behalf He suffered and died.

Brothers and sisters, the extent to which the Bible seems to go out of its way to indicate specifically those for whom Christ died is unmistakable and reinforces the impression that He did actually bear only the sins of his people. The following passages highlight this truth:

MATTHEW 1:21

*"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save **his people** from their sins."*

The angel which appeared to Joseph told him that Mary's son was to be called JESUS, because His mission in the world was to save His people from their sins. He, then, came not merely to make salvation possible but actually to save **His people**; and what He came to do we may confidently expect Him to have accomplished.

JOHN 10:11

*"I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life **for the sheep.**"*

It is apparent that our Lord did not give his life for the **goats** who constitute the other class of mankind in the Day of Judgment according to **Matthew 25:32-33**.

JOHN 17:6-9

*"I have manifested thy name unto **the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.** Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. **I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.**"*

In verse **9**, Jesus specifically and deliberately states that He was not praying for the world but for those that His Father had given Him out of the world. Does it seem likely that our Lord would die to atone for the sins of persons whom He would not even pray for?

It is instructive to compare this passage with **1 John 5:19**: *“And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.”* In this verse, John informs us that *“the whole world lieth in wickedness,”* and yet we have just read that the elect of God, even before they came to Jesus to be His sheep, did not lie in wickedness but already belonged to the Father! These elect individuals, though yet unsaved, were nevertheless already in the Father’s possession, purchased by Him in anticipation of the Atonement that Jesus Christ would make for them.

ACTS 20:28

*“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed **the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.**”*

ROMANS 4:24-25

*“But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered **for our offences**, and was raised again **for our justification.**”*

GALATIANS 1:1-4

*“Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto **the churches of Galatia**. Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for **our sins**, that he might deliver **us** from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father.”*

GALATIANS 3:13

*“Christ hath redeemed **us** from the curse of the law, being made a curse for **us**: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”*

EPHESIANS 5:25

*“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved **the church, and gave himself for it.**”*

TITUS 2:13-14

*“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; **Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us** from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”*

1 PETER 2:24

*“Who his own self bare **our sins** in his own body on the tree, that **we**, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes **ye** were healed.*

1 JOHN 4:9

*“In this was manifested the love of God **toward us**, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, **that we might live through him.**”*

Notice here, that John does not say that God sent his Son into the world that the world might live through Him but that *“we might live through Him.”*

These passages reveal that it was not a general and indiscriminate love for every single human being which caused God to send His Son into the world to suffer and die. It was a peculiar, mysterious, infinite love for His elect which caused Him to do so.

In **Genesis 3:15**, we read that God *“put enmity”* between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. This verse clearly teaches that there are persons who are the seed of the serpent and others who are the seed of the woman. This is in harmony with what our Lord said to the Jewish religious leaders in **John 8:44-45**: *“Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.”*

Evidently, the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent are each a part of the human race. And since at the very beginning God *“put enmity”* between these two groups, it is clear that He never loved all alike, nor intended to redeem all alike. An Atonement that is applicable to every human being can never be in harmony with God’s sentence on the serpent.

In **Isaiah 46:9-10**, we read the following: *“Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”* These verses emphatically proclaim the foreknowledge of God. If He knew beforehand those who would not be saved, is it reasonable to argue that He would have sent Jesus Christ with an intention to save those whom he positively foreknew would not be saved? Would God be consistent with His own character and purpose to make an Atonement for persons whom He knew would never make use of it? If an individual who intends to host a dinner, already knows that out of the group of 100 persons he desires to invite, 25 of them will certainly not attend, will the host still send out invitations expecting those 25 persons, as well as the others to attend? Brothers and sisters, persons who claim to believe in the foreknowledge of God and at the same time contend that Jesus Christ died for every human being that ever lived, are deceiving themselves and are attributing folly to God. To argue that God is earnestly striving to do what He knows He will not accomplish is to represent Him as acting foolishly.

The doctrine of **definite** or **specific** Atonement teaches that Jesus Christ died to fully secure the salvation of His people, not just to make salvation possible for every single human being. He died not merely to make a genuine offer of salvation to all people indefinitely, but to actually secure the salvation of a definite group, namely His sheep, His bride, His elect.

In our next Lesson, we will examine some passages of Scripture which appear to contradict the doctrine of **definite** or **specific** Atonement that we have advanced in this Lesson.