

LIMITED ATONEMENT

The “L” in TULIP – Definite / Particular Atonement

T Total Depravity U Unconditional Election **L Limited Atonement** I Irresistible Grace P Perseverance of the Saints

Key Question: Did Jesus accomplish the mission for which He came into the world? Did He actually secure redemption for some — or merely make salvation theoretically possible for all?

FOUR LOGICAL SCENARIOS

Any view of the atonement's extent falls into one of these four boxes. Only one is logically and biblically coherent.

1 — All people, all their sin Jesus died for all people and all of their sin. <i>X Universalism</i>	2 — All people, some sin Jesus died for all people and some of their sins. <i>X Nobody is saved</i>
3 — Some people, some sin Jesus died for some people and some of their sins. <i>X Nobody is saved</i>	4 — Some people, all their sin Jesus died for some people (the elect) and all of their sins. <i>✓ Limited Atonement</i>

THE DOCTRINE

What is atonement? To atone means to make amends, to set things right. It involves two ideas: **(1) Satisfaction:** Jesus satisfied the demands of God's holy law; **(2) Substitution:** Jesus died on behalf of His people.

Limited atonement is the view that Christ died only for his elect, his people, all those the Father had given him before the foundation of the world. His death was intended by the Father and actually secures their redemption. Christ's purpose was to redeem those given to him, and He succeeded *actually, not merely theoretically*.

CLARIFICATION

Limited atonement does **not** mean the atonement is limited in power, sufficiency, ability, duration, or the sins it covers. The limitation concerns only **to whom** it applies.

EVERYONE LIMITS THE ATONEMENT

Arminians limit its **efficacy** — Christ died for all, but not all are saved. Calvinists limit its **extent** — Christ died for some, but actually accomplishes all he set out to do.

Reformed distinction: Christ's death was **sufficient** for all, but **efficient** only for some.

Even Arminians agree that Christ's death excludes those who have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit – for which there is not forgiveness.

WCF 8.5: “The Lord Jesus... hath fully satisfied the justice of His Father; and purchased... an everlasting inheritance... for all those whom the Father hath given unto Him.”

Limited atonement is closely tied to **unconditional election**: if unconditional election is true, limited atonement follows logically.

OLD TESTAMENT TYPES & SHADOWS

The Passover lamb was sufficient for *the family* — not every household in Egypt.

The high priest's ephod bore the names of the twelve tribes. Entering the Holy Place, he bore the **specific names** of the people he represented.

OBJECTION: “WORLD” PASSAGES

John 1:29; 3:16; 12:47; 1 John 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:19 — each says Christ came for “the world.”

Response: “World” must be read in context. It can mean: the physical universe (Acts 17:24); the earth as man's dwelling (John 16:21); humanity in general (Rom. 3:19); the fallen world-system opposed to God (1 John 2:15–17; James 4:4); the inhabited/Roman world (Luke 2:1); or all kinds of people, Jews, Gentiles, classes, nations, etc.

DIFFICULT TEXTS

Titus 2:11 — “grace... for all people.” Does “all” mean every individual, or all *kinds* of people — every tribe, nation, and class, Jew and Gentile?

John 12:32 — “draw all people to myself.” Speaks to Christ's exclusivity as Savior — no rival savior draws anyone; He draws all *kinds* of people to Himself.

2 Peter 3:9 — “not wishing that any should perish.” Peter is writing to **believers in the church**, not to all humanity indiscriminately.

PROBLEMS WITH GENERAL ATONEMENT

Bavinck: creates conflict within the Trinity. If the Son died for everyone, but the Spirit regenerates only some, the Spirit's work is at odds with the Father and Son's intent.

Vos: undermines substitutionary atonement. “Substitution includes dealing with persons; as there is a specific person who substitutes, there must be more than one or more specific persons for whom he substitutes.” Dying for everyone in general means dying for no one in particular — imputed righteousness requires a specific recipient.

Mission failure: if Christ died for everyone, but not everyone is saved, His mission was not fully accomplished.

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE

Matthew 1:21 · Matthew 20:28 · John 6:39 · John 10:11 · John 10:14–15 · John 17:6–9 · John 17:12 · John 17:20–21 · Ephesians 5:25