

“Why Jesus Died”  
Romans 3:21-26  
February 29, 2004  
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Romans 3:21-26

“But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup> This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup> for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup> and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. <sup>25</sup> God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished-- <sup>26</sup> he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

At the close of WWI tens of thousands of soldiers were stationed in Europe waiting for orders that would allow them to go home.

Conditions were relaxed and the men were taking every opportunity to see as much of Europe as possible before they left.

Near a village about a hundred miles from Paris was a group of American soldiers - about 40 of them with a lieutenant in charge.

The Lieutenant received permission to take a two-day leave and turned over leadership to his sergeant.

While the Lieutenant was gone a motorcycle messenger brought news that General Pershing was seeking 2700 men who would march in victory parades in London, Paris, Brussels and Rome.

That possibility excited most of the men - what a way to see Europe. But there were two conditions to qualify:

1. You had to have a clean record - no courts marshal.

None of the men had been even indicted. They all qualified.

2. You had to be at least a certain height - and the regulation height was given in metric measure.

The sergeant and another soldier looked at each other as they read the orders and then they asked each other - "Do you know how tall that is? - "No, how about you?" "No, but at least I'm taller than you."

When the news spread through the camp about the possibility of being in the victory parades the same discussion broke out everywhere - "How tall do you have to be" "At least I'm taller than you."

And there they were standing back to back all over the camp and soon every man knew his height relative to every other man.

And there was a tall fella named Slim telling a shorter man named Shorty how he'd send him a postcard from Rome and how he'd take a look at all the English girls for those too short to make the trip.

These men did what comes naturally - because they didn't know the true standard, they set up an artificial standard and compared themselves to themselves.

But the Lieutenant came back and when he saw the orders he, knowing some French, went into the village to get a meter stick.

With it he made a mark on the wall and made the men stand up to it to see who qualified.

No longer could they measure themselves against themselves  
Now they had an unchangeable standard.

Some didn't even try - knowing they were too short.

But to everyone's surprise not even Slim, standing as tall as he could, could measure up to the mark.

Not one of those soldiers qualified for General Pershing's parade army.

Though there was a relative difference between Slim and Shorty they both equally failed to measure up. (story paraphrased from Barnhouse Romans Vol 2 p72ff)

Romans 3:23 says that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

For most of the first three chapters of his letter to the church in Rome, the Apostle Paul gave very bad news.

Basically the bad news is that there is a holy and just God who is incapable of tolerating sin and we are sinners.

In chapter 1 Paul writes that even those who have never heard of Christ, those who have no access to the Bible, are condemned by a holy God because they have refused the truth about God they do have - truth that comes from their own consciences and from what God has created. (1:18-32)

1:18 “the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth...”

Then in Chapter 2 Paul writes that even the religious people who have had access to more truth are condemned by a holy God because they have refused the truth about God they have - truth that comes from the Bible.

2:5 “Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath when his righteous judgment will be revealed.”

Paul then summarizes all he had written thus far by pointing out in repeated terms that no one can stand before a holy God.

Why? Because God is righteous and we are unrighteous.

God is holy and we are unholy.

God is sinless and we are sinners.

Chapter 3:10 “There is no one righteous, not even one.”

No one has the righteousness necessary to stand before God.

When God judges people at the end of time - everyone will be found to have sinned and fallen short of the glory, the righteousness, the holiness, which is the standard of perfection of God.

No one will measure up!

Bishop Moule wrote: "The harlot, the liar, the murderer, are short of

God's glory; but so are you. Perhaps they stand at the bottom of a mine, and you on the crest of an Alp but you are just as little able to touch the stars as they." (Moule in Stott p 109)

That's the bad news.

Look now, please, at 3:21.

The late English preacher, D. Martin Lloyd-Jones called these the two most wonderful words in the Bible: "But now!"

We were condemned - "but now".

We were under the wrath of God - "but now".

We were helpless and without hope -

"But **now** a righteousness from God has been revealed"

The thing we most need, righteousness, has been made available!

What we are going to see from the Bible in the next few minutes are the most important words in the Bible and the very foundation of everything we believe.

This is the heart of the Bible - the very central, core, fundamental, basic truth that sets Christianity apart from every man-made religion.

Learn these six verses and you will know the Gospel - you will know fundamental Christian theology.

All of Scripture revolves around this one truth.

If all of Christianity was boiled down to its essence - this would be it.

This is the "Good news" the "Gospel"

Bible scholar, Leon Morris declared, this may be "possibly the most important single paragraph ever written." (Morris in Stott p 109)

We are going to study this passage by answering four questions:

1. What does this righteousness from God do for us?
2. Where does it come from?
3. How is it possible?
4. And how does it become ours?

But we need to start with what this “righteousness from God” is.  
 It is God’s action whereby he gives us a righteousness which is not our own but his.

Have you ever gone to a place that charges an entrance fee and discovered that you didn’t have any money?  
 The next thing you notice is they don’t take Visa or MasterCard.  
 And then you fish around in your wallet and find an old Mexican five peso bill - Sorry you have the wrong currency.

The “currency” of heaven is righteousness.  
 Access to a holy God requires holiness.

God the Son, became a human being and lived a perfect life.  
 He obeyed the law of God in every detail.

God the Son was perfectly righteous and he offers that righteousness of his to us.  
 1 Corinthians 1:30 "Christ has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption

The “righteousness from or of God” is God’s own holiness - God’s perfection.

1. Now the first question: what does this “righteousness from God” do for us?  
 V24 gives the answer. By it we “are justified”.

If you are following the text carefully even as I speak, and I hope you are, you will notice that I skipped right over V23.  
 Actually I didn’t skip over it - I started the sermon with it.

You will notice that Paul handles V23 like a parenthetical statement - reminding his readers of the major point he had made in chapters 1 & 2 -

Everyone is equally in trouble with God -  
 there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles or the religious and the heathen - all have sinned and fall short of the glory, the holy standard of God.

So when Paul starts V24 who is the subject? Who is justified?  
 ?Is it the “all” of “all have sinned”

That can't be - for we know from the Bible that not “all” will be saved.  
 The ones who are justified must be the “all who believe” of V22.  
 So it is those who believe who are justified.

Particular Redemption at issue here.

But that takes us back to the first question:  
 What does the “righteousness from God” do for us?

The answer is that by it we are justified.  
 When we are granted God's righteousness, God's holiness, we  
 are justified.

But what does it mean to be justified?  
 If we say someone was justified in doing something, we mean  
 that such a person should not be held accountable for the  
 action.

How does the “righteousness from God” justify us?  
 There are at least two aspects to it: Justification takes  
 something away and it gives something.

First of all it takes something away.  
 In chapters 1 & 2 God said that we are condemned - guilty and  
 sentenced to the wrath of God.

In 3:9 Paul said we have already made the charge that Jews and  
 Gentiles alike are under sin.  
 To be justified is to have the charges dropped.  
 To be acquitted of all charges.

We were condemned BUT NOW we are justified - declared 'Not  
 guilty'

The guilt is removed.  
 That is why the term "justified" is sometimes cleverly  
 defined as "Just as if I'd never sinned"

But to be justified is not just to be pardoned.

To be justified means we are given something.

In 2Cor 5:21 it says, we have become the righteousness of God in Christ.

In Isa 61:10 we read, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord; my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness."

The great English theologian John Owen said that Christ makes an effectual grant and donation of a true, real and perfect righteousness unto all who believe and God accounts it as theirs thus absolving them of the penalty of sin and giving them title to eternal life. (In Huldane p143)

To be justified means both something taken away and something given:

Someone wrote, "The voice that gives forgiveness will say: 'You may go; you have been relieved of the penalty which your sins deserve.' But the same voice also says 'You may come; you are welcome to all my love and my presence.'" (In Stott P110 - paraphrased)

May we never become inured, accustomed, unmoved by the significance of this act of God in justifying us.

When the "righteousness from God" is given to you, you are justified, declared by God to be "not guilty" - no longer under the wrath of God

AND you are declared "righteous" - the goodness, holiness and righteousness God has been given to you so you may come into the very presence of a holy God.

**Imputation is at issue here**

But I must move on -

## **2. Where does this "righteousness" come from?**

Now the obvious answer it is "it comes from God".

But I am getting at something deeper.

Look at V24 again “and are justified freely by his (that is God’s) grace”

The text says we are justified "freely".

The word "freely" is the adverb form of "gift" - justified as a gift.

This righteousness from God comes not as a reward or payment but solely because of God's choice.

In Ephesians chapter 1 we are told that the basis of the gift is God's choice based on something in him not based on anything in us.

Ephesians 1:5,7,9 In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, **in accordance with his pleasure and will**...<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, **in accordance with the riches of God's grace**...<sup>9</sup> And he made known to us the mystery of his will **according to his good pleasure**...”

That same concept is repeated back in Romans 3:24 when Paul writes we are justified freely by God’s GRACE.

"grace" is God's joyful, delighted, favor toward us - God’s totally unmerited choice of us

The source of our salvation is pure grace.

Paul has been especially intent on nailing this idea down tightly.

We are not made right with God by our efforts - good as they may be.

In light of this clear teaching from the Bible it is distressing to hear so many people even in the church still want to add something to grace.

They insist on stating something they have done that would give God cause to grant his grace.

I try. I want to do right. I have always believed in God. I will do better.

No, no, a thousands times “no”, it is either all of grace or it is not of grace at all.

Listen to this from the largest Christian religion in our country:

Martin Luther had come to the mistaken idea that human nature was so ruined by Adam’s sin that humans were powerless to do



anything that would earn God's favor. In place of any works, Luther would substitute faith - a blind confidence that Christ's good works were enough for mankind's salvation. He said Christians need only believe that Christ had saved them.

(Pamphlet 39 Catholic Information Service)

Luther is wrong they claim.

That religion goes on to say (and I quote) "it is necessary to make reparation for our sins. This means that we must somehow try to make up for the disorder in our lives and the harm we have done to others by our sin." And "the ordinary way for us to have our sins forgiven is by the sacrament of penance." ((Pamphlet "To Sin is to Die" Knights of Columbus) (pamphlet 91 Knights of Columbus).

Again, "No, No, a thousand times no" - The bible says: "By grace we are saved through faith, not of works lest anyone should boast."

Paul said it so clearly in Romans 3:20 "no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law."

Our "righteousness from God" is by grace - and grace alone.

### **3.Thirdly this morning, How is this possible?**

How can the "righteousness from God" be given to us?

How can God justify us freely.

Where is justice?

How can God acquit the guilty?

All through the Bible God says an innocent person must be declared innocent and a guilty person guilty - to do other than that is to pervert justice and make a mockery of God!

So how can God do what he says others must not do?

- Doesn't it demean us as humans - a human being can sin grievously and get away with it?
- Where is justice?

- What reason do we have to do right?
- Isn't lawlessness then as good as law?
- What difference do right and wrong make?

A number of years ago an organization promoting atheism published a pamphlet in which they had rather ugly, sinister, portrait sketches of several of the principle people of the Bible.

Under each picture was the name of the person being referred to and a description of the person.

- Under Abraham was the word "coward" for being willing to sacrifice the honor of his wife Sarah to save his own hide.
- Under Jacob's name were the words "liar and cheat".
- Under Moses' name was "hypocrite" - the man who killed another said 'thou shalt not kill'.
- Under David's name were "adulterer and murderer".

The thing that is noteworthy about all these charges is that they are absolutely true.

And when the Atheist asks "How can a good God forgive such actions?" They are asking an excellent question.

So how can God declare us not guilty?

How can God justify us who are guilty of everything from blasphemy to murder to immorality to selfishness, of any and all of the evil things we do to God and each other.

The answer is found in V24 with a fuller explanation of it in Vv25-26.

V24 says we are justified freely by his grace, THROUGH the REDEMPTION that came by Jesus Christ.

"REDEMPTION" - there's a 25-cent theological word, right?

Yes it is a theological word but it is also a very common word used by many in our culture.

**Penal substitution is at stake here.**

Redemption simply means to set free through the paying of a price.

Today we can redeem an item we have placed in "hock" at a

“hock shop” or “Pawn Shop”

The Hock Shop owner will keep the item we have placed there until we bring the specified price and “redeem” it.

In a similar fashion we are “in hock” because of our sin.

We are slaves to sin and its consequence - the wrath of God.  
But God comes and redeems us, buys us out of the situation we are in.

Now that becomes clearer to us when we put the next verses with it and see exactly what it is that God does.

V25 “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement.”  
(The NASB reads, “God displayed him publicly as a propitiation”)

These words “sacrifice of atonement” or “propitiation” come from one Greek word - but what do they mean?

If I harm you and you are rightly angry with me because of my offense, we will be “at odds” with one another unless justice is done.

Unless the offense is atoned for, satisfied, made up for, righteous anger is still appropriate.

But when I sincerely confess my wrong and make whatever reparation is possible; when justice is done, you forgive me, lay down your anger, and we are reconciled.

In the OT times, at God’s direction, the Jews would offer certain kinds of sacrifices to make atonement for the sins of the people.

By offering the sacrifice the people could avert the wrath of God against them for their sin.

By the sacrifice of atonement God would become propitious, favorably disposed, toward the people - he would be a friend rather than an enemy.

Now Paul has already made it clear in Romans 1 & 2 that God has every right to be intensely angry with us.

We are under his wrath because of our sin.

But what these verses state is that because of his grace God has

chosen to give himself.

- Notice who takes action to bring about reconciliation.
- Notice who offers the sacrifice.
- Not us, but God.

He presented himself, in the person of his Son Jesus, as a sacrifice of atonement.

It is not at all that we bring gifts to God hoping to avert his anger.  
But that God gave his only Son.

John Stott said it this way: "God gave himself to save us from himself." (Stott p115)

God chose to direct **against himself** the full weight of his wrath against our sin.

Because of the movie "The Passion of the Christ," controversy has swirled around the question of who killed Jesus.

Whether you have already or will see the movie or not, don't let the movie or the controversy around it get in the way of understanding the whole point of Jesus' death.

Jesus was not a victim of Pilate, the Jews or even of you and me.

He was not a martyr for a cause.

Jesus died because, he, God, **gave** his life – he was self-offered sacrifice to atone for the sins of his people.

Jesus is God and he came to earth to die, but not as a victim or martyr.

Speaking of his death and resurrection Jesus said in John 10:17-18, "The reason my Father loves me is that **I lay down my life**--only to take it up again. **No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.** I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again."

Isaiah had prophesied it in Isaiah 53:10, "It was **the LORD's will to crush him** and cause him to suffer."

Peter said in Acts 2:22 “This man (Jesus) was handed over to you **by God's set purpose and foreknowledge...**”

And in Acts 4:28, “those who crucified Jesus “did what **(God's) power and will had decided beforehand should happen.**”

Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:6, “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, **who gave himself** as a ransom...”

John said it this way, 1 John 4:10 “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and **sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice** for our sins.

Who killed Jesus? God did!

Don't misunderstand me to be saying that God the Son was victim of God the Father.

If we keep in mind the full deity of Jesus and the Trinity, we understand that the triune God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) determined before the creation of the world that the Son would lay down his own life for us.

Now why did God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) have to do this?

Why couldn't he just **declare** us “forgiven”, “justified”?

V26 answers that question: “He did it (that is, he presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement) to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as **to be just and the one who justifies** those who have faith in Jesus.”

God is just - and he must act in accordance with his nature.

If God overlooked sin he would cease to be God.

God must punish sin.

The problem is that God is also love and he loves us, but we are destined for wrath and eternal destruction.

We were helpless; we couldn't make up for our own sin.

And so God used the only way possible to justify us, to acquit us, and still remain a just God who punishes sin - he poured out his just wrath on himself - “for God so loved the world that he gave his only unique Son...”

And so God remains “just”.  
AND He justifies us.

Why would he do it? Because he loves us.  
Why does he love us? Because of His unmerited grace.

Oh, how I wish I had time to address the resurrection this morning.  
But suffice it to say that without the resurrection, without Christ’s victory over the sin and death for which he died, his death would have been in vain and as Paul says it we would still be in our sin and headed for eternity under the wrath of God.

But Christ did rise from the dead – he is the victor.

- His death did satisfy the demands of divine justice.
- My sins have been paid for and I can have his righteousness as mine.
- I can be reconciled to God.

4. Lastly this morning, we ask the question:

**“How does God’s righteousness become ours?”**

How does this “righteousness from God” that I so desperately need in order to stand in the presence of a holy God, become mine?

Most of you know the answer but I want you to see that Paul pours that answer all over these words of his:

V22 “This righteousness...comes **through faith** in Jesus Christ to all who believe.”

V25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement **through faith**”

V26 (the very end) “the one who justifies **those who have faith** in Jesus.

Faith in Jesus is placing your trust in him and what he did on the cross as your way to God.

Faith in Jesus is placing no confidence whatsoever in you, your goodness, your efforts, or your standing in the church or community  
AND instead placing full confidence **ONLY** in Jesus and what

he did.

Faith in Jesus is acknowledging that apart from Jesus you have no hope - none whatsoever!

Faith in Jesus is acknowledging that with Jesus you have all confidence - the assurance of life with God now and forever.

Faith in Jesus is not faith in your faith:

One theologian wrote: "God justifies the believer not because of the worthiness of his belief, but because of the worthiness of the one who is believed - Christ." (paraphrased from Stott p118)

Faith's only function is to receive the grace offered.

We are justified, we receive the "righteousness from God" by grace alone through faith alone.

I wish to close by having you hear Paul again from later in his letter: Romans 10:9-11 "If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. <sup>10</sup> For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. <sup>11</sup> As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

I ask you, have you made a public declaration of your trust, your faith in Christ alone for your salvation?

Sing: "Hallelujah, What a Savior"

"Justification by Faith" by Charles Spurgeon

<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0126.htm>

*Counted Righteous in Christ* by John Piper (an on-line book)

[http://desiringgod.org/media/pdf/books\\_crc/countedrighteous\\_ch1-2.pdf](http://desiringgod.org/media/pdf/books_crc/countedrighteous_ch1-2.pdf)

## Unlimited vs. Limited Atonement

It is vital for someone to understand that, unless you are a universalist you believe in a limited atonement because you don't believe everyone goes to heaven. **The question then becomes not "Is the atonement limited?" but "How is the atonement limited?"**

Is the atonement limited by the free will of man or the free will of God? The answer is found in the definition of "atonement." If Christ atoned for the sins of everyone, then everyone goes to heaven. For that is the meaning of "atonement." (from [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org).)

### Verses apparently supporting unlimited atonement:

John 1:29b "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!  
Notice, that if "world" here means every individual, this would mean universalism. For if Christ takes away the sins of every individual in the world, then everybody would be saved (for their sins would be gone).

1 Timothy 2:5-6 "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>1Ti 2:6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all men AND 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. <sup>2Co 5:15</sup> And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Like the word "world," "all" doesn't always mean "every individual without exception," but "some people from all groups." It means "both Jews and Gentiles" but not "every Jew and every Gentile." Read Mark 1:5. Does "all" in this verse mean every individual in the world?

1 Timothy 2:6 Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for all classes and groups of people.

Hebrews 2:9 "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

If we do use the word all to mean "every individual without exception," we mean "every individual within a certain group." For example, if I say to our Bible study group "is everybody here?" I do not mean "every individual to ever walk the face of the earth." I mean everybody who is in our group. Hebrews 2:9 "Every" means "every believer."

1 John 2:2 "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.



(For definition of “whole world” see Revelation 13:3; 12:9; Romans 1:8) *He prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad* (John 11:51-52). “Whole world” (1 John 2:2) therefore means “the children of God who are scattered” throughout the world (John 11:52-53).

If Jesus died for the sins of unbelievers in the same way that he died for the sins of believers then what are unbelievers in hell for?

If you say “unbelief,” then you are saying that Jesus died for all sins except the sin of unbelief. But the Bible says that sinners in hell pay for many sins. See Colossians 3:5-6 and other passages.

### **Verses supporting Limited Atonement – Definite Atonement – Particular Atonement**

Acts 20:28 “Be shepherds of **the church** of God, which he bought with his own blood.

Matthew 20:28 “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as **a ransom for many.**”

John 15:13 “Greater love has no one than this, that he **lay down his life for his friends.**

John 17:6, 9 “I have revealed you to those **whom you gave me out of the world.** They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.  
<sup>9</sup> I pray for them. I am **not praying for the world**, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.

John 10:14-16 ““I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— <sup>Jn 10:15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and **I lay down my life for the sheep.** <sup>Jn 10:16</sup> I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

Ephesians 5:25-26 “just as Christ **loved the church** and gave himself up for her..”

Hebrews 9:28 “so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins **of many people;**

“If you say to me, then, that at the cross Christ only accomplished for me what he accomplished for those who will suffer hell for their sins, then you strip the death of Jesus of its actual effective accomplishment on my behalf, and leave me with what?—an atonement that has lost its precious assuring power that my sins were

really covered and the curse was really lifted and the wrath of God was really removed. That's a high price to pay in order to say that Christ tasted death for everyone in the same way. (John Piper in sermon: "For whom Did Jesus Taste Death.")

See also Lorraine Boettner at <http://www.mbrem.com/calvinism/bchap12.htm>  
And John Hendryx below:

### **Did Christ Die for all Men or Only His elect?**

<http://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/jhendryx03.html>

The following is a written response to a brother with the following question about limited atonement (that Christ died only for the elect):

*Could you please clarify the extent of the atonement, limited versus unlimited? Isn't limited atonement wrong and doesn't the Bible plainly teach unlimited atonement (that Christ died for the sins of all people in the world)?*

This is a very good question and has remained an issue between believers through many centuries.

Many people popularly call themselves "four-point" Calvinists because they find the idea of a limited atonement loathsome, or believe somehow that the Bible does not teach it. What is meant by a four-point Calvinist? It is generally understood to mean that an individual claims to believe in *total depravity, unconditional election, irresistible grace* and *perseverance of the saints* but not limited atonement (dropping the "L" in limited atonement) in TULIP (TU-IP). What is interesting about this, however, is that everyone involved actually believes in a limited atonement since we can all agree that Christ did not actually redeem everyone who ever lived. There will be some who end up in the lake of fire according to both positions. The question, therefore, is not whether there is a "limit" to the extent of the atonement, but rather, what is the nature of the limit and who limits it? Is it limited by God's choice and design or by free human choices? Did God, from eternity, sovereignly determine to whom He would apply the benefits of the atonement, or did God leave it to man's will? This is why I generally like to call my position "particular redemption" rather than limited atonement since both sides ultimately limit the application of the atonement.

If you ask one of these brothers or sisters, "***for whom did Christ die?***" they will generally answer something like this: "the Bible plainly teaches that Christ's death and His work of redemption was not only sufficient for the entire world, but that He actually died for the sins of all the world." They will back their position with this verse from 1 John 2:2 - "*He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*" ...as well as John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish

but have eternal life." (And leave it there as if this settles the argument).

Unfortunately this view leaves an island of righteousness in man to be able to believe the Gospel without the aid of the regenerating grace, which Christ purchased on the cross. It follows that those who hold to a general atonement believe ***the one sin for which Christ did not die is rejection of His person and work*** (they will cite John 3:18,36). *[Some readers have claimed that I am setting up a straw man here but this is actually the position (word for word) currently being taught by such institutions as Dallas Theological Seminary. Anyone wishing to take issue with me here I have evidence of this and will gladly provide it upon request.]* So if, as they claim, that Christ did not die for our unbelief, then who did?

What many are, in fact, teaching is that Christ *did not* die for **ALL THE SINS** of the whole world, since they have excluded the sin of unbelief. In other words they claim that Christ died for our breaking of the 2nd through 10th commandments in the decalogue but not the first commandment. So, the obvious question to answer here is "who, then, dies for our sin of unbelief?" Do we atone for it ourselves? Does God overlook our former unbelief because the sincerity of our newly found faith makes up for our previous unbelief? Does the atonement for sins of unbelief kick in only **after** we unlock the door by "accepting Jesus into our hearts?" It is my contention that Christ died for all our sins including the sin of unbelief. If you agree with me yet believe in a universal atonement then why are there still people in hell? If all men's unbelief has been paid for then all sin has been forgiven - there is nothing left to forgive and we would then have universalism. But 1 John 3:23 teaches "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ." To disobey this command is a sin, and the greatest sin of all I might add. A question to ask yourself is did Christ pay for this sin or not?

It is not quite apparent to me why the text of John 3:16 should be an argument against limited atonement. The passage does not say Jesus died for everyone, but only that the Father gave his Son for **ALL THOSE WHO WOULD BELIEVE**. It says, "**WHOEVER BELIEVES** in **HIM** shall not perish but have eternal life." Right? Don't we all believe this? That is why the consistent biblical Calvinists, when presenting the gospel to unbelievers, simply teach that Christ died for "**all who would believe**", which is actually closer to the meaning of this text than the erroneous position that He died for all in a general kind of way, and yet for no individual in particular. Instead, we believe that the benefits of the atonement will apply only to who will be believers, so he did not die for any person who would remain steadfast in their unbelief. So I would argue that John 3:16 actually supports the definite atonement position better than the indefinite position. They are reading into the text that Christ's death only potentially will save someone if they believe without the help and grace of the cross to do so. So in actuality, Christ died for no one in particular this scheme. His affection was only cast forth in a general impersonal kind of way rather than actually coming for His people who He set his affection on from eternity.

In fact, this teaching comes full circle and devastates all of the other doctrines of grace.

Although claiming to believe in Total Depravity, the teaching of the so-called four-point Calvinists is really that man still has the moral ability to turn to God on his own without regenerating grace (a grace purchased on the cross) effectively destroying total depravity, even though the Bible plainly teaches that no one seeks God unless first born again (1 John 5:1; John 6:37, 39, 44, 63-65; Rom 3:11. 1 Cor 2:14, John 1:13; John 3). That is to say, natural fallen man has the ability and desire (in some cases) to believe in Christ without regenerating grace. It is teaching a "conditional" election since it depends completely on God's foreknowledge of whether or not we will have faith, even though the Bible plainly teaches that election is not conditioned on something God sees in us and that faith is a divine gift (Eph 2:5-8). So in effect **WE** end up choosing God with our autonomous free will in this scheme, not the other way around. Those who deny limited atonement are also surreptitiously semi-pelagian in all the other doctrines of grace as well. Salvation becomes the work of man, rather than a monergistic divine work of grace. Some may argue that God's grace works together with man, but the problem with this is that it still leaves the final decision for salvation in the hands of man. Faith, apart from Christ's work on the cross, precedes saving grace in this view, contrary to everything the Bible teaches (ROM 9:16; John 1:13). God's grace would take us part of the way to salvation leaving man's will to make the final decision. So, according to those who claim that the atonement is unlimited (indefinite) there is no divine election in the final analysis, but only humans electing God even though we all know that it is God that chooses us (John 15:16).

The biblical teaching is that God, before the foundation of the world in His eternal councils, knew and determined to whom He would apply the benefits of the atonement? (2 Timothy 1 9, Titus 1:2; Eph 1:4,5)

*"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.**" John 6:39 (emphasis mine)*

What does "*that of all He has given Me I lose nothing*" mean except that God, in His eternal councils had already determined who would be written in the book of life and that Jesus Christ came to earth in time to carry out their eternal redemption. Is Jesus' purpose not in sync with God the Fathers' and God the Holy Spirits'? God the Father elects certain individuals and the Holy Spirit regenerates them. Does the Son have a different redemptive agenda? No, the three Persons of the Trinity are always consistent with one another. If you believe in election, which you do unless you have torn out almost every page of your Bible, then you must believe that that Christ came to redeem His elect, and the Holy Spirit applied the benefits of the atonement only on those the Father had "given" Christ. It means that He will infallibly bring His own into His eternal kingdom. I hear someone say "but that's not fair" ... does God owe you anything my friend? Is He your debtor? The only debt He owes you is His just wrath. His choosing of you is an act of His mercy, an act of His divine good pleasure (Eph 1:4,5).

Before we get to 1 John 2:2 lets familiarize ourselves with some other biblical texts on this crucial issue:

***First Take a look at these passages of Scripture:***

"Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation." Revelation 5:9 (emphasis mine)

*my comment:* did Christ redeem everybody by His blood in this passage? the entire world or a limited number? Doesn't it say that He purchased men **FROM** every tribe???

"...and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption." Heb 9:12

*my comment:* was everybody's redemption eternal? through His blood He obtained eternal redemption - for whom? all men? then why aren't they all saved? If all men's redemption is eternal then we must become universalists.

"...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 2:14

*My question:* IN this passage did Christ redeem all men from iniquity or just some? the second half of the verse also narrows the redemption to a particular people, not all people.

v.5 "...But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.... v. 8 He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? v.11... By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. v.12 ...Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors." Isaiah 53:5,8,11-12

*my comment:* Are the sins of the whole world "healed" by Christ's scourging in this passage? If they are, then why isn't everyone saved? What meaning does healing have then if it is unlimited? Are the words "my people" referring to all mankind or the many whom He would justify that the Father had "given" Him? (see John 17:9) Since He "bore the sin of many" this certainly is not including the reprobate but a particular people purchased out of the world.

Now we come to the famous text that our "four-point" brothers put all their weight upon as teaching an unlimited atonement:

"He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." 1 John 2:2

At first glance I must admit that this appears to be a pretty good text to back up their argument but upon closer examination, it falls apart. The problem is that if the four-pointers read this verse the way they intend to then we must also conclude that the whole world's sins have already been atoned for (believers and unbelievers) and thus all will be saved (universalism). If Christ is a propitiation or atonement for all men's sins, paying for all sins ever committed, then why isn't everyone in the whole world

saved???? So the verse actually proves to much. The verse simply means, (and there is no doubt this is what Paul meant), Christ did not die for every person without **exception** but every person without **distinction**. . All kinds of people everywhere, is what is meant. We see this elsewhere when the Scriptures say, Christ "purchased for God with [His] blood men **from** every tribe and tongue and people and nation." (Revelation 5:9). Many will argue that He didn't die for our unbelief, which I believe I thoroughly discredited in my argument above. John is speaking, rather, of sins for people *throughout the whole world*, not each and every person's sins. There are too many problems with saying that the text includes all men (believers and unbelievers) and, as I have shown, this leads to an unbiblical universalism. Saying Christ died for the sins of the whole world is similar in the use of language in many other passages in Scripture such as Mark 1:5 which says, "And **all the country of Judea** was going out to him, and **all the people of Jerusalem.**" **If you think the "all in this passage means every single person without exception, you have missed the point, it means large numbers of people; all persons without distinction, but not all persons without exception.**

Christ died for all of the sins of His elect, including their previous sin of unbelief. Belief in the Gospel does not make up for our previous sin of unbelief. Belief (faith) is the witness that God has already wrought grace in our hearts, the inevitable response to His work of regeneration in our souls. ([John 3:21](#)) Christ clearly came to lay down His life for His sheep (John 10:11) and some people are not his sheep: *"...but you do not believe because you are not my sheep."* (John 10:26) Jesus prayed for His own but he would not pray for those the Father had **NOT** given him: "I pray for them. ***I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me***, for they are yours." Emphasis mine (John 17:9).

This teaching does have great practical value; specifically that our prayers for the lost will be effectual. As we go out to do missions, to reach the lost, we can have confidence that we go not in vain but that we carry with us the Word of God which has the power to raise the dead to life. We don't just go in the hope that maybe someone will be saved; or that Christ died for no one in particular. But rather that He died for a particular people to make them His own. If my hope was based solely on whether someone would respond to the Gospel message by their own free will then I would despair because no one would respond (ROM 3:11. 1 Cor 2:14)... but because God has an eternal plan, a bride he has chosen for His Son, I can rejoice in the knowledge that God's word proclaimed will effectually bring home those whom he delivers the inward call. (ROM 8:28-30)

Finally, remember that it is not a question of whether or not Christ's redemption was able to cleanse the sins of all men, as we know it clearly could have if this is what He so desired. The question is what does the Bible teach about the divine intent with regard to the atonement, which I hope this short paper has answered.

Soli Deo Gloria  
John Hendryx

P.S. Historically many of the greatest minds the church has produced were 5 pointers, not four. Some of the more well known ones were Jonathan Edwards, C.H. Spurgeon, A.A. Hodge, Charles Hodge, John Owen, John Calvin, George Whitfield, Thomas Goodwin and more recently, J.I. Packer, R.C Sproul, John Piper, Iain Murray, Michael Horton, James Boice and John Murray

***Further Studies:***

[A QUEST FOR GODLINESS The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life](#) by J. I. Packer  
[2 Peter 2:1 and Universal Redemption](#) By Simon Escobedo III Must Read!

[Definite Atonement](#) by R. Scott Clark

[Limited Atonement](#) by Loraine Boettner

[12 Examples from Spurgeon on Particular Redemption](#) compiled by Colin Maxwell

[Christ's Limited Atonement](#) by Charles Spurgeon

[The Death of Death in the Death of Christ](#) by John Owen (Book)