

The Sovereignty of God

Part 4: In Salvation

Particular Redemption

What Does the Bible Say?

God's work of redemption cannot be both *universal* and *particular*. The language of Scripture reveals which it is. The following are just a few of the Scriptures affirming that: (1) the benefits of Christ's atonement are the *definite* possession of the Church in *particular* (believers); and, (2) the sufficient work of Christ guarantees to the elect all of God's promises of reconciliation and eternal blessing. The words *us*, *we*, *our*, and *they* in these passages indicate that the merit of Christ's atonement belongs to His Church *in particular*.

Matthew 1:21: And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is **He who will save His people from their sins.**

John 10:11: I am the good shepherd; **the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.**

Acts 20:28: Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God **which He purchased with His own blood.**

Romans 5:8-11: ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward **us**, in that while **we** were yet sinners, **Christ died for us.** ⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, **we** shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. ¹⁰For if while **we** were enemies, **we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son**, much more, having been reconciled, **we shall be saved** by His life. ¹¹And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, **through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**

Romans 8:31-34: ³¹What then shall we say to these things? If God is for **us**, who is against **us**? ³²He who did not spare His own Son, but **delivered Him up for us all**, how will He not also with **Him freely give us all things?** ³³Who will bring a charge against **God's elect?** God is the one who justifies; ³⁴who is the one who condemns? **Christ Jesus is He** who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, **who also intercedes for us.**

2 Corinthians 5:21: He made **Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we** might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Galatians 1:3-5: ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴**who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us** out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

Galatians 3:13: **Christ redeemed us** from the curse of the Law, **having become a curse for us**—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”—

Ephesians 1:7: **In Him we have redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, . . .

Ephesians 5:25-27: ²⁵Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and **gave Himself up for her;** ²⁶that He might **sanctify her**, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but **that she should be holy and blameless.**

Colossians 1:13-14: ¹³For **He delivered us** from the domain of darkness, and **transferred us** to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴**in whom we have redemption**, the forgiveness of sins.

Titus 3:5-7: ⁵He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Hebrews 10:14: For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

1 Peter 2:21-24: ²¹For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow, ²²who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; ²³and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

1 John 1:6-7: ⁶If we say we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth, ⁷but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.

These passages (and many more) clearly affirm that Christ's work *definitely* secures for the Church *in particular* all the benefits of reconciliation to God. This fact is rarely disputed. What is often disputed is that the Church *alone* receives these benefits.

Question 177: Reread the above passage, circling specific words or phrases affirming that Christ's atonement applied specifically to those God has chosen for salvation. Based on this evidence, are you willing to accept this doctrine? _____ Explain your answer. _____

Does the Bible teach universal atonement?

Since the Bible teaches that only those who believe are justified, it necessarily implies that the benefits of Christ's atonement are *not* afforded to unbelievers.

Romans 3:21-25a: ²¹But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.

Clearly, salvation is given to those whom God chose to give it before time began. Clearly, salvation is brought to pass in time through the effectual calling of the Holy Spirit and results in regeneration.

Romans 8:28-30: ²⁸And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. ²⁹For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; ³⁰and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

God's effectual calling brings the sinner to repentance and faith through the enabling work of God's Holy Spirit. This results in conversion, justification and imputation, as well as ultimate sanctification and glorification. At the point of repentance and faith, sinners are *justified* because God's wrath against their sins has been satisfied (*propitiated*). Their guilt has been removed from them (*expiated*), and they are declared righteous in Christ (imputation).

Romans 3:25-28: . . . ²⁵whom God displayed publicly as a **propitiation in His blood through faith**. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and **the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus**. ²⁷Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. ²⁸For we maintain that **a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law**.

Believers in Christ are thus *saved* from God's wrath through Christ's work of *justification*.

Romans 5:9: Much more then, **having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him**.

Question #178: On what basis are believers saved? _____

Question #179: How does this guarantee that all the glory for the salvation of sinners goes to God alone? _____

Some passages of Scripture seem to imply that Christ's atonement was universal. Do the benefits of the atonement extend to unbelievers? Did Christ die for the sins of people who will never be saved?

John 1:29: The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God **who takes away the sin of the world!**"

1 John 2:1-2: ¹My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; ²and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but **also for those of the whole world**.

2 Corinthians 5:18-19: ¹⁸Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹namely, 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.

1 John 4:14: And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be **the Savior of the world**.

If God, through the work of Jesus Christ, has *taken away the sin of the world* through the *propitiation of sins*, how can He righteously punish unbelievers in Hell according to the perfect and good justice of God? Since Scripture cannot contradict itself, these individual passages must be understood in the whole context of Scripture. Thus, these passages cannot mean that the *specific sins of all the people* in the world have been *propitiated*. Scripture defines *propitiation* is the satisfaction of God's wrath against sin; it also teaches that apart from repentance and faith, sinners are doomed by the wrath of God. If the above passages could be understood to mean the benefits of the atonement extend to all people everywhere, then preaching the Gospel would be unnecessary. If the sins of the whole world have already been *taken away* and *propitiated*, repentance and faith are unnecessary for salvation. There is no need for the Gospel. We might even say there is no need for a Bible! Of course, since God's Word is *wholly true*, these passages cannot be understood in a way that invalidates the rest of Scripture. How should we understand these passages in the light of the whole counsel of God? We *must* understand that

although Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross was *sufficient* to save all, it was not *efficacious* for all. The atonement is sufficient to propitiate the sins of all, but only proficient for believers.

Question #180: What primary truth about Scripture *must be* applied as we seek understanding of John 1:29, 1 John 2:1-2, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, and 1 John 4:14? _____

Why is it absolutely necessary that we do this? _____

Hebrews 2:9: But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God **He might taste death for everyone.**

If Christ has already "*tasted death for everyone,*" then why is there any need at all for anyone to die? Is it not rather plain that this "tasting death" is not meant to imply that it will cover or **atone** for the sins of non-elect people, for they will actually "*taste death*" themselves. The **Reformation Study Bible** regarding Hebrews 2:9 is very helpful. "*Here, 'everyone' must be understood in the light of the context and of the results of Jesus' death described elsewhere in Hebrews. It refers to the 'many sons' whom God brings to glory (v.10), whom Jesus calls 'brothers' (v. 11). Those for whom Jesus tasted death were made holy and perfect once for all by His sacrifice (10:10,14), their consciences cleansed from acts that lead to death (9:14), so they are freed from the fear of death (2:14,15). By contrast, there are those (even within Christian congregations) who do not trust the Son but subject Him to ridicule (6:6). For them, 'there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment' (10:26,27). Thus 'everyone' here includes all those (but only those) who persevere in trusting Jesus (3:6,14).*" See here how important understanding texts in their context really is!

Sufficient but not Efficacious

When the Bible speaks of "*the sins of the whole world*" or "*the sins of the world,*" it is addressing the *sufficiency* of Christ's atonement rather than its efficacy. Christ would not have had to suffer any more or any less if God had chosen to save more or fewer people. The *efficacy* of Christ's atonement addresses the *application* of Christ's suffering to particular sinners who come to Christ in faith believing. Only those God has specifically chosen to save are *benefited* by Christ's atoning death because only they possess God given gift of saving faith. Hell is a reality which portrays that the atonement is **not benefiting the non-elect (and unbelieving) in the same way** it is benefiting the elect and believing.

Ephesians 1:7-8a: ⁷In Him **we have redemption through His blood**, the forgiveness of our **trespasses**, according to the riches of His grace, ⁸which He **lavished upon us.**

Although the free offer of the Gospel goes out to *the whole world*, the *benefit* of the atonement is received only by those who believe the Gospel. The efficacy of Christ's death is applied (made specifically effective for particular people) when **they place their faith** (believe and rely) on Christ for salvation. Christ's atonement remains *non-effectual* for those who do not place their faith in it. **Propitiation** of sins and **justification** before God only **result from grace alone by faith alone in Christ alone.**

Romans 3:21-25a...28 - ²¹But now apart from the Law, the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even **the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe**; for there is no distinction; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴being justified as a gift by His grace **through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus**; ²⁵whom God displayed publically **as a propitiation in His blood through faith....** ²⁸For we maintain that **a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**

Scripture passages that describe Christ's death as universal in scope are clearly consistent with the full counsel of God. Christ's death, as the perfect unblemished sacrifice, is *infinite* in its ability and power to atone for *the sins of the whole world*, but limited in its application to those who, as a result of God's work of regeneration, repent and place their faith in Jesus Christ. **The Bible plainly declares** that *redemption* is applied in *particular and only* to people who believe the Gospel with saving faith. This is done *as a result of* God's foreknowledge and predestination. *All* of God's elect come to this saving faith by the effectual calling and regeneration of *His Holy Spirit*, which faith is a gift given in regeneration.

Question #181: In your own words, explain the relationship between the *sufficiency* of Christ's atonement and its *efficacy*. _____

Particular Redemption can be reasoned from the Decree

The Church is ultimately saved by God's *eternal decree*. God purposed, *from the beginning*, to redeem a specific group of people for His own possession. Each member of the Trinity participated in the redemption of this group, the Church, the bride of Christ. God the Father *planned* redemption (by election and foreknowledge), God the Son *purchased* redemption (by atonement), and God the Spirit *applied* redemption (by regeneration).

2 Timothy 1:8-10: ⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, **but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity**, ¹⁰but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

Romans 8:29-30: ²⁹**For whom He foreknew, He also predestined** to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren; ³⁰**and whom He predestined, these He also called**; and whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Romans 3:21-25a: ²¹But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²²even the righteousness of God through in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; ²³for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴**being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus**; ²⁵whom God displayed publically as a propitiation in His blood through faith.

Titus 3:4-7: ⁴But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, ⁵He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, **by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit**, ⁶whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Question #182: In your own words, describe the role of each Person of the Trinity in redeeming sinners. _____

Thus, we affirm Scripture's clear teaching that God did, in fact, *decree* from eternity past to save specific individuals who would comprise the Church of Jesus Christ. The unfolding of history progressively validates this great truth. God's people are being effectually called by His Spirit, redeemed from sin, and reconciled to God through the work of His Son for the purpose of enjoying God and glorifying Him forever. Scripture teaches that whatever comes to pass has been *eternally decreed by God*. This means that God has predetermined all of the events of history. The theological term for this divine activity is *foreordination*. God has *fore* (before time began), *ordained* (determined) all that comes to pass. Jonathan Edwards helpfully explained: "Whether God has decreed all things that ever come to pass or not, all that own the being of a God, own that He knows all things beforehand. *Now, it is self-evident that if He knows all things beforehand, He doth approve of them or doth not approve of them*; that is, He is either willing they should be, or He is not willing they should be. *But to will that they should be is to decree them.*"

In the final analysis, the question, "To whom does the atonement apply?" has only one scriptural answer: the believer in Christ. We have seen that the benefits of the atonement are efficacious for believers *only*. Thus, redemption in Christ Jesus is a *particular redemption*.

Ephesians 1:7-8a: ⁷In Him **we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses**, according to the riches of His grace, ⁸which He lavished upon us.

Revelation 5:9-10: ⁹And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; **for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.** ¹⁰And Thou has made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."

Question #183: How do the highlighted phrases in the above passages indicate that our redemption in Jesus Christ is a particular redemption? _____

Christ's Priesthood is Exclusive

Scripture clearly teaches that Christ is not interceding for unbelievers. If He were, they would have an advocate with God and enjoy the benefit of salvation through Christ's perfect mediation. However, this is *not* the case. The **Bible plainly declares** that Christ's sacrifice of atonement benefits only believers in Christ.

Ephesians 3:8-12: ⁸To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light what is the administration of **the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things**; ¹⁰in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹**This was in**

**accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord,
¹²in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.**

Hebrews 10:10-15: ¹⁰By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹And every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; ¹²but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³waiting from that time onward until His enemies be made a footstool for His feet. ¹⁴For **by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.**

When Jesus prays for the church in His high priestly prayer, He does not pray for the world, nor for unbelievers, but specifically for those the Father has given Him. His prayer of intercession for His own will be answered by the Father absolutely and completely in the course of time.

John 17:9, 20-21: ⁹I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine; . . . ²⁰I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us; that the world may believe that Thou didst send me.

Other passages also affirm that His intercession is for believers only.

Romans 8:33-34: ³³Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; ³⁴who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, **who also intercedes for us.**

Hebrews 4:14-15: ¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast **our confession.** ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.

Hebrews 7:25: Hence, also, He is able to save forever **those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.**

Question #184: If you are a Christian, write a brief prayer of thanksgiving to God for choosing you for salvation. If you are not a Christian but would like to be, write a brief prayer asking God to guide you into genuine repentance and faith. _____

Notes: