

The Extent of the Atonement: Who Did Christ Die For?

by Matt Perman

Who did Christ die for? Did He die for every single human being to ever live, or did He only die for those that the Father had chosen to save? Did Christ come to merely open the possibility of salvation for everybody, or did He come to actually guarantee the salvation of the elect by His death? Is it even important to know the answer to these questions?

If we think that these questions are merely a matter of interesting debate, but are of no awesome significance to our lives, our worship, our view of God, and our hope in evangelism, we are very far off base. The extent of the atonement is of crucial importance because it is inextricably tied up with what Christ actually did when He died. You see, if we have a wrong understanding of the extent of the atonement, we will have a wrong understanding of what the cross even was, and what it was intended to do. And I doubt that anyone would be willing to say that a wrong understanding of those points is of no real significance.

As we investigate the biblical arguments that Christ died only for those who would believe in Him that is, He died only for those that the Father had chosen to bring to faith we will see the crucial significance of the issue and exactly how it affects our view of Christ's entire mission. The view that Christ died only for the elect I will call *successful redemption*. The view that He died for all humans without exception I will call *universal redemption*.

The three Persons of the Trinity are always in perfect agreement

It is a marvelous thing that our salvation is a work of the whole Trinity, each Person emphasizing a special role. Understanding this will not only give good evidence for successful redemption, but will allow us to be more specific in the thanks we give to God for our salvation.

God the Father is the chief agent who *planned redemption*. He chose whom would be saved (Ephesians 1:3-11), predestined His Son to be the Savior (Matthew 12:18; 1 Peter 1:20) sent His Son into the world as Savior (John 3:16; 17:3; 1 John 4:14), laid upon Christ the punishment for sins (Isaiah 53:6, 10; Romans 3:25), rose Him from the dead (Romans 10:9; Acts 3:26), and then exalted Him to His right hand (Acts 2:32-36; Ephesians 1:20-23; Philippians 2:9).

God the Son is the chief agent who *accomplished redemption*. He willingly assumed the role of mediator the Father had given Him (Philippians 2:6-8; Hebrews 10:6, 7; John 6:38), became man (John 1:14), as the God-man offered

Himself up to the Father as the sacrifice for sins (Hebrews 9:14; Ephesians 5:25-26), rose from the dead (John 10:18), and assumed His position at the right hand of God (Hebrews 1:3) where He now intercedes for the elect (Romans 8:34) and reigns as king (Ephesians 1:20-23; Revelation 1:5), one day to return to claim His church (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18) and judge the living and the dead (Acts 17:31; John 5:22-23).

God the Holy Spirit is the chief agent who *applies redemption*. He convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgement (John 16:7-11), brings the elect to faith so that they can receive the benefits won for them (John 6:63; 3:3-8) and is given as the pledge of our inheritance (Ephesians 1:14) and seal of our security (Ephesians 1:13; 4:30). He concurred with the Father and Son in each of their roles. He was involved in the incarnation (Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:35), the sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 11:14), the resurrection, and empowered Christ for His ministry (Luke 4:14).

There are many riches to be found in studying the various roles of each Person of the Trinity. But what I wish to call attention to is the fact of election. There can be no doubt that the Father has chosen precisely who will believe and thus be saved (John 6:37; Luke 10:21-22; Acts 13:48; Romans 8:29-30; 9:15-16; Ephesians 1:4, 5, 11; 2 Timothy 1:9), and it therefore follows that He has also decided who will not believe and thus not be saved (Romans 9:17-23). Now, would it be consistent for the Father to predestine only the elect to be saved, but then send the Son to die for and thus attempt to save every individual in the world? That would seem to be a contradiction in God's plan. For then God would be purposing to save only the elect, but then intend by Christ's death to save every individual in the world. Thus, it seems inescapable that the Father sent Christ to die only for the elect. And since the Trinity is always unified in purpose, we know that if the Father sent the Son to die only for the elect, then the Son only died for the elect. For the Son would not attempt to do anything that was contrary to God's plan.

Christ's purpose was to save

This is where we see revealed the great difference in the opposing ways universal redemption and successful redemption view the death of Christ. The question is: What were God's intentions in Christ's death? Did Christ die for the purpose of making *certain* the salvation of all those whom He died for, or did He die only with the purpose of making it *possible* for all humans to be saved if they will only "do their part"?

There are three options before us in regards to the purpose of Christ's death:

Option #1.

The first option is that Christ intended to secure the salvation of every human to ever live. But if this was Christ's intention, then He failed, since many people will never be saved (Matthew 25:46). Since God can never fail (Job 42:2), we must rule this option out.

Option #2.

Because of the force of this objection, most who believe in universal redemption will agree that Christ did not intend to secure the salvation of every human to ever live. But, they argue, that does not destroy their system. For, they respond, He only intended to *make it possible* for everybody to be saved. In other words, Christ did not die to actually and really save anybody, but only died in order to make all humans *able to be saved*. He didn't die to *actually* save us, but to only make us *saveable*.

The errors of option #2.

The errors of this belief are **huge**. I hope that they are self-evident, that just the thought that Christ's death was only intended to make us *saveable*, and not actually saved, makes clear to you the terrible mistake of universal redemption. But it is important to make explicit the errors of this understanding of the purpose of Christ's death.

First, it denies that Christ is a Savior who actually saves. For, on this view, the work of Christ wasn't sufficient to gain our salvation for us. It wasn't enough. Rather, the work of Christ needs us to add something to it our faith. Thus, our salvation is not coming *fully* from Christ rather, it is coming partly from Christ and partly from ourselves. In contrast to this, the glories of successful redemption are evident, as J.I. Packer brings out: "Christ did not win a hypothetical salvation for hypothetical believers, a mere possibility of salvation for any who might possibly believe, but a real salvation for His own chosen people....[The cross's] saving power does not depend on faith being added to it; its saving power is such that *faith flows from it*. The cross secured the full salvation of all for whom Christ died." [1] Rejoice in our successful savior!

Second, universal redemption seems to deny the personal nature of Christ's death. If Christ didn't actually die to *save me*, wherein lies the comfort of saying that "Christ died for *my* sins. Christ loved me and gave Himself up for *me*" (cf. Galatians 2:20)?

Third, the Scriptures utterly oppose the the teaching that Christ only died to make it possible to save us, but did not die to actually secure the salvation of anyone. Luke 19:10 informs us that Christ did not come to merely make possible salvation, but came "to seek and *to save* that which was lost." Christ did not come into the world to make all humans *able to be saved*, but came into the world to *actually save* people: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). The following list of Scriptures should serve to make clear enough that Christ's intention was to secure salvation for those that He died for:

1. Christ died to deliver believers from this evil age, as God had willed: Galatians 1:4
2. Christ died to redeem and purify believers: Titus 2:14.
3. Christ died to sanctify and cleanse the church: Ephesians 5:25-27.
4. Christ died to actually remove God's wrath: Romans 3:25.
5. Christ's death doesn't make it possible for us to be reconciled to God, but

actually does reconcile us to God: Romans 5:10.

6. Christ actually obtained eternal redemption by His death: Hebrews 9:12.

7. Christ's death actually secured redemption: Ephesians 1:7.

Thus, the Scriptures are clear that Christ didn't die to simply make salvation possible; He died for the purpose of actually saving those that He died for! Since God's purposes cannot fail (Job 42:2; Isaiah 46:10), we must conclude that *everybody that Christ died for will be saved*. Yet, we know that not everybody will be saved (20:15). Therefore, Christ did not die for everybody. For if He did, then either His purpose failed, or everybody will be saved both of which Scripture denies.

Option #3.

These three objections to option number two decisively prove the truth of option number three successful redemption. Christ intended to save everybody He died for, and was successful in accomplishing His purpose. Since not everyone is saved, Christ did not therefore die for everyone.

"Calvary, in other words, not merely made possible the salvation of those for whom Christ died; it ensured that they would be brought to faith and their salvation made actual. The Cross *saves*. Where the Arminian [one who believes in universal redemption] will say: 'I could not have gained my salvation without Calvary,' the Calvinist [one who believes in successful redemption] will say: 'Christ gained my salvation for me at Calvary.' The former makes the Cross the *sine qua non* of salvation, the latter sees it as the actual procuring cause of salvation, and traces the source of every spiritual blessing, faith included, back to the real transaction between God and His Son carried through on Calvary's hill." [2]

In summary, we see that if Christ died for everybody, then either He intended to secure everybody's salvation by it but failed in His purpose (which we saw to be inadequate as option one) or else His death was not intended to secure the actual salvation of those that it was for (which we saw to be inadequate as option two). But if we accept the biblical teaching that Christ's death was intended to accomplish the salvation of those that He died for, then we must conclude that He did not die for everybody.

I hope it is clear from this analysis why it is so important to believe in successful redemption and reject universal redemption. I am not concerned about successful redemption because of some twisted desire to confine the boundaries of divine mercy, but because it is the only way to "safeguard the central affirmation of the gospel that Christ is a redeemer who really does redeem." [3]

The nature of Christ's death reveals the extent of Christ's death

We saw above that the *extent* of Christ's death is necessarily linked up with the *intent* of Christ's death. In addition to this, we will now see that the extent

of Christ's death is necessarily linked up with the *nature* of Christ's death what He did when He died. The way we view the nature of Christ's death will determine the way we view the extent of Christ's death. As we will see, belief in universal redemption requires one to seriously distort and lessen the Biblical teaching on what Christ actually did when He died.

To begin, we must ask a question: Why does God send people to hell? Because His wrath is upon them (Romans 2:5), they are sinners (Romans 3:23), He is their enemy because of their sins (Psalm 5:5), and because they have a penalty to pay for their sins (Romans 6:23). This should be evident. The barrier between God and humankind is sin. Because God is holy, our sin brings out His wrath upon us and makes us His enemies. And because God is just, He is required to make sure that our sins get the penalty they deserve.

With that in mind, we need to ask a second question: What did Christ do when He died? Several things, which if they were going to be effective had to be designed to resolve the above problems our sin has created. First, the Bible teaches that Christ was our propitiation (Romans 3:25-26; 1 John 3:10). This means, as all the dictionaries define it, that He took away *God's wrath*. Second, the Bible teaches that Christ's death was our exapiation (2 Cor. 5:21; John 1:29; 1 Peter 3:24; Hebrews 1:3). This means that is took away *our sins*. Third, the Bible teaches that Christ's death reconciled us to God (Romans 5:10-11). This means that it *made God favorable to us*, removing the hostility and separation between us. Fourth, the Bible teaches that Christ's redeemed us (Mark 10:45; Revelation 5:9; Galatians 3:13-14; Ephesians 1:7; Romans 5:9). This means that it paid the penalty for our sins, as well as securing our deliverance from the pollution of our sins (Titus 2:14; 1 Corinthians 6:20). And fifth, Christ did all of this by sacrificing Himself *in the place of* those whom He died for (Mark 10:45; 1 Peter 3:18).[4]

These five biblical truths about Christ's death show very clearly that *His death removed everything that was sending us to hell*. But if it did this, then His death has infallibly secured the salvation of everybody He died for. If Christ died for you, you cannot perish for His death has removed everything that was causing you to perish. For example, our sins have made us enemies of God. But Christ's death reconciles us to God, thus removing the enmity. Would God condemn someone that has become His friend by the blood of His Son? Again, hell means being eternally punished by God's wrath. But Christ took away God's wrath for everybody He died for. Therefore, if Christ died for you, you cannot go to hell because God has no wrath to pour out on you.

Some people try to respond to this: "Yes, I agree with the Biblical teaching on the nature of the atonement. But that only means that Christ took away God's wrath even for those who perish through unbelief." Do you see the utter inconsistency of this view? It cannot honestly say that Christ's death actually took away God's wrath from those people—for many of those that Christ died for must endure God's wrath forever in hell. Can we really say that Christ took away God's wrath from those people who suffer under God's wrath forever in hell? Let's stop speaking with forked tongues! To say that Christ removed

God's wrath from everybody, yet many people suffer under God's wrath for eternity, is a contradiction. If you hold to the view that Christ died for everybody in the same way, you must believe, in order to be consistent, that therefore Christ's death did not *actually* take away God's wrath, take away sins, bring about reconciliation and obtain redemption—but instead only made it *possible* for those things to happen. As we have seen, Scripture expressly contradicts this view.

Perhaps one of the clearest arguments for successful redemption regards the penalty for our sins. Would it be just for God to make double payment on our sins? In other words, if Christ paid the penalty for the sins of those who finally perish, wouldn't it seem unjust for God to those people once again for their sins again in hell? Furthermore, I would argue that it is not only unjust for God to obtain double payment, but impossible. For example, let's say that "Bob" owes \$4,000 to the bank, which his friend decides to pay back for him. Would it then be possible for the bank to come to Bob the next day and try to collect payment? No!, for there is no payment to collect they debt is already paid and thus gone. In the same way, Christ's death paid the penalty for the sins of the elect, and thus guaranteed their salvation.

Let me sum up this basic line of argument in one concept. Why is it that people go to hell? Because of their sins. What did Christ do when He died? He took away our sins. How, then, can anyone perish for whom Christ died?

Now, some people do try to respond to this. They argue, "Yes, Christ took away the sins of everybody, and therefore nobody will ever be punished for their sins. Therefore, people do not go to hell because of their sins. They go to hell only for rejecting Christ." This objection doesn't work. First of all, the Scriptures clearly teach that people go to hell *both* for their sins and for rejecting Christ. After listing a whole list of sins in verse 5, Colossians 3:6 says, "For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come." Thus, people in hell are not simply punished for rejecting Christ (if they have heard of Him), but are also punished for their sins. For this reason, Christ's death could not have removed their sins.

Second of all, isn't the rejection of Christ itself a sin? If it is, didn't Christ, on this view, die for it? If He did, how can anyone perish? But if it isn't a sin to reject Christ, then why does it cause people to perish? Do we wish to hold that people go to hell for something that isn't even a sin? If one wishes to say that Christ died for all the sins of unbelievers except their sin of unbelief, then they would be saying that Christ did not die for *all* of the sins of all humans which is awfully close to the very thing they are trying to oppose.

As can be seen from all of this, the biblical teaching on the nature of the atonement requires that we believe in successful redemption. Universal redemption requires one to twist the whole nature of the biblical view of the atonement.

All of the elect were in union with Christ when He died

This argument is very simple (though it may take some reflection to first grasp), so I will simply list its steps and leave the verses for the reader to consult.

1. All those whom Christ died for, died with Christ: 2 Corinthians 5:14.
2. All those who died with Christ are raised with Christ to salvation: Romans 6:5, 8.
3. Not everybody is raised with Christ to salvation: Revelation 20:15.
4. Therefore, not everybody died with Christ.
5. Therefore, Christ did not die for everybody—for everybody whom Christ died for, died with Christ (principle #1), but not everybody has died with Christ (principle #4).

Would Christ have died to save those who were already perishing?

Did Christ die to save those who were already in hell when He died? It would be strange that Christ would endure the pains of hell in the place of and in order to save those who already were in hell when He died. But if we admit that He did not die for those who were already eternally lost, we are in effect admitting that He did not die for everybody. It is only a short step from admitting that Christ did not die for those who had perished in the past, to admitting that Christ did not die for those who were destined to perish in the future.

Christ's death was successful: Romans 8:31-34

Romans 8:31-34 is a very glorious passage: “[31]What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? [32]He 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? [33]Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; [34]who is he 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.” To analyze this passage, let us walk through a series of questions.

In verse 31, who is the us? Obviously, it is believers and believers only. All unbelievers will be eternally condemned by God and have His wrath upon them even now (John 3:36), and thus one could hardly say that God is “for them.”

In verse 32, who is the us? Due to the continuation of thought, it must be the same as the “us” in the previous verse all believers, and believers *only*. But do you see what this means? It means that Paul is saying that Christ died for believers, and *only believers*. For since in verse 31 “God is for us” refers only to believers, then the same construction in verse 32 (“...delivered Him up for

us all”) means all believers, but only believers.

But there are even deeper ways that this passage teaches successful atonement. Look at verse 32. Is there anybody that Christ died for that will not be given “all things”? Clearly not, for Paul says that if God delivered up His Son for you, then He would certainly give you everything else that is good for you. And surely this “all things” would include eternal life. Therefore, Paul is affirming that if Christ died for you, you will most certainly be saved for if there were people that Christ died for that never got saved, then Paul could not say that God gives “all things” to everybody that Christ dies for. Therefore, Christians can have great comfort and encouragement.

For the sake of clarity, let me restate the argument from a different angle. In verse 32, Paul is basically saying this: if God gave his own Son for you, He will give you everything else as well. But if Christ died for all people, this argument vanishes. For everybody does not get “all things” because many people will go to hell. Thus, Christ did not die for these people who perish, because Paul says that if Christ died for you, God will also give you all things-which certainly includes salvation! “If God gave his own Son for unbelievers who in the end are lost, then he cannot say that the giving of the Son guarantees ‘all things’ for those for whom he died.”[5]

Continuing on to verse 33, what is Paul saying when he asks “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect?” He asking a rhetorical question. The answer is: No one can bring a successful charge against them. He then gives some reasons for this in verses 33 and 34. What are they? One of those reasons Paul gives for the fact that God’s elect will never be condemned is that Christ died for us. Would this reason still be a good one if Christ died for all people? Obviously not, for Paul’s argument is basically: “Christ died for us, therefore we will never be condemned.” But this argument vanishes if Christ died for the non-elect as well. If people can perish whom Christ died for, Paul could not point to Christ’s death for us as the *guarantee* that all of the elect will be saved.

The effectiveness and extent of the atonement in Revelation 5:9-10

This is another excellent verse: “[9]And 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. [10]And Thou hast made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.’”

First, look carefully at verse nine. Did Christ ransom everybody in every people group? No, He did not for if He did it would not say that the ransomed are taken out *from* every people group, which clearly means Christ ransomed *some* people from *every* people group. Thus, we see from verse nine that Christ’s redemption is *limited in its scope*.

Now look carefully at verse ten. What happens to those who are ransomed? It says that Christ makes them to be a kingdom and priests to God. The *same* people who are ransomed are said to be made a kingdom and priests which is the same as saying that *all* of those whom Christ ransomed become saved. There is nobody that Christ died for that will not finally be saved, because this verse says that those whom He died for are made into a kingdom and priests to God. Thus, we see from verse ten that Christ's redemption is *effective in nature*.

So once again we see how the extent and effectiveness of redemption go together. Because the atonement is effective in nature, everybody that it is intended for will be saved (v. 10). Since not everybody will be saved, the atonement must also be limited in its extent (v. 9). As I said before, the reason it is important to know that Christ did not die for everybody is for the sake of preserving in our hearts and minds the great truth of the effectiveness of the atonement that Christ, through His death, saves everybody He died for.

This view, which we have called "successful redemption," has sometimes been called "limited atonement" because it states that Christ did not die for everybody. But don't let the fact that the word "limited" is used in one of the names for this view mislead you. One simply cannot escape a limited atonement, since not everybody is saved. The atonement is limited in either its extent or its effectiveness. If Christ died for everybody, His death is unlimited in extent-but limited in effectiveness because it is not of its nature to guarantee the salvation of everybody that it was intended for. On the other hand, if Christ died only for the elect, then His death is limited in extent-but unlimited in success. Considering the fact that not everybody is saved, what is more glorious to Christ? Which is more loving to His people? Which gives more comfort to His elect? And, of course, which view is supported by the Scriptures we have seen?

The love of Christ for His church in Ephesians 5:25-27

For the sake of space, I will not give a detailed analysis of this verse. But I encourage you to look it up yourself and consider the following questions. Did the death of Christ have specific beneficiaries? Who did Christ love and give Himself up for (v. 25)? Why did He do this (v. 26)? From what you see in this passage, was the death of Christ intended to simply make their salvation possible, or to make it actual?

This passage is also important because it sheds great understanding on the love Christ has for His people. The love He has for His church is compared to the love that a husband has for his wife. The view that Christ died for all people His bride as well as those who are not His bride seems to greatly lessen His love for the church. For the greatest expression of love one can give to someone is to lay down his life for them (John 15:13). Therefore, if

Christ died for the non-elect and the elect in the same way, it would mean that He loves them in the same way. But that would be like a husband who says, "Sure, I love my wife. But I love her in the same way that I love every other woman!" His wife would definitely not feel very loved! Fortunately, Ephesians 5:25-27 tells us that Christ loves His church like His own body, and like a husband loves his wife. Therefore, He loves us in a richer and deeper way than He loves those who do not belong to His church. If this is not true, I simply cannot grasp what God is trying to tell us in this passage.

Christ laid down His life for His sheep: John 10:15

Jesus says, "...I lay down My life for the sheep." According to this verse, who did Christ give His life for? The answer is clear for the sheep. By implication, we rightly infer that He therefore did not lay down His life for the goats (cf. 10:26).

One may respond to this: "This verse does teach that Christ gave His life for the sheep, but that doesn't mean that He died *only* for the sheep." There are two main problems with this objection. First, in this same context we read "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me, and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish" (vv. 26-28). This verse says that Jesus gives eternal life to His sheep. Now, nobody would say to this verse, "Sure, Jesus gives eternal life to His sheep. But that doesn't mean only His sheep He gives eternal life to all people"! It is very evident that when Jesus says he gives eternal life to the sheep, He clearly means *the sheep and only the sheep*. Therefore, it seems best to conclude that when he says, in this same context, that he *dies* for the sheep, he must mean *only the sheep*.

Second, remember that God divides the world into sheep and into goats that is, into non-believers and believers (compare 10:15 with 10:26). It is a common use of language that when somebody divides something into two groups and says "I will do this for group A," it is clear that he is not going to do it for the other group. For example, if I say "There are poor people and rich people in Cedar Falls. I am going to give food to the poor people" it is clear that I mean *only the poor*. It would be a terrible butchering of my words to try to argue: "He doesn't mean only the poor, he's going to give food to the rich people also!" Thus, since Scripture divides all people into either sheep or goats, and says that Christ died for the sheep, we conclude that He did not die for the goats.

Christ's intercession for His elect

The death of Christ is the foundation of the intercession of Christ. Christ's prayers on behalf of his people are founded on the fact of His death on behalf of His people (1 John 2:1-2). Therefore, the intercession of Christ must have the same extent as the death of Christ (cf. Romans 8:34). Since Christ does not intercede for all, it shows that He did not die for all.

But how do we know that Christ doesn't intercede for all? By a simple argument:

1. Christ's prayers are always answered (John 11:22, 42).
2. Not everybody is saved.
3. Therefore Christ is not interceding for all.

Objections?

The clear Biblical teaching on the extent of the atonement is too forceful to be denied. But many may be wondering how this fits with passages which seem to speak of Christ as dying "for the whole world" and other passages sometimes brought against this view. Rather than lengthening this article, I deal with the three categories of these texts and each of the individual passages included in the three categories in a separate article which I encourage you to consult. The article is, *The Extent of the Atonement: Answering Objections*. In this article, I show how the texts brought in opposition to successful atonement are by no means legitimate objections. Rather, they are entirely consistent with successful atonement when rightly interpreted.

Applications

In conclusion, a correct understanding of successful redemption has many wonderful applications that can be divided into two groups.

Successful Redemption keeps us from the inaccurate views of Christ's death that stem from Universal Redemption.

The teaching of universal redemption decrepitates the glory of Christ's atonement, gives us a deficient view of what it means for Christ to be Savior, diminishes our understanding of the uniqueness of God's love for His church, makes our salvation ultimately depend upon what we do for ourselves rather than Christ's cross, and weakens the ground of our assurance. Unfortunately, because universal redemption is such a common belief in the modern church, "Our minds have been conditioned to think of the Cross as a redemption which does less than redeem, and of Christ as a Savior who does less than save, and of God's love as a weak affection which cannot keep anyone from hell without help, and of faith as the human help which God needs for this purpose. As a result, we are no longer free either to believe the biblical gospel or preach it." [6]

Elsewhere Packer says, "So far from magnifying the love and grace of God, [universal redemption] dishonors both it and Him, for it reduces God's love to an impotent wish and turns the whole economy of 'saving' grace, so-called ('saving' is really a misnomer on this view), into a monumental divine failure. Also, so far from magnifying the merit and worth of Christ's death, it cheapens it, for it makes Christ die in vain. Lastly, so far from affording additional encouragement, it destroys the Scriptural ground of assurance

altogether, for it denies that the knowledge that Christ died for me (or did anything else for me) is a sufficient ground for inferring my eternal salvation; my salvation, on this view, depends not on what Christ did for me, but on what I subsequently do for myself.”[7] To think that Christ died to save those who will perish cuts the nerve of our comfort. If Christ died for them, and they perished, what hope is there for us?

Successful Redemption opens for us the wonderful benefits of an accurate understanding of Christ’s death.

First, as we come to hold to the truths of successful redemption, we can now more properly exalt Christ. For rejoice that He was perfectly successful! Everybody that He died for will be saved! He didn’t simply make us saveable, He actually saved us! Praise Him deeply for this!

Second, understand that your faith is a fruit of Christ’s death. Christ secured your salvation by His death, and therefore He bought everything that was necessary to make sure it was applied to you. Therefore, Christ didn’t die for you because you believe. You believe because Christ died for you.

Because of this, we can recognize the true place where your salvation is completely founded—Christ’s death, not your own act of faith. It is true that God applies the work of Christ to the elect through their faith, and apart from faith in Christ no one will be saved. But when we recognize that even our faith is a fruit of His death, we have greater security and can give Christ greater thanks. On the other hand, if we deny successful atonement, then redemption does not ultimately rest on Christ or His cross, but on our own act of faith which we generate as our own independent act.

Third, this truth gives deep consolation and comfort to believers. Our salvation has a solid rock—the death of Christ. Christ’s death was successful and thus it secured our salvation. To know that my salvation does not ultimately rest upon myself, but on Christ, is great consolation and comfort.

Fourth, draw hope and assurance from the death and intercession of Christ. *Trust Christ more, recognizing how dependant upon Him you are.*

Fifth, this truth exalts the love of Christ for you. His death is the ultimate expression of His love. If He died for all, it would mean that He loved all in the same way. But He doesn’t. You are special to Him if you are counted among His church. His death for us in particular reveals the height of this great love.

Sixth, as in everything we learn about Christ, let your increasing love for Him compel you to serve others. “For the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” “The greatest among you shall be the servant of all.”

Footnotes

1. J.I. Packer, Introductory Essay to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, by John Owen (Banner of Truth, 1995) p. 10. Emphasis added.

2. Packer, p. 7.

3. Packer, p. 5.

4. *What We Believe About the Five Points of Calvinism*, Bethlehem Baptist Church Staff, Minneapolis, MN.

5. Packer, p. 13.

6. Packer, p. 12.

SEE ALSO:

The Extent of the Atonement: Answering Objections

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SOURCE: <http://www.geocities.ws/mattperman/extent.html>
