

To Save Sinners

The Single Saving Intention of the Atonement

Selected Scriptures

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Introduction

Well, last month, I began a series of sermons that I've entitled, *O Perfect Redemption!* It's a study on the doctrine of the atonement—particularly in its character as a perfect atonement, a perfect redemption. And specifically we're answering the question, given that the atonement of Christ is a perfect redemption, what is the extent of the atonement? Did Christ die for all people without exception, or did He die for the elect alone?

And in my first two messages, I've mentioned that the key to answering that very controversial question is to set the question of the extent of the atonement in the larger context of Scripture's teaching on the design and nature of the atonement. The clear biblical teaching on (a) what God intends the atonement to accomplish and (b) what the atonement actually did accomplish helps us interpret the less clear teaching on (c) to whom the atonement extends.

And so, in my last time with you, we began to examine the design of the atonement. And we began with the Designer of the atonement—namely, the Triune God of the Scriptures: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In that sermon, we saw how the unity of the Trinity demands a particular redemption. The argument was that because the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are perfectly united in their essence, the three persons of the Trinity must be perfectly united both (a) in their saving intentions and (b) their saving acts. What the Father wills must be what the Son wills, and what the Son wills must be what the Spirit wills. Those whom the Father intends to save must be the same exact number as those whom the Son intends to save, and those whom the Son intends to save must be the same exact number as those whom the Spirit intends to save. And since Scripture teaches (a) that the Father has chosen to save a particular people and not all without exception, and since it teaches (b) that the Spirit will regenerate that same particular people and not all without exception, it also teaches (c) that the Son has atoned for that same particular people and not all without exception. Christ died for all that the Father had given Him, which, as He says in John 17, was not all without exception—not “the world,” but some out of the world.

So, we learned last time that all three persons of the Trinity are perfectly united in conceiving and carrying out the plan of salvation. What the Father intends in sending the Son into the world, what the Son intends in undertaking His atoning mission, and what the Spirit intends in applying the Son's work are identical. They are the exact same intention. They are the exact same design. This morning, I want to address what precisely that intention was. Given that the persons of the Trinity are united in their saving design, what does Scripture teach about what they intended the cross to accomplish?

And it's important for us to recognize that this concept of "Divine Intention" is absolutely central to the debate over the extent of the atonement. And that is because: God accomplishes His intentions, doesn't He? God brings all of His purposes to pass. Isaiah 46:9–10: "I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, ... saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure.'" Psalm 115:3: "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." Daniel 4:35: "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" He does according to *His* will! No one can stay His hand! As Job says in Job 42:2: "I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted." No purpose of Almighty God can be thwarted! Whatever the Triune God intends, or designs, or purposes in the atonement must certainly be accomplished.

So what did the Triune God intend in the atonement? What is it that Christ has come into the world to do? Think about the answers you often hear to that question. Think about the answers you might *give* to that question, especially when you're speaking the Gospel to unbelievers. "We've cut ourselves off from God by our sin, but Jesus came *to make a way* for us to be reconciled to God." "On our own, we can do nothing to commend ourselves to God, but Jesus came *to make it possible* for sinners to have fellowship with their Creator." "Because of the *provision* made by Christ's death, all who believe can be saved." "Christ came to *provide* salvation to all who will repent and trust in Him." Do you recognize any of those phrases? They don't sound bad! We may not realize it; we may not even believe it. But isn't it interesting how often so many of us cast the intent of Christ's atonement in inherently provisional terms? "To make a way," "to open a door," "to make it possible," "to make provision," "to make salvation available."

But is that how Scripture speaks of the divine intention for Christ's death? No, it's not. We think of the atonement—and sadly enough, some of us speak about the atonement—as if it merely opened doors, removed obstacles, and made provision. As if it's a potential or provisional payment which remains impotent and ineffective until it's actualized by the sinner's faith. "All hail the almighty will of man!"

Others of us might think of it this way: “Christ’s atonement did more than make provision for salvation in the case of the elect; He actually saved *them*. But then His death did other things even for the non-elect—like purchasing common grace; like providing the opportunity of salvation for all; like making it possible to genuinely offer the Gospel to all without exception; and so on. These people say that salvation was one among many intentions that God had for the atonement. And since these other intentions extend to all people without exception, the atonement is universal. “Jesus died for everybody, in some sense,” they say.

But what does the Scripture say? How do the biblical authors cast the Father’s intention for sending the Son into the world? How do they capture the design and purpose for Christ’s atoning work? Here’s the answer: Scripture consistently and uniformly identifies the Trinity’s unified intention for the atonement as *exclusively salvific*. Yes, there is universal common grace, a genuine universal Gospel offer; but Scripture never says the atonement was designed to purchase those things. Instead, the Word of God speaks of the atonement as that by which God intends to secure *salvation*.

And, very importantly, to *secure* salvation, not merely provide for it. Scripture says God’s intention for the atonement was to *accomplish* redemption, not merely to make it possible. to satisfy, reconcile, and redeem—actually to save! The cross itself saves sinners! Saving faith doesn’t activate the cross’s power; the cross’s power purchases and secures saving faith. The cross’s power does not depend on saving faith being added *to* it. The cross’s power is such that saving faith flows *from* it (Packer).

And so again: here’s my argument for this morning. Scripture consistently and uniformly identifies the Trinity’s unified intention for the atonement as exclusively salvific. Contrary to the claims of those who hold to a universal atonement—and those who would attempt to find middle ways between a universal and a particular atonement—the Word of God never identifies God’s intention for the atonement as mere provisions, possibilities, or procurements which may or may not be applied to those for whom they were purchased. Instead, the writers of Scripture teach that the divine intention for the atonement was that Christ would actually save everyone for whom He died, purchasing their redemption in such a way that they whom He redeemed cannot fail to be...well, redeemed! cannot fail to be set free from sin unto salvation! And so if (a) God’s intentions must certainly come to pass, and if (b) His intention for the atonement is not to make provisions or possibilities but actually to save, then (c) all those for whom Christ died must certainly be saved. And since not all are saved, Christ’s atonement is particular, and not universal.

And I hope to make that case in **two stages**. First, I want to consider the explicit statements of Scripture that speak to the **intention** for the atonement. And then, secondly, since we believe that all of God’s intentions must come to pass, I want to consider the statements of Scripture that

speak to the actual **effects** of the atonement. And again, my argument is that both the intention and the effects of the atonement are presented as exclusively salvific. So, point number one: **the salvific intention of the atonement**; and point number two: **the salvific effect of the atonement**.

And before I jump in, I want to say that my method this morning will be to quote a lot of Scripture. So we're going to be in a number of passages—so many that it might feel more like a Bible study than a sermon. But that's intentional. One of the most rewarding aspects of my study as I've worked through this debate was seeing this truth—how uniformly and consistently and pervasively and relentlessly the New Testament declares that both the **intent** and the **effect** of the atonement was to save, and not to provide or make possible or anything else. And you might think that there are a handful of texts that speak to the purpose of the atonement, but the reality is that there is a mountain of texts. And they all speak with one voice. And so I want to just overwhelm you with that this morning. And even though there will be a lot of texts, I still won't be able to get to all of them.

I. The Salvific Intention of the Atonement

So let's get to it. Point number one: **the salvific intention of the atonement**. And we're really just going to walk through the New Testament here, in four categories. We'll look first at the Synoptic Gospels; then at John's writings; then at Paul's writings, and then at the so-called General Epistles.

The first text that expresses a clear intention for the coming of the Son of Man into the world is Matthew 18:11. Interestingly, Matthew 18:11 is not in some of your Bibles, because it is missing from a number of New Testament manuscripts. It says, "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost." And though it's likely that that statement was not in Matthew's original writings, it was in Luke's. And whatever scribe added it in Matthew was probably remembering it from Luke 19:10, which says, almost identically, "For the Son of Man has come to seek and save that which was lost." But both texts make it clear: the **intention** for the coming of the Son of Man was that He would *save* the lost.

Turn to Matthew chapter 20. As James and John contend with one another for their own greatness in the kingdom of Jesus, the Lord rebukes their selfish ambition by teaching that leadership in His kingdom is marked not by lordship but by service—an example that He Himself modeled for them. And then in Matthew 20:28, He makes the same statement that we've been quoting from Mark 10:45: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." I know we read that and we want to focus immediately on "many." And I understand that. And it's important. But what we're focused on right now is

intent. And this text tells us that the deliberate goal and purpose of Jesus' coming is identified as giving His life as a *ransom*.

Now, the term “ransom” translates the Greek term *lutron*. It was a word that originated in practices of warfare, where the *lutron* was the price that was paid to bring a prisoner of war out of captivity (Morris, *Matthew*, 512–13). Both in the Greek translation of the Old Testament and in the Greek New Testament, the term was associated with practices of atonement and redemption, specifically because Scripture describes man's predicament in sin as slavery and captivity. Our sin holds us in bondage. And so the Son of Man has come into the world with the **intention** that many who are enslaved to sin may be released into the freedom of salvation through the giving of His life as the substitutionary *lutron*—the ransom price—to be paid for them. There is no word here about Christ coming to make these slaves *redeemable*. Nothing about providing for the *possibility* of their release. Christ's **intention** is that the ransom price of His blood will actually free the captives for whom He pays.

Let's turn to the Book of John, and chapter 3. In John 3:16–17, we have one of the most beloved passages in all of Scripture, and one of the most disputed passages in the atonement debate. We read, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, *that* whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but *have eternal life*. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” Now, we could do a whole sermon series on those two verses, but we're concerned here with what they say about the **intention** of the atonement. And we see in verse 16 that the purpose for which God gave His only begotten Son to die was so that the ones who believe in Jesus would have eternal life. Not that they would have the *opportunity* for eternal life, but that they would *have* eternal life. Verse 17 only emphasizes this **salvific intention**: the Father sent the Son into the world *that* the world might be *saved* through Him. I understand that we have to define “world,” there. But no matter who “world” refers to, the purpose—the **intention**—of God for sending His Son into the world is that they would be saved.

You say, “Wait a second. It doesn't say that they *would* be saved; it says that they *might* be saved. Isn't that a comment on potentiality? They *might* be saved, but they might not!” If you were asking that, that's a good question. But the answer is no. And the reason has to do with the nature of the subjunctive mood in Greek. Riveting stuff, I know. And I could explain it to you, but then I'd have to wake you all up afterward. So instead I'm going to read a short quote from expert grammarian Dan Wallace on this construction. Wallace says, “We must not suppose that this use of the subjunctive necessarily implies any doubt about the fulfillment of the verbal action on the part of the speaker. . . . Not only is *ἵνα* used for result in the NT, but also for purpose-result. That is, it indicates *both the intention and its sure accomplishment*. . . . In other words, the NT writers employ the language to reflect their theology: what God purposes is what

happens and, consequently, ἵνα is used to express both the divine purpose and the result” (GGBB, 472–73).

And so, in fact, the same exact construction is used in verse 16, where it says, “that whoever believes in Him *shall* not perish, but have eternal life.” Same construction. One verse says, “shall not perish,” the next one says, “might be saved.” The important thing to recognize is: it would be entirely unfounded to think verse 16 is saying that if you believe in Jesus, you might be saved but you also might not, as if “might” intended to communicate doubt or uncertainty. It doesn’t. If you believe in Jesus, you will be saved. Well, the same is true for the identical construction in verse 17. Jesus comes not to bring the possibility of salvation, but to bring salvation itself.

John 6 verse 51: Jesus says, “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” Jesus’ **intention** in giving His flesh in death is to bring life to the world. Not the provision of life, but life itself. The same is the case in John 10:10: “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” His intention is not merely to *offer* life, but actually to *impart* life. John 12:46–47: “I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.” One commentator who rejects particular redemption says that by saying He comes to save the world in John 12:47, “Jesus makes salvation *available* to all people” without exception. But that is just not what the text says. We see nothing of the concept of availability in this verse. Jesus does not say He came to make salvation available to the world, but to save the world. And so, whoever it is that “the world” refers to in that verse, if Jesus came to *save* them, and if they are not finally saved, then Jesus has failed of His intention.

One more text in the Gospel of John. We need to go back to the High Priestly Prayer in John 17, and specifically verse 19. John 17:19: Jesus says, “For their sakes I sanctify Myself, *that* they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.” So here is Jesus on the eve of His crucifixion, coming to the pinnacle of His work as the High Priest of His people—namely, to make propitiation for them by His substitutionary death. In this high priestly context, Jesus speaks of sanctifying Himself, which is a funny expression. Jesus was always perfectly holy; He didn’t need to be any more sanctified—in that sense—than He already was. But what this speaks about is His being the fulfillment of the Levitical priesthood.

Exodus 28 and 29 prescribes that priests be consecrated for their priestly service. Exodus 28:41 says, “You shall put [the garments] on Aaron your brother and on his sons with them; and you shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them”—same word as “sanctify” in John 17—“you shall...consecrate them that they may serve Me as priests.” The same was true of the high priest on the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 16 verses 2–6 speak of the high priest making

atonement for himself and his household before ministering on behalf of the people. Well, as Jesus prepares Himself for His high priestly work on the ultimate Day of Atonement, He consecrates Himself as our Great High Priest.

And note the express purpose of His priestly consecration: verse 19: “that they—Who are they? Verse 9: not the world, but those whom the Father has given the Son *out* of the world, that is the elect—that *they* would be sanctified in truth. Jesus **intends** for His atonement to accomplish the actual, effectual sanctification of His people. Not just the possibility that they might be saved, but that they would come into actual possession of all the benefits of redemption, including sanctification: purity, practical holiness.

Now, we’re going to stick with John, but we’re going to go to his first epistle. Turn with me to 1 John 3:5. Here we find one of the clearest, most categorical statements of the **salvific intent of the atonement**. First John 3:5 says, “You know that He appeared in order to take away sins.” In the context in which the churches of Asia are beset with the false teaching of indifference to sin, John explains that those who are united to and follow Christ can have nothing to do with sin, because their Savior has come into the world for the express purpose of taking away sins. And how are sins taken away? John 1:29: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” It is by atonement—by the shedding of the blood of the sacrificial Lamb of God—that sin is taken away. And so Christ appeared in His incarnation to offer Himself as the sacrificial Lamb of God with the **intention** that His atoning work would actually and effectively take away sins. And so if those for whom He died do not actually and effectively have their sins taken away, what other conclusion could we come to but that Jesus has failed in His intention?

Look down to verse 8: “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.” And what are the works of the devil? Verse 4: the practice of sin. Beginning of verse 8: the practice of sin. Verse 9: the practice of sin. The devil tempts and enslaves men to sin. He certainly does more than that, but it’s clear from the context of this passage that what John means by “the works of the devil” is the devil’s work of tempting and enslaving men to a life of practicing sin. And so to destroy Satan’s work of man’s enslavement to sin, the Son of God appeared to take away sins, verse 5, by bearing sin in Himself as the Lamb of God. Christ did not **intend** by His atonement to potentially destroy sin, or to make it possible for sin to be destroyed; His **intention** was to actually destroy the works of the devil.

Let’s turn now to the epistles of Paul. In 2 Corinthians 5:15, Paul says, “And He [Christ] died for all, *so that* they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.” Again, we’re going to have to define the “all.” But before we do, we must observe that this teaches that Christ died with the **intention** that the beneficiaries of His death would live a life of sanctification, devoted no longer to themselves but to Christ above all else. You see, the **intention** of the atonement was not merely to make men savable, but to purchase a

salvation which would of necessity be applied unto the practical transformation of those for whom Christ died. Those for whom Christ died must be sanctified, or Christ fails in His intention. The same is true with regard to justification in verse 21: “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, *so that* we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” So, if those for whom Christ was made sin do not in reality become the righteousness of God in Christ, then once again God has failed.

Turn to Galatians, chapter 1 verse 4. Paul identifies Christ as the one “who gave Himself for our sins *so that* He might *rescue* us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” The term “rescue” there is the same word used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament for Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt. In that case, the Lord’s intent was to conclusively transplant Israel from the yoke of their bondage in Egypt out unto the freedom of their redemption. So also in the cross, the Lord Jesus’ intent, according to the will of God the Father, was not merely to make provision for such a rescue but to conclusively transfer His people from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of His beloved Son (cf. Col 3:13).

Galatians chapter 4, and verses 4 and 5: “But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, *so that* He might *redeem* those who were under the Law, *that* we might receive the *adoption* as sons.” So the *purpose* for which the Father sends the Son to earth is the redemption of those in bondage under the law. One commentator observes that redemption “connotes liberation from enslavement, involving the payment of a price: the price of Christ’s death” (Moo, 267). So once again, it is redemption that God is aiming at in the cross, not mere redeemability. And that redemption consists not merely in the payment of a price, but the effectual release of those for whom the price was paid. So if you pay the price, and the captives aren’t released, there is no redemption, according to the biblical definition of the term. But then there’s a second purpose clause in verse 5: that those who are redeemed would receive the *adoption as sons*. So the **intent** of the redemption purchased by Christ’s cross work is to bring the redeemed into a proper relationship with God as members of His family—those who enjoy all the rights and privileges of the household of God. He intends that those for whom He died not merely have the opportunity to become adopted sons and daughters, but that they might receive the adoption as sons. In His atonement, Christ aims for nothing short of the full application of salvation to those for whom He has died.

If we had time, I’d take you to Ephesians 5:25–27, which shows that the **intent** of Christ’s atonement is the full and complete sanctification and glorification of the bride for whom He dies. And still other texts. But for the sake of time, we’ll look at one more from Paul. In 1 Timothy 1:15, we find what is perhaps the most plain-spoken statement concerning the divine **intention** for the incarnation and atonement of Christ. Paul writes, “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world *to save sinners*, among whom I am foremost of all.” And I love John Owen’s comment on this passage. He says, Paul does not say

Christ came “to open a door for [sinners] to come in if they will or can; not to make a way passable, that they *may* be saved; not to purchase reconciliation and pardon of his Father, which perhaps they shall never enjoy; but *actually* to save them from all the guilt and power of sin, and from the wrath of God for sin: which, if he doth not accomplish, he fails of the end of his coming” (10:209). Christ Jesus came into the world to *save* sinners! Not to make sinners savable! Not to make salvation possible! Not to make heaven available! Christ came to *save* sinners!

And we’ve run out of time for the General Epistles, so I’ll just quickly cite a few passages from Hebrews. Hebrews 2:14–15: “Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, *that* through death He might *render powerless* him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might *free* those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.” Christ dies to free those for whom He dies from the slavery of the fear of death. Verse 17: “Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, *to make propitiation* for the sins of the people.” And what is propitiation? It is nothing less than the efficacious satisfaction of divine wrath. Christ came to extinguish the wrath of God. Hebrews 9:15: “For *this* reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, *so that*, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called *may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance*.” The purpose for Christ’s New Covenant mediation through His redemptive death is that the called—that is, those who were foreknown and predestined by the Father, eventually effectually called unto salvation, whom Romans 8 calls the elect—would receive—again: to come into actual possession of—the promise of the eternal inheritance!

So have I convinced you? Have you seen for yourselves that New Testament’s characterization of the divine **intention** for Christ’s atonement is uniformly and exclusively **salvific**? We agree that Scripture teaches a universal common grace: He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, Matthew 5:45. We agree with the necessity of universal gospel proclamation: God commands all people everywhere to repent, Acts 17:30. We agree that cosmos will be finally redeemed: The creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God, Romans 8:21. But there is no mention of the Father, or the Son, or the Spirit intending the cross to accomplish or secure those realities. Still less is there any talk about the cross making anything merely possible.

There is no text of Scripture which expressly sets forth any universal divine intentions for the cross in the manner of the above passages. You will search the Scriptures in vain for a statement like, “The Son of Man has come to provide forgiveness” (cf. Luke 19:10); or, “You know that He appeared to provide common grace” (cf. 1 John 3:5); or “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to make it *possible* for sinners to be saved” (cf. 1 Tim 1:15). It’s just not there.

And so there are not multiple intentions for the atonement. There may be multiple angles from which the single salvific intention is expressed, just because there are multiple facets of our salvation. But Scripture testifies with one voice that *the* divine intention for the atonement was to save sinners (Luke 19:10; John 3:16–17; 12:46–47; 1 Tim 1:15; 1 John 4:14), to satisfy divine wrath (Heb 2:17), to take away sin (1 John 3:5; cf. John 1:29), to impart spiritual life (John 6:51; 10:10; 1 John 4:9), to free captives from slavery (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; Heb 2:14–15; 1 Tim 2:6), to rescue from evil (Gal 1:4), to impute righteousness (2 Cor 5:21), to impart adoption (Gal 4:5), to sanctify His people (John 17:19; 2 Cor 5:15; Eph 5:25–27; Tit 2:14; Heb 13:12; 1 Pet 2:24), and to glorify us and bring us into the presence of God (Heb. 2:10; 1 Pet. 3:18).

And if every last one of those saving blessings are not actualized in the experience of everyone for whom Christ died, then Christ fails of His intention. He is not the Good Shepherd. He does lose those whom the Father has given Him. And the sovereign will and unchangeable purpose of Almighty God is frustrated by the unbelief of man. No thank you! You may have *that* Savior! I'll take the One who says, "I am the Good Shepherd, I lay down My life for the sheep, I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand"—the God who says, "My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure."

II. The Salvific Effect of the Atonement

And that brings us to our **second** point. If the salvific intent of the atonement is to actually save all for whom Christ has died, then the **salvific effect of the atonement** must be identical to the intent. Given that the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are perfectly united in their saving intention, if the sovereign, Triune God is for these ends, who can be against them? (cf. Gibson, 367). And so as we survey the biblical witness once again, we find that Christ's cross actually effected those intentions which God purposed. After all those texts that said, "Christ came to save sinners!" there are as many texts that say, "And Christ did save sinners by His death!" And this time, instead of going through the four categories of New Testament literature, I'm going to outline this point by giving ten doctrines of soteriology that Scripture says the cross accomplished. And I'll move through these quite quickly.

Number one: **redemption**. The texts in our previous point showed us that Christ intended to redeem by His cross. Hebrews chapter 9 verse 12 shows us that that's exactly what He did. Hebrews 9:12: "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.*" When Christ shed His blood on Calvary, He did not make redemption possible. He *obtained* eternal redemption for all for whom He died.

Number two: **expiation**, the taking away of sins. Hebrews 9:26: “But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested *to put away sin* by the sacrifice of Himself.” And 1 Peter 2:24: “He Himself *bore* our sins in His body on the cross.” In giving Himself as a sacrifice, Jesus carried our sins away. “By His wounds,” Isaiah 53:5, “we are” not: made healable. No. “By His wounds we are *healed*.” The atoning death of Christ of itself healed our spiritual sickness.

Number three: **definitive sanctification**. Hebrews 1:3 says Christ “made purification for sins.” And Hebrews 10:10 says, “*we have been sanctified* through the offering of the body of Jesus once for all.”

Number four: **reconciliation**. Romans 5:10 says, “*We were reconciled* to God through the death of His Son.” Colossians 1:22 says, “He has now *reconciled* you in His fleshly body through death.” The death of Christ does not merely make God reconcilable to sinners. It actually, of itself, accomplishes reconciliation.

Number five: **salvation**. Titus 2:11 says that “the grace of God has appeared, *bringing salvation* to all men.” Non-particularists seize on the phrase, “all men,” and declare that Paul is teaching that “God’s purposes in Christ’s saving work [have] made salvation *available* to all people” (Shultz, 141). But the text does not say, “The grace of God has appeared, making salvation *available* to all men.” It says that grace actually *brings salvation* to all men. Rather than reinterpreting the substance of the atonement (“salvation”) in light of its scope (“all men”), we should understand the scope of the atonement in light of its substance. The fact that “all men” do not in actuality have salvation brought to them is evidence that we shouldn’t interpret “all” to mean “all without exception.” Instead, we should interpret it as “all without *distinction*,” all *classes* of men, just as the previous context speaks of older men (verse 2), older women (verse 3), young women (verse 4), young men (verse 6), and slaves (verse 9).

Number six: **regeneration**. John 6:33 says that He is the bread that “comes down out of heaven and *gives life* to the world.” Second Timothy 1:10 says that by His atoning death, Christ “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.” This is to say that Christ’s death of itself gives new spiritual life to those for whom it was accomplished.

Number seven: **justification**. Romans 3:24 says we are “*justified* as a gift by His grace *through the redemption* which is in Christ Jesus.” The redemptive death of Christ accomplishes our justification.

Number eight: **adoption**. We saw that in Galatians 4:5, so I won’t read it again.

Number nine: **progressive sanctification**. First John 1:7 says that “the blood of Jesus [the] Son cleanses us from all sin.” Hebrews 9:14 says, “the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse[s] your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.”

And number ten: **glorification**. In Hebrews 2:10, the author describes Christ’s saving death as actually “bringing many sons to glory.”

Conclusion

And so, Scripture not only testifies that the divine **intention** for the cross was uniformly salvific. It also testifies that the cross **effectively** accomplished all of its salvific intentions. Scripture says God intended for the atoning death of Christ to save, ransom, satisfy wrath, take away sin, redeem, impart spiritual life, justify, sanctify, and glorify. And then Scripture says that the actual effect of the atoning death of Christ is that by it Christ saved, ransomed, propitiated, expiated, redeemed, and secured the regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification of all those for whom He died.

Given these truths concerning the intent and effect of the atonement, John Owen’s conclusion regarding the extent of the atonement is inescapable. Owen writes, “If the death and [sacrifice] of Jesus Christ . . . doth sanctify all them for whom it was a sacrifice; doth purge away their sin; redeem them from wrath, curse, and guilt; work for them peace and reconciliation with God; procure for them life and immortality; bearing their iniquities and healing all their diseases; — then died he only for those that are in the event sanctified, purged, redeemed, justified, freed from wrath and death, quickened, saved, etc.; but that all are not thus sanctified, freed, etc., is most apparent: and, therefore, they cannot be said to be the proper object of the death of Christ” (10:214). In other words, Jesus died to purchase the blessings of salvation precisely so that they would be applied to those for whom He purchased them. And yet, it cannot be said that all individuals without exception experience these blessings. Not all are called, justified, and glorified; many walk the broad road to destruction rather than the narrow way unto salvation (Matt 7:13–14). Therefore, lest we grant that the Triune God failed in His intention, the intent of the atonement is determinative of its extent: Christ did not die for all without exception but for the elect alone.

Now, even as I say that, I recognize the unsavoriness of framing the issue negatively like that. “There are some for whom Christ did not die” sounds like terrible news, not the Good News of the Gospel. But I want to plead with you not to hear it that way. We only speak of a restriction in extent of the atonement because we want to preserve the absolute sovereignty of our Savior and the unbounded efficacy of His atonement. We want to preserve the cross’s power to save!

Let me illustrate what I mean. Jesus says in John 6:51, “I give the bread of My flesh for the *life* of the *world*.” Now, the person who believes in a universal atonement reads that and says, “See? He gives His flesh for the *world*!”

And you say, “So ‘world’ there refers to all without exception?”

“Yes! What else could it mean?!”

“Ok, so if Christ comes to give His flesh for the life of the world, then all without exception have that eternal life, right?”

“Well, no! I’m not a universalist! Christ gives His flesh for the world so that they *might* have eternal life! Eternal life is provided for all! It’s available for all!”

Now, do you see what’s happened? If Christ comes to give life to the world, and all without exception don’t come into possession of life, it’s concluded that Christ has not come to actually give life to the world, but to provide life—to make it possible for them to have life. Do you see what’s happened? In order to interpret the word ‘world’ to mean all without exception, the nature of the atonement as an efficacious accomplishment—as that which brings life—has been downgraded—reduced—to mere possibility.

Listen to Dr. Bruce Ware, Professor of Theology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who rejects particular redemption in favor of a mediating position that he calls a “multiple intentions” view of the atonement. Ware writes, “We cannot speak correctly of Christ’s death as actually and certainly *saving* the elect. No, even here, the payment made by his death on behalf of the elect renders their salvation *possible*” (5). I can’t even imagine thinking those two sentences. “We can’t speak of Christ’s death as actually and certainly saving the elect”? But that’s where all my hope is! “Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood shall never lose its power! ’til all the ransomed church of God be saved to sin no more!” “We can’t speak of Christ’s death as actually and certainly saving the elect”? Then *what does?*

You see, dear people, that is the violence that must be done to the infinite power of the cross when we seek to universalize its extent. And that is not good news! If Christ’s death doesn’t save us—if it only makes us savable—we are still damned in our sins. I don’t need a cross that makes me savable! I need a cross that actually and certainly saves me!

Dear sinner, if you are here this morning and you are outside of Christ, if you are still laboring under the weary load of your sin—painfully aware that despite all your efforts, you could never earn the righteousness that is required for acceptance with an infinitely holy God—I do not offer you, this morning, the *possibility* of salvation. By God’s unfathomable grace, I offer you

salvation! I do not offer you a *potential* Savior; I offer you the *Almighty* Savior, who stood in the place of sinners to bear all the furious fullness of the wrath of God against our sins, who while yet under the heavy hand of divine punishment, cried out in sovereign victory: “It is *finished!*”

O you who are weary and heavy-laden under the burden of your sin and the fruitlessness of your own “good works,” you are welcome to this Sovereign Savior, who has no to-do list by which you might convert His gift of savability into salvation; but who, by His efficacious atonement has fully accomplished *salvation*—a salvation to which you need add *nothing*. It merely stands to be received as a gift by faith alone. Turn from your sins, come to Christ, and trust in Him alone for your righteousness before God, and you shall have Him.

And to my brothers and sisters in Christ, if we are to preach that Gospel with any integrity, we cannot preach a universal, possible atonement. We must preach a particular, definite atonement.