Unlimited Atonement

The Bible emphatically states that God desires for all men to be saved and that Christ died for all people. The apostle Paul taught the Roman believers that Christ died for the ungodly, which refers to unbelievers and reconciled us meaning believers, while we were God’s enemies. Therefore, if Christ reconciled the believer to God while he was an enemy of God, then Christ died for unbelievers as well (Romans 5:6-10). Thus, in order for God’s desire for all men to be saved to ever have any chance of becoming a reality, He would have to send His Son into the world to die for all men. Therefore, Christ’s death on the Cross was the propitiation for the sins of both believers and unbelievers. Of course, all men will not be saved because many will reject Jesus Christ as Savior.

The “limited” atonement doctrine contends that Christ died for only the elect or in other words, believers whereas the “unlimited” atonement contends that Christ died for “all” men, all-inclusive, without exception and thus “without racial, sexual or social distinction.”

This doctrine states that Jesus Christ died for every sin committed by every single member of the human race-past, present and future (John 1:29; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Tim. 4:10; Titus 2:11; 1 John 2:2).

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!” (NASB95)

John 4:41 Many more believed because of His word; 42 and they were saying to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world.” (NASB95)

Hebrews 2:9 But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. (NASB95)

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared (the Lord Jesus Christ), bringing salvation to all men. (NASB95)

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you (unbeliever), not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to a change of mind about Christ. (NASB95)

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ motivates us, having concluded this, that one (Jesus Christ) died for all men, therefore, all died (as a result of Adam’s sin). 15 And He (the Lord Jesus Christ) died for all men, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf! (Author’s translation)
2 Corinthians 5:18  Now all these things are from God the Father, the One who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave to us for our benefit the ministry of this peace treaty (the Gospel). 19 Specifically that God the Father was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not charging their personal sins to their account, and has deposited in us (believers) the doctrine of this peace treaty (the Gospel). (Author’s translation)

John 3:16 For God the Father so loved the world that He gave His uniquely virgin born Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish (go to the Lake of Fire), but have eternal life (live with God forever and ever)! (Author’s translation)

1 Timothy 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. (NASB95)

1 Timothy 4:10 For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. (NASB95)

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all (the entire human race), the just (the believer) and the unjust (unbeliever), in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit. (NASB95)

1 John 2:2 Furthermore, He Himself is the propitiation with regards to our sins. In fact, He Himself is the propitiation not with regards to our sins only in contrast with the rest of unregenerate humanity, absolutely not, but also with regards to the entire world, without exception and without distinction. (Author’s translation)

1 John 4:14 We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. (NASB95)

The “limited” atonement doctrine contends that Christ died for only the elect or in other words, believers whereas the “unlimited” atonement contends that Christ died for “all” people, all-inclusive, without exception and thus “without racial, sexual or social distinction.”

The Bible emphatically states that God desires for all men to be saved and that Christ died for all people. The apostle Paul taught the Roman believers that Christ died for the ungodly, which refers to unbelievers and reconciled us meaning believers, while we were God’s enemies. Therefore, if Christ reconciled the believer to God while he was an enemy of God, then Christ died for unbelievers as well (Romans 5:6-10). Thus, in order for God’s desire for all men to be saved to ever have any chance of becoming a reality, He would have to send His Son into the world to die for all men. Therefore, Christ’s death on the Cross was the
propitiation for the sins of both believers and unbelievers. Of course, all men will not be saved because many will reject Jesus Christ as Savior.

Christ had to die for everyone otherwise if He did not then unregenerate men could accuse God at the Great White Throne Judgment of wrongdoing by stating that they never were given a chance since their sins were never atoned for. Thus, the fact that Christ did die for everyone gives no one an excuse at the Great White Throne Judgment. They will go to the Lake of Fire forever because they chose to and not because God wanted them to.

Romans 5:12-21 teaches that God condemned the entire human race the moment Adam sinned. Christ had to die for everyone otherwise if He did not then unregenerate men could accuse God at the Great White Throne Judgment of wrongdoing by stating that they never were given a chance since their sins were never atoned for. Thus, the fact that Christ did die for everyone gives no one an excuse at the Great White Throne Judgment. They will go to the Lake of Fire forever because they chose to and not because God wanted them to.

The problem of those who adhere to the “limited” atonement doctrine is that not only do they reject major passages of Scripture, which clearly teach “unlimited” atonement but also they failed to understand the doctrine of the imputation of Adam’s sin to every person born into this world.

Romans 5:12-19 clearly indicates that every person in human history received the imputation of Adam’s sin in the garden, thus making every person who comes into the world physically but spiritually dead and qualified for grace. Therefore, if God imputed Adam’s sin in the garden to every person born into this world, it would be unjust for God not to send His Son into the world to die for all men. This imputation obligated God to send His Son to the cross for all people.

In Romans 1:16, Paul teaches that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to “everyone” who believes.

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (NASB95)

Therefore, the expression “who believes” refers to making the non-meritorious decision to trust or place one’s complete confidence in the Person of Jesus Christ for salvation. Then the apostle Paul notes the universal nature of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ with the phrase “to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” This phrase demonstrates that God desires all men to be saved and that Christ died for all men.

The expression “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” does “not” mean that every Jew must be evangelized before the gospel can be presented to the Gentiles but rather means that the Jews were elected by God as noted by Paul in Romans 9-
11. Also, this expression “to the Jew first and also to the Greek” places the Jew on equal footing with the Gentile with respect to the need for salvation.

In Romans 1:16, the apostle Paul reveals three principles: (1) The effect of the gospel is salvation. (2) The extent of the gospel is that it is for all men. (3) The condition attached to the gospel is faith in Christ.

The entire human race is born spiritually dead because of Adam’s sin.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and spiritual death spread through sin, and so spiritual death spread to all men, because all sinned when Adam sinned. (Author’s translation)

Therefore, God the Father sent His Son to the cross for everyone because He made everyone a sinner at physical birth through the imputation of Adam’s sin.

Now, the fact that every member of the human race possesses a sin nature does mean that the entire human race is qualified for grace, which is all that God is free to do in imparting unmerited blessings to anyone who trusts in Jesus Christ as his or her Savior.

Galatians 3:22 But the Scripture has shut up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (NASB95)

Romans 11:32 For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all. (NASB95)

Nevertheless, despite God’s grace in offering everyone salvation, not everyone will be saved because God, in His perfect integrity, also provided everyone with a free will, or volition. Therefore, unbelievers must make the decision to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior; God cannot make the decision for them.

People go to the Lake of Fire because they make the decision to go there. God doesn’t want anyone in the Lake of Fire. He wants them all in heaven. But, we are not robots. We are human beings with volition to choose—to choose Christ and be saved or to choose Satan and succumb to the Lake of Fire.

John 3:36 He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son shall not see eternal life, but the wrath of God abides on him. (NASB95)

There is only one way to be saved and that is through faith alone in Christ alone. There is no other person through whom you can attain salvation. Our ticket to heaven is through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter made this extraordinarily clear in Acts 4:10-12.

The “unlimited” atonement doctrine was taught by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:4.

1 Timothy 2:1 Therefore, based upon my previous statements, I first of all urgently request specific detailed requests, reverential prayers, intercessory prayers, thanksgivings be regularly offered up on behalf of each and every
member of the human race, 2 on behalf of kings as well as each and every one of those individuals who are in authority in order that we may continue to live a peaceful and tranquil life with absolute godliness as well as dignity. 3 This is, as an eternal spiritual truth noble as well as pleasingly acceptable in the judgment of God the Father, our Savior 4 who, as an eternal spiritual truth desires each and every member of the human race to be saved as well as to enter into knowing experientially the truth. (Author’s translation)

“Who, as an eternal spiritual truth desires each and every member of the human race to be saved” is a relative pronoun clause that is connected to verse 3, which itself is connected to verse 1. It reveals that the reason why intercessory prayer for each and every member of the human race is noble and pleasingly acceptable to the Father is that He desires each and every member of the human race to be saved.

The expression πάντας ἄνθρωπος, “each and every member of the human race” in verse 4 is picked up from verse 1 where it mean the same thing. Thus, as noted in verse 1 Paul taught that it is the Father’s will that the Ephesians intercede in prayer for all people or each and every member of the human race. Now in verse 4 he teaches that the Father wants the Ephesians to do this because it is His will that each and every member of the human race be saved and to come to an experiential knowledge of the truth. This expression refers to “common” or “universal grace.” God the Holy Spirit, in common or universal grace, makes the Gospel understandable to unbelievers, so that they may make a decision to either accept or reject Jesus Christ as Savior.

When Paul says that the Father desires each and every member of the human race to be saved does not imply that all will be saved automatically. Rather, he is simply teaching that the Father desires this to be the case and made it possible by making salvation possible for everyone through the gospel of His Son Jesus Christ. The offer salvation is made possible to every member of the human race because the Father’s Son Jesus Christ died on the cross for each and every member of the human race. The fact that the sinner has to make a volitional decision in relation to this offer is clearly taught by Paul in Romans 3:21-5:1 and many other passages such as Ephesians 2:8-9, Galatians 2:16 and John 3:16-17 just to name a few.

“To be saved” speaks of the act of the Father delivering each and every member of the human race without exception from personal sin, the sin nature, Satan, his cosmic system, condemnation from the Law, spiritual and physical death and eternal condemnation through faith in His Son Jesus Christ.

This statement in 1 Timothy 2:4 teaches the “unlimited” atonement and refutes those who adhere to a “limited” atonement. The latter is a false doctrine that is actually an attack instigated by Satan upon the integrity of God. The “limited” atonement doctrine contends that Christ died for only the elect or in other words,
believers whereas the “unlimited” atonement contends that Christ died for “all” men, all-inclusive, without exception and thus “without racial, sexual or social distinction.” This doctrine states that Jesus Christ died for every sin committed by every single member of the human race—past, present and future (John 1:29; Rom. 5:6-8; 1 Tim. 4:10; Titus 2:11; 1 John 2:2).

1 Timothy 4:10 In fact, for this express purpose we continue to make it our habit of working hard. Specifically, we ourselves continue to make it our habit of making every effort (to experience eternal life) because we possess a confident expectation of rewards because of the living God, who is, as an eternal spiritual truth the Savior of each and every member of the human race without exception, especially of believers. (Author’s translation)

This verse advances upon or intensifies and emphasizes Paul’s previous statements in 1 Timothy 4:8-9. It advances upon these verses in the sense that it demonstrates that both Paul and Timothy have accepted by faith this promise of eternal life to the extent that they were working hard and struggling for this promise. So this statement advances upon and intensifies the statements in 1 Timothy 4:8-9 because Paul is going from stating to his readers that the promise of eternal life is worthy of their acceptance by faith to his acceptance by faith as expressed by his efforts on behalf of this promise. Verse 10 is also emphatic in the sense that it would attract special attention from his readers because it would serve to motivate them to follow Paul and Timothy’s example.

“For this express purpose” refers to the promise of godliness which involves experiencing eternal life during one’s present lifetime and in addition as a certainty experiencing it throughout all of eternity. It indicates the purpose for which Timothy and Paul worked hard and struggled. They worked hard and struggled for the promise of godliness, which is experiencing eternal life now during one’s lifetime as well as during the future, throughout all of eternity. This prepositional phrase answers the question as to why Paul and Timothy worked hard and struggled. It also makes clear that Paul is not talking about him and Timothy working hard or struggling on behalf of the gospel or communicating it. Rather, it refers to their intense efforts to live godly lives themselves in the face of opposition from the sin nature and Satan’s kingdom.

“We continue to make it our habit of working hard” describes Paul and Timothy’s efforts on behalf of the promise of experiencing eternal life for the present and the future, throughout eternity. It refers to Timothy and Paul and not Paul and the apostles, or Paul and his other co-workers since in 1 Timothy 4:6-16, Paul is addressing Timothy specifically with regards to his responsibilities. Interestingly, here in verse 10, is the only place in chapter four where Paul uses the first person plural form. Paul does this not only to encourage Timothy but also to identify himself with his young delegate with a view to offering himself and
Timothy as examples for the Ephesians to follow. This statement implies that Paul and Timothy were already working hard in the sense of exerting themselves mentally, physically and spiritually in the face of adversity for the promise of experiencing eternal.

“Specifically, we ourselves continue to make it our habit of making every effort” is an epexegetical clause that explains in greater detail the previous statement. It points out the objective of Paul and Timothy working hard for the promise of experiencing eternal life. Namely, to accomplish the Father’s will, which is analogous to winning the race in the Graeco-Roman games. This would result in the winner receiving a crown and rewards, which the Christian will receive at the Bema Seat for accomplishing the Father’s will. The Christian’s crown and rewards are imperishable in contrast to the crown and rewards gives to the victor in the Graeco-Roman games, which were perishable.

This epexegetical clause refers to Paul and Timothy making every effort to experience eternal life which will accomplish the Father’s will for their lives despite strong opposition from sin and Satan’s kingdom. It implies that Paul and Timothy were already engaged in making every effort to experience eternal life, which accomplishes the Father’s will. It also emphasizes the intense effort that both exerted mentally, physically and spiritual to execute the Father’s will by growing up to spiritual maturity.

“Because we possess a confident expectation of rewards” is a causal clause that expresses the reason why Paul and Timothy continued to make it their habit of making every effort in order to experience the promise of eternal life. They did so “because” they possess a confident expectation of blessing because of the living God. In other words, they confidently expected to receive a crown and rewards for accomplishing the Father’s will to become like Christ. This is the direct result of accepting by faith the revelation they received from the living God, i.e. the Father, through the Spirit and which revelation is found in the gospel. Paul is saying that “because” they possessed a confident expectation of rewards, they continued to make every effort to experience eternal life and execute the Father’s will for their lives, which is to become like Christ. This confident expectation was also the direct result of accepting by faith the revelation they received from the Father through the Spirit that they would receive rewards for doing so. This revelation was given to Paul and the apostles and is found in their writings that appear in the letters, which are now found in the New Testament.

The causal clause continues the athletic metaphor in the sense of describing what takes place when a runner has won the race in the Graeco-Roman games, namely, they received a crown and rewards for their victory. It indicates that Paul and Timothy “confidently expect to receive a crown and rewards” because of the living God, i.e. because they received revelation from God. It also indicates that
they possessed a confident expectation that they would be rewarded because they had accepted by faith the Spirit’s revelation from the Father regarding rewards. This revelation declared that they would be rewarded for making every effort to experience eternal life in order to execute the Father’s will to become like Christ despite opposition from the sin nature and the devil’s kingdom.

“Because of the living God” teaches that Paul and Timothy possessed a confident expectation of rewards because of the revelation they received from the Father through the Spirit. This revelation they accepted by faith as demonstrated by their making every effort to experience eternal life in order to become like Christ and execute the Father’s will. So because of revelation from the Father who gave them eternal life at regeneration, they possessed this confident expectation. This revelation, as well as the rest of the revelation that appears in the Word of God, is eternal life since the Word of God is eternal life.

Therefore, the Father is the cause of Paul and Timothy’s confident expectation of receiving rewards for making every effort to experience eternal life so that they grow up to spiritual maturity and execute His will for their lives, which is to become like Jesus Christ. He is the cause of their confident expectation in the sense that He communicated to them through the Spirit that they would be rewarded for making every effort to experience eternal life in order to grow up to spiritual maturity and execute His plan for their lives.

“Who is, as an eternal spiritual truth the Savior of each and every member of the human race without exception, especially of believers” is a relative pronoun clause that emphasizes that the Father is the member of the Trinity who initiated salvation and is its source. He is the Savior or Deliverer of the human race in a seven-fold sense: (1) Deliverer or Savior from personal sins. (2) Deliverer or Savior from old sin nature (3) Deliverer or Savior from Satan and his cosmic system. (4) Deliverer or Savior from spiritual and physical death (5) Deliverer or Savior from eternal condemnation. (6) Deliverer or Savior from self. (7) Deliverer or Savior from condemnation from the Law.

This relative pronoun clause teaches that teaches the “unlimited” atonement and refutes those who adhere to a “limited” atonement. The latter is a false doctrine that is actually an attack instigated by Satan upon the integrity of God.

When Paul says that the Father is the Savior of each and every member of the human race, this does not imply that all will be saved automatically. Rather, he is simply teaching that the Father has provided salvation for each and every member of the human race through His Son Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. The offer salvation is made possible to every member of the human race because the Father’s Son Jesus Christ died on the cross for each and every member of the human race. The fact that the sinner has to make a volitional decision in relation to this offer is
clearly taught by Paul in Romans 3:21-5:1 and many other passages such as Ephesians 2:8-9, Galatians 2:16 and John 3:16-17 just to name a few.

This relative pronoun clause not only refers to the “unlimited” atonement but also refers to “common” or “universal grace.” God the Holy Spirit, in common or universal grace, makes the Gospel understandable to unbelievers, so that they may make a decision to either accept or reject Jesus Christ as Savior.

“Common” or “universal grace” is grace that the entire human race receives when God the Holy Spirit makes the Gospel message, which is a spiritual language, understandable to the spiritually dead unbeliever. It is given to everyone in the human race, so that all men may have the same privilege and opportunity to be saved.

“Especially of believers” singles out those who have exercised faith in Jesus Christ as Savior in contrast to the unsaved or do not. It is singling out those who appropriate salvation provided by the Father through His Son Jesus Christ through faith alone in Christ alone in contrast to those who don’t appropriate this salvation through unbelief.

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