

# The Satisfaction of Christ Studies in the Atonement 20. Its Extent-Concluded

by A.W. Pink

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## Transcript

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That aspect of our subject which is now before us has been a vexing question among theologians, especially so during the last century, for Christ's death for God's people only was never denied till the basic truth of Election was rejected; and that rejection only became common about one hundred and fifty years ago. Were it not so vitally important that we should be quite clear about this branch of our theme, we should avoid the discussion of it as too controversial. But inasmuch as the extent of the Atonement depends upon its nature, and directly concerns the honor of God and the glory of His Son, we feel called upon to give our best attention to the same. In our last chapter we endeavored to present some of the evidences which prove that the atonement of Christ was a real one, a definite one, an efficacious one, that whatsoever it was designed to effect must be accomplished. Appeal too was made to some of those Scriptures which expressly make known for whom Christ died, namely, His "Church," His "people," the "sheep." Yet clear and plain, full and frequent, as are the declarations of Holy Writ concerning the purpose and design of God in the death of Christ, so that he who runs ought to be able to read, yet, scarcely any truth of Scripture is now more frequently called into question than is this one. A theory diametrically opposed thereto has been advanced by the enemies of the Truth, and, sad to say, is now being promulgated by many who imagine they are the friends of Christ — as to whether or not they are, God alone can infallibly determine. On practically every side where there is any pretense of honoring Christ today, it is taught that the love of God extends to all mankind, that Christ gave Himself a ransom for the whole human race, and that the Holy Spirit is now seeking to woo and win every sinner to Him. So uniform has this preaching become, so fervently has it been advocated, so widely has it been accepted, that for any one to affirm the contrary, is to be looked upon as a setter forth of "novelties," and for him to press the same, is to invite his being denounced as a narrow-minded and harsh-hearted bigot, a heretic of the worst sort. Yet such an one can always console himself with, "If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). Ere we turn and examine those passages which are appealed to by those who proclaim a universal redemption, three things should be carefully considered. First, since all of Adam's race are not pardoned and saved, and never will be, then Christ cannot have made an atonement for their sins: this was shown at length in our last chapter. Second, the Holy Scriptures cannot contradict themselves. Being the inspired Word of God, there cannot be any inconsistencies in them: they cannot teach that Christ died for God's elect only, and also affirm that He died for all mankind as well: one or the other is an erroneous deduction which men have drawn from them. Third, seeing they explicitly teach the

former, then there must be some honest and legitimate way of interpreting those passages which may, at first glance, seem to teach the latter. Now the Word of God does not yield up its meaning to lazy people. Salvation is free; but "Truth" has to be "bought" (Prov. 23:23); yet few indeed are willing to pay its stipulated price. Not only do the Scriptures have to be "searched" (John 5:39), and searched "daily" (Acts 17:11); not only does passage have to be carefully compared with passage (1 Cor. 2:13); not only must all this be done in meekness (Ps. 25:9) and complete dependency upon God (Prov. 3:6); but there must be a fervent crying "after knowledge" and an importunate "lifting up of the voice for understanding," and seeking her "as silver" (which entails hard labor and diligent perseverance), yea, a searching for her as for "hid treasure" (Prov. 2:1-5). It is at the above point that so many have failed. The meaning of God's Word cannot be ascertained as easily as can that of a newspaper article, nor can any enter into the "mystery of the Gospel" (Eph. 6:19) as readily as one may solve a problem in mathematics. If a person approaches Holy Writ with prejudice, his mind is closed against its teachings. If he regards any passage as plain and simple and is satisfied that he already understands it, he is not likely to cry unto God for or receive light from it. If he assumes that he is now in possession of practically all that the Bible teaches on a subject (contrary to 1 Cor. 8:2), or blindly follows some man unto whom he credits the same thing, then God will take the wise in their own craftiness (1 Cor. 3:19) and suffer them to remain in darkness. It is because of this that so many are misled by the mere sound of certain words. Our last statement has received many a solemn illustration. Take the controversy which has been waged in certain quarters as to whether or not man remains in a state of consciousness after he passes out of this world. How many who deny that he does so, have appealed to such passages as "the dead praise not the Lord" (Ps. 115:17), "the dead know not any thing" (Eccl. 9:5). But the matter cannot be settled so easily. Those passages must be studied in the light of their contexts, the dispensation under which they were given, and then interpreted in harmony with other passages of a different, but not conflicting, nature. Take again the great controversy between the Reformers on transubstantiation: how easy it was to be deceived by the mere sound of those words, "This is my body!" The same principle applies to our present subject. This issue cannot be settled by an appeal to such words as "God so loved the world" and Christ "died for all" (2 Cor. 5:15). Such expressions need to be studied and interpreted in keeping with the Analogy of Faith. Incalculable damage has been wrought by unequipped men undertaking to preach the "simple (?) Gospel" and expound the Holy Scripture. There has been a zeal which was not proportioned with spiritual knowledge. Men with the merest smattering of Scripture consider themselves qualified to pass judgment on the teachings and writings of those who have devoted a lifetime to the continuous and concentrated study of God's Word. To a multitude of evangelists and preachers of today, we would say, "O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom" (Job 13:5). Rightly has it been said, "Modern theology is largely based upon the sound rather than the sense of Scripture. And it is an everyday practice for men to expound texts who cannot even quote — much less expound — the contexts" (J. M. Sangar). "Not a novice" (1 Tim. 3:6) has been deliberately ignored, and "Be not many of you teachers" (Jam. 3:1, R. V.) has been defiantly disobeyed. When men say that God has provided an atonement which is designed for all mankind, they need to be asked, Do you mean that Christ's sacrifice procured for all sinners that quickening grace of the Holy Spirit which is indispensably needed to bring men to a cordial and saving reception of the atonement? Do you mean that an atonement has been made by Christ so as to infallibly secure that all shall be saved by it? If so, be honest, and declare yourself a "Universalist." But if you do not mean this, then cease using empty words which can only deceive souls and dishonor Christ. The real issue is not so much upon the scope of the atonement, as it is upon the efficacy of it! Let us now briefly set forth that position which is popularly maintained in these degenerate times. We are told that there is such a fullness in the atonement, that the value of Christ's sacrifice is sufficient for the salvation of the entire

race, were all men to believe in Him. But this means that the sufficiency of the atonement is a conditional one — conditional upon the whole world believing. But that "condition" is not so easily performed. Almost all preachers today speak of faith in Christ as a comparatively easy matter, but the Scriptures teach quite otherwise: see Matthew 19:25,26; John 5:44; 6:44; Ephesians 1:19; 1 Peter 4:18. The Word of God represents the fallen children of Adam as being spiritually bound with chains, shut up in death, securely held in prison, so that nothing short of a miracle of grace, the putting forth of Divine omnipotence can free them. In his masterly treatise on "Particular Redemption" W. Rushton (1831) illustrated this conditional sufficiency of the atonement thus: "A wealthy and philanthropic individual visits Algiers and approaches a dungeon in which a wretched captive lies bound with chains and fetters, and strongly secured within walls and doors and bars. He proclaims aloud to the captive that he has brought gold sufficient for a ransom, on condition that the captive will liberate himself from his chains, burst open his prison doors and come forth. Alas, exclaims the wretched man, your kindness does not reach my case. Unless your gold can effect my deliverance, it can be of no service to me. To offer it on such terms can do me no good. Now man by nature is spiritually as unable to believe in Christ, as the Algerian captive is physically unable to break his chains and the prison doors; so that all this boasted sufficiency of the atonement is only an empty offer of salvation on certain terms and conditions; and such an atonement would be much too weak to meet the desperate case of a lost sinner. "But how different is the salvation of God! 'By the blood of thy covenant, I have sent forth thy prisoners out of the pit wherein is no water' (Zech. 9:11). The Lord Jesus, by His death, hath paid the ransom, and made the captive His own. Therefore He has a legal right to their persons, and with His own right arm He brings them forth. It is His glory 'to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house' (Isa. 42:6,7)." Yes, Scripture affirms that "He sent [not 'offered!'] redemption unto his people" (Ps. 111:9). Turning now to the principal passages to which holders of this view, appeal, let us begin with John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son," etc. To a superficial mind this declaration appears to settle the controversy once for all. We do not use that term "superficial" in any invidious sense, but common honesty will not allow us to substitute another for it. Anyone who has examined a concordance and looked up the passages where "world" occurs, soon discovers that this word is used in the New Testament in quite a number of ways and with widely different latitudes, so that nothing can be determined for certain by the occurrence of this term in John 3:16. Sometimes the "world" signifies the unbelieving as in John 15:18, in others it includes none but believers as in Romans 11:12, etc. Sometimes the "world" denotes the material system, created by Christ (John 1:10), in others it is applied to a mere handful of people as in John 7:4 and 12:19. In the great majority of instances it is a general and indefinite expression which has reference to the Gentiles in contradistinction from Israel after the flesh. Now it is a fundamental and unvarying rule of interpretation that both definite and indefinite phrases or terms must be understood and defined in strict accordance with the subject about which they are employed. So it is with John 3:16. The subject of that verse is the love of God, to which the indefinite expressions "world" and "whosoever" are joined. Therefore, if we would discover to a certainty who are the objects of God's love, we have to diligently compare and examine other, passages where the love of God is mentioned. Then we learn that His love is eternal: Jeremiah 31:3; Ephesians 1:4,5. That it is uninfluenced. Nothing in its object calls it into exercise, prompts or attracts it (Deut. 7:7,8): it proceeds simply from the spontaneous will of God. It is immutable or unchanging (Song of Sol. 8:6,7). Those whom God loves, He loves forever (John 13:1), nothing can ever separate from it, nothing can ever cause God to cease loving those on whom He set His love (Rom. 8:35-38). It is sovereign (Rom. 9:13): there was no more cause in Jacob why he should be the object of the Divine love, than there was in Esau. The love of God is known by its manifested effects. There is an infallible connection (as there is between cause and effect) between the love of God and His ordination of its

objects to life and salvation: hence we read, "We are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation" (2 Thess. 2:13). So also, those whom God loves, He regenerates. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (1 John 3:1)— making them "sons" is the certain effect of His having loved them from all eternity. Those whom God loves, He "draws" to Himself (Jer. 31:3). Those whom God loves, He "chastens" (disciplines) so that they become actual partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:6, 10). It therefore follows that those who are not made His "sons," who are not made "partakers of his holiness," were never the objects of His love. The same love of God which was the cause of sending Christ to die for the salvation of His people, is also the same cause which "freely gives" all things with Christ (Rom. 8:32), i.e., the Spirit to regenerate, faith to receive Him, love to be devoted to Him: compare 2 Peter 1:3. Were it otherwise, God's love would be incomplete, inadequate, deficient, unefficacious. God's love for me would be vain, if it did not actually save me, deliver me, and win my heart to Him. John 3:16 simply states that design of God's love, and that is, that all who believe in Christ should be saved by Him, which believers, in their unbelieving state, are found "scattered abroad" (John 11:52) throughout the earth, among the Gentiles as well as the Jews. The popular interpretation of John 3:16 is repudiated by all the facts of history. First, take the history of the human race before Christ was born. Unnumbered millions lived and died "without God and without hope" (Ps. 9:17). If God "loved" them, where is the least evidence of it? He "suffered all nations to walk in their own ways" (Acts 14:16). He "gave them over to a reprobate mind" (Rom. 1:28). He announced to Israel "you only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). Second, take the history of the race since Christ was born. Remember the "dark ages" which lasted not for a few days, but for a thousand years, when the Papacy dominated almost all Christendom and the Bible was withheld from the peoples. And since the great Reformation, what untold millions have died in heathendom without ever hearing of Christ! It would be inexplicably strange if God should "love" multitudes to whom He never so much as signified His love — leaving them in entire ignorance of the Son of His love! Third, take the coming Day of Judgment. To whom will God's love then be exercised? To sum up our comments on John 3:16. We understand "the world" here to mean men of all nations, with an especial reference to the Gentiles, whom Nicodemus (as all Jews) considered to be accursed. To those who reject this explanation, and say, We keep by the plain declaration "God so loved the world," we ask them to apply the same principle to the following passages: "on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 10:45), "God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18), "declaring the conversion of the Gentiles" (Acts 15:3). Is that expression "the Gentiles" in these passages a general and indefinite one, or a universal and specific one? is it a relative or an absolute one? That is, does it take in all, or refer only to some? Acts 15:44 answers the question: "God has visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name!" The last clause of 2 Peter 3:9 is frequently quoted, but without any attention being given to the first part of it. Is that honest? The "any" whom the Lord is "not willing" should perish, is clearly defined: verse 8 shows that it is God's "beloved" who are here addressed and referred to. The "promise" which He is "not slack" in fulfilling, has reference to the return of Christ (v. 4), which "scoffers" (v. 3) suppose will never be fulfilled. The great reason why God has not yet sent back His Son is because the last of His elect have not been regenerated: all of them shall come to repentance before human history can be wound up and verse 10 fulfilled. Thus, the "any" looks back to the "us-ward" in the previous part of the verse! "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John the Baptist was the herald of a new dispensation. One of the leading distinctions between the Old and New Testament dispensations was with regard to its scope. The former was greatly restricted, being, for two thousand years, almost exclusively confined to a single nation; and to that limitation the members of the Church had become thoroughly accustomed. But the new dispensation possessed an

opposite character. At the cross, the "middle wall of partition," by which the Jews were kept separate from all other nations, was broken down, so that henceforth there should be no difference between Jew and Gentile, bond and free. But the previous regime had given rise to a deeply-seated prejudice in favor of exclusive privilege, which it was no easy matter to uproot. Although the Savior had manifested a regard for a Roman centurion, a woman of Samaria, and had even plainly declared "other sheep I have which are not of this fold" (John 10:16), still the exclusive sentiment retained a firm hold even upon the minds of His disciples. They were Jews, and were manifestly reluctant to descend to a common level with others, in regard to the enjoyment of religious privilege. Clear proof of this is seen in the case of Peter (Acts 10:14): God had to work a miracle before he was willing to preach the Gospel to Cornelius. The jealous antipathy of the Jews comes out even more noticeably in 1 Thessalonians 2:15, 16. This one consideration accounts for and throws much light upon the use of terms of an extensive import when speaking of the new economy. To mark the contrast from Judaism, the strongest language that could be used became necessary: hence the employment of "the world" and "all men" to denote men in general without regard to national distinction. From what has been said above, it is not to be surmised that the Holy Spirit moved men to employ language which was not strictly true or accurate. Far from it. Nothing is more common, either in the writings of men or in the Word of God, than to use a general designation when it is intended to express a general principle, but which does not include every individual comprehended in the general designation employed. When we read that a certain city is smitten with a small-pox epidemic, no one concludes that every individual in it has contracted that disease. So when we read in Exodus 9:6 that "all the cattle of Egypt died," we must not take those words absolutely, as Exodus 9:9,19,25 plainly show. A critical examination of the terms of John 1:29 obliges us to take into account the undeniable fact that a very considerable portion of the human race was already in hell when the Son of God became incarnate. This one consideration is sufficient to show that we are compelled to understand that the "world" here is far less extensive in its scope than the whole human family. Again, that Christ did not "take away the sin of," bear the guilt of, suffer for, the iniquities of all alive on earth in His own day, is abundantly clear from His own words to the Pharisees, "Ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24 and cf. 9:41). The best commentary upon John 1:29 is the song of the redeemed, "Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9)! "Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:6). What has been said above concerning the signification of the term "world" when used in connection with the objects of God's love or the subjects of Christ's redemption, applies with equal force and pertinency to the word "all." That Christ gave Himself a ransom for "all" without distinction of nationality, social status, age or sex, is blessedly true; but to say that He died in the stead of "all" without exception cannot be maintained without involving the most palpable absurdities and contradictions. Nor is there anything elsewhere in Scripture which obliges us to give to "all" in this and similar verses an absolute and unlimited meaning. The word "all" is employed in Scripture with considerable latitude and variety of meaning; very rarely indeed is it used without limitation. Mark 1:5 says that "all the land of Judea and they of Jerusalem were all baptized" of John, yet Luke 7:30 shows the Pharisees and lawyers were "not baptized of him." When the Savior told His disciples that "ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (Matthew 10:22), it is obvious that those who believed on Him must be excluded. When we read that "all men came unto" Christ (John 3:26), we can only understand that many of the Jews attended upon His ministry. When Christ declared He would "draw all unto" Himself (John 12:32), He had in mind the "all that the Father giveth me" of John 6:37. So here in 1 Timothy 2:6 the "ransom for all" is defined by the "ransom for many" of Matthew 20:28. The "all" of 1 Timothy 2:4 and 6 is simply emphasizing the contrast from the Jewish nation only. 1 John 2:2. Here again many have been deceived by the mere sound of terms. The very first word of this verse shows that Christ is the

"propitiation" of those only for whom He is an "Advocate with the Father," and John 17:9 proves that He prays for none but the elect. Again, if the closing words of this verse expressed an unlimited universality, then the previous clause would be quite superfluous: if the "whole world" takes in all the race, then it would be meaningless to say that Christ is the propitiation "for our sins" and also for every body's — the "our" would be included. Instead, the "our" refers to Jewish Christians, for John was an apostle to the "circumcision" (Gal. 2:9) and his epistle was written (first) to such (see 2:7); the "whole world" signifies God's elect scattered among the Gentiles. Romans 3:25 shows that Christ's "propitiation" is limited to those who put their faith in it. Scripture always interprets Scripture: if the reader really desires to know the meaning of 1 John 2:2 let him compare John 11:51,52 and 17:20, carefully noting the "also." That this expression the "whole world" is not an unlimited one, is clear from the last clause of Revelation 13:3, compared with Revelation 20:4; or Revelation 12:9 with Matthew 24:24. To affirm that Christ shed His blood for the sins of all mankind, is to be guilty of charging Him with rebellion against the sovereign will of God. But how far from the truth is such a concept! "Every part of our Lord's conduct on earth was an act of obedience to the Father's will (John 6:38). How then could He lay down His life for any but those who were given Him of the Father to be redeemed from among men? Had He laid down His life for all mankind, He would have gone beyond His commission" (James Haldane). It remains to be pointed out that there is a (relative) universality to Christ's sacrifice in three respects. First, in time: its efficacy was not limited to one generation or dispensation. Being "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:20), His merits extended to all believers from Abel onwards. Second, in place: the efficacy of Christ's death was not to be limited to any one nation: Revelation 5:9. Third, in virtue: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Christ's sacrifice made atonement for Noah's drunkenness, Lot's incest, David's murder, Peter's denial, Paul's persecution of the Church. In these three respects there is no limitation to His sacrifice. Luke 19:41-44. Christ's weeping over Jerusalem is often regarded as His lamentation over lost sinners. Such was not the case. Verses 43, 44 show plainly that He had before Him the destruction of the city. As He foresaw the awful siege and contemplated the unparalleled temporal calamities, He was deeply moved. As a nation, the doom of the Jews was sealed: the things belonging to their civic peace were now hid from their eyes. But so far from their spiritual state being hopeless, or Christ bewailing that, He knew full well that in a few weeks at most thousands of them would believe to the saving of their souls! Space will only allow us to notice briefly a few more texts. The "all men" of Romans 5:18 is explained by 1 Corinthians 15:22. 1 Corinthians 8:11 asks a question, not states a fact: it warns against the evil tendency of uncharitable conduct. The "all" for whom Christ died (2 Cor. 5:15) are in that same verse said to "live unto. . . him which died for them." The "world" of 2 Corinthians 5:19 are those unto whom God is "not imputing their trespasses," and that is certainly not the "world of the ungodly" (2 Pet. 2:5). The "living God" of 1 Timothy 4:10 is the Father (see Matthew 16:16), and "Savior" there means Preserver — in a temporal way. Christ "tasted death for every" (Heb. 2:9): there is no word for "man" in the Greek, and the next verse shows it is "every" son. That some whom the Lord "bought" (2 Pet. 2:1) shall be damned, presents no difficulty: He bought "the field" (Matthew 13:43,44), but "redeemed" only His people; as Man (Acts 17:31) He has acquired the right to judge and dispose of all. To reason as some have done from the second half of Hebrews 9:26 that Christ made atonement for no man's sins in particular, but only for sin in general, is really too puerile for serious consideration. Yet this is what is being taught in many places today. The Cross is looked upon as little more than an honoring of the moral government of God, a satisfying of His justice abstractly considered. Such a theory involves this absurdity: that Christ died not for sinners, but for sin. Sufficient to point out in refutation that "sin" has no existence apart from sinners! Sin is not a mere non-entity, or metaphysical abstraction, but a moral agent to which it belongs. Separate sin from sinners and it ceases to be. Surely the Son of God died for something else than a mere abstraction!

To say that in the atonement of Christ God has laid a sufficient and suitable basis for the salvation of all men, if so be they would avail themselves of it, may sound very plausible, yet is it, in reality, meaningless jargon. Such an assertion ignores the eternal and sovereign election of the Father. It dissevers the work of the Spirit from the work of Christ. It repudiates the lost condition of man. While professing to widen the extent of the atonement, it compromises its reality and efficacy. To say that everything turns on the sinner's acceptance, is to affirm that Christ did nothing more for those who are saved than He did for those who are lost. It is not faith which gives Divine efficacy to the blood; it was the blood which efficaciously purchased faith. To make the eternal salvation of sinners turn upon an act of their own wills, would not only be leaving the success of the redemptive work of Christ, contingent upon the fickle caprice of men, but would allow them to divide the honors with Christ! To talk of God's "offering assistance to sinners" while He leaves them in a state of un-regeneracy, is the veriest trifling. To say that Christ died for all the sins of all who hear the Gospel, and that the only thing which can now damn them is their unbelief, is to fly in the face of Ephesians 5:5, 6, etc. Moreover, such a statement is, really, a contradiction in terms. Either their unbelief is a sin, or it is not. If not, then why are they punished for it? If it be, then, according to their own affirmation, Christ atoned for it, and there is nothing more in their unbelief than there is in their other sins to hinder them from partaking of the fruits of Christ's sacrifice. Let such choose which horn of the dilemma they please. Seeing that Christ died for the elect only, how is the Gospel to be preached to sinners indiscriminately? This question will be carefully considered and answered at length in a following chapter.

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