

Examining Calvinism: Limited Atonement

Does the Bible really teach that Jesus did not die for everyone?

Don Ruhl • Savage Street, Grants Pass, Oregon • August 14, In the year of our Lord Christ, 2022

Scripture Reader and Reading: Billy Henshall – John 3.16

Song Leader and Song Suggestions: Phil Joseph – Songs on the crucifixion

Prelude:

I. Again, I am reviewing

A. *Tulip: The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture*

B. by Duane Edward Spencer.

1. I have already covered the first two letters of the acrostic:

- a) Total Depravity
- b) Unconditional Election

2. Tonight we shall examine the next letter in the acrostic:

- a) Limited Atonement
- b) Yes, Mr. Spencer maintains just exactly what that sounds like,
 - (1) that the atoning work of Jesus on the cross
 - (2) was limited,
 - (a) limited to only certain people and
 - (b) not for the world.

II. Spencer wrote:

“When we speak of the meritorious work of Christ on the cross, do we right-fully say that He died for all men equally and alike (as say the Arminians), or do we more accurately state (with the Calvinists) that Christ died for the Elect, only?”

– Page 35

A. Your first thought might be John 3.16:

16 “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

– **John 3.16**

B. You probably thought

1. that John 3.16 refuted the idea
2. that the cross was only for the elect.
 - a) And you would be correct
 - b) for thinking that way.

C. However, Mr. Spencer has an answer for you:

“Much of what we think about the atoning death of Christ will be tempered by what we understand the simple word ‘world’ to mean.”

– **Ibid.**

Persuasion:

I. Did Jesus Die for the World?

A. What Mr. Spencer then does is

1. present different definitions of the word “world.”
2. It is true that most words have multiple definitions and
 - a) we know which definition to use
 - b) by the *context*.

B. Troy Cummings used the word “bank,” to illustrate this.

1. I am going into the bank to deposit my check.
2. I am sitting on a bank fishing.
 - a) Do you see me sitting on a building fishing in that last one?
 - b) No, you understand it to mean a river bank.

C. Here is the way that the Calvinist understands “world” in John 3.16:

“The Calvinist logically assumes the definition of *world* to be ‘men out of

every tribe and nation, but not all tribes and nations as a whole.”

– Pages 36–37, Emphasis his

1. In other words, Jesus died for
 - a) people from every tribe and nation but
 - b) not for everyone in every tribe and nation!
 - (1) What is the point of evangelism
 - (2) if what he asserts is true?
2. However, there is a passage
 - a) that is not so familiar to Christians, but
 - b) makes the point emphatically
 - (1) that when Jesus said, “world,” he meant
 - (2) that his sacrifice is available for every single person.

D. I think the Calvinist believes

1. that if you say Jesus died for every person in the world
2. that means every person will be saved.
 - a) No, it does not mean that everyone will be saved, because
 - b) the Bible makes it clear
 - (1) that not everyone will be saved,
 - (2) truly, most people will be lost.
 - (a) However, that is the case because
 - (b) not everyone accepts Christ and his work.
 - i) The cross is available for everyone, but
 - ii) not everyone avails themselves of the cross.
3. If we say
 - a) that a certain medicine is for everyone in the world,

b) does that mean everyone in the world will take the medicine?

(1) No, but it is available for everyone.

(2) However, will not take it.

(a) That is the same thing with the cross of Christ.

(b) Yes, it is available for everyone, but

i) most people do not want it.

II. Who Is “Us”?

A. When the Calvinist reads Second Peter 3.9, which says:

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

– 2 Peter 3.9 (KJV),

1. he questions what Peter meant by “us.”

2. Therefore, Mr. Spencer says the Lord does not want any of “us” to perish,

a) meaning none of the elect,

b) whom God has elected unconditionally.

(1) Although the Second Coming of Christ, the topic of chapter 3,

(2) will involve everyone on earth,

(a) the dead from the past and

(b) those living when Jesus returns.

B. First, Mr. Spencer tries to define what Peter meant by “us.”

1. He quotes Second Peter 1.1:

1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ...”

– **2 Peter 1.1 (KJV)**

2. However, we have to consider the immediate context.

- a) His introduction may not have a connection
- b) with what he writes on later.

C. He gets to Second Peter 3,

1. where the issue is the Second Coming of Christ:

4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

– **2 Peter 3.4 (KJV)**

2. However, in this chapter

- a) Peter speaks of scoffers (v. 3),
- b) so that we can understand “us,” in verse 9
 - (1) to mean anyone.
 - (2) Anyone who needs to repent,
 - (a) God is waiting for them to do so, but
 - (b) eventually time will run out.

III. Christ Died for Us, but Not for the World?

A. Now, listen to this statement that he makes:

“Peter’s position there, as everywhere else, is that *Christ died for* (the elect) *and not for the whole world.*”

– **Page 40, Emphasis his**

B. He then used several other passages.

1. Here is one of them:

21 For he hath made him to be sin for us...

– 2 Corinthians 5.21 (KJV)

2. This passages does not establish his point.
 - a) It simply affirms that Christ died for us.
 - b) There is no reason to exclude the world.
 - (1) He reasons in the same way here
 - (2) that “us” can only mean the elect.

C. Let us also look at the context of Second Corinthians 5:

18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled *us* to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given *us* the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling *the world* to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to *them*, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

– 2 Corinthians 5.18–21 (NKJV)

1. If we take “us” to mean only the elect,
2. then notice how Paul emphasized
 - a) “them,” the people of the *world* and
 - b) that the “us” is seeking to bring the “world,” to Christ.

D. Remember I told earlier

1. that there is a passage
2. that is not so familiar to Christians, but
 - a) makes the point emphatically
 - b) that the sacrifice of Jesus is for, “ the world,” and
 - (1) that means every single person,

- (2) both the elect and those who reject the Lord.
- (3) Now, listen to that passage:

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

– 1 John 2.1–2 (NKJV)

E. Let us restrict the meaning of “ours” to the elect in this passage from John.

1. What then did John do or say next?
2. He emphasized
 - a) that Jesus is the propitiation (appeasement, atonement) for our sins.
 - b) John by the Holy Spirit then made a statement
 - (1) as though the Holy Spirit knew
 - (2) the day would come
 - (a) when someone would deny
 - (b) that the sacrifice of Christ
 - i) was for all people, and
 - ii) that they would redefine words in the context to do so.

F. John assured us

1. that Jesus is our Advocate for when we sin, but
2. not only for us who have already become followers of Jesus Christ, but
 - a) he is also the propitiation (appeasement, atonement)
 - b) for the sins of the *whole world*.
 - (1) Please observe
 - (2) that John not only used the word “world,” but
 - (a) that he drove home the point

(b) that the death of Jesus is for the sins of the *whole* world.

G. Other passages affirm the truth of John 3.16 and First John 2.1–2:

29 The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the *world!*”

– John 1.29 (NKJV)

11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to *all men*...

– Titus 2.11 (NKJV)

4 ...[God] desires *all men* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

– 1 Timothy 2.4 (NKJV)

Exhortation:

I. I hope that you can see

A. that just taking verses from here and there

B. can be dangerous.

1. Be sure that you check the context.

2. If you still do not understand what is going on in the text,

a) ask someone to help you,

b) like the Ethiopian Treasurer did.

(1) It opened the door of salvation for him, and

(2) it may open the door of salvation for someone you know.

II. Remember do not let the verse divisions break up your thinking.

A. Look for sentences.

B. Look for paragraphs.

C. Follow the punctuation.