



What Is Reformed Theology?

Limited Atonement

Introduction

Without the cross of Jesus Christ there is no gospel. There simply is no good news without the cross. Indeed, any attempt to preach the gospel, minus the cross, is to offer people a placebo rather than the very medicine that they require. To be sure, they may feel that it has done them some good. But, if we have not really explained to them the meaning and purpose of the cross, then we have neither convinced them of their problem, nor have we been able to convey to them the biblical solution. How can God pardon sinner without encouraging sin? How can he simultaneously show justice in punishment but mercy in pardoning? How can he turn his enemies into his friends and bind them to him in eternal love? How can he admit men and women to heaven? The answer to all of these questions is the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. As foolish as it seems to those who are perishing, to those who are being saved is it the very power of God. (Atonement)

The most difficult...

most controversial

most confusing

Atonement

definition statements

atone: to make amends or reparation

at-one-ment refers to the atoning death of Christ through which the sinner is reconciled to God, restored to His favor.

“The atonement is the work of God in Christ, by his obedience and death, by which he cancelled the debt of our sin, appeased his holy wrath against us, and won for us all the benefits of salvation.” (Piper)

We believe that men are regenerated, redeemed, reconciled to God, justified, forgiven, adopted by the sacrificial and substitutional death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Penal

Substitutionary

Atonement

Scripture

Romans 3:23–26 [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, [25] whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. [26] It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

That the Bible's central message is atonement, that is, that God has provided a way for humankind to come back into harmonious relation with him, is everywhere apparent in Scripture. From the first stories in Genesis to the last visions of Revelation, God seeks to reconcile his people to himself.

The Atonement of Christ is the sacrificial work of Jesus for sinners. In his death on the cross, Christ atoned for the sins of humanity such that God is satisfied and reconciliation is accomplished for all who will be redeemed. The obedience and death of Christ on behalf of sinners is the ground of redemption.

In Christianity, atonement refers to the needed reconciliation between sinful mankind and the holy God. This reconciliation is possible through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, as expressed in Romans 3:25, Romans 5:11, and Romans 5:19. Atonement is the Bible's central message.

Romans 3:25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

Romans 5:11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Romans 5:19 For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

What does Limited Atonement not mean?

It does not mean that there is a limit to be placed on the value of the atonement.

It does not mean that the gospel shouldn't be preached or doesn't need to be preached universally.

The gospel is universal in that it is available to anyone who would believe.

To state the question in another way: Did Christ die to atone for the sins of every human being, or did he die to atone for the sins of the elect only? (Sproul)

The ultimate question has to do not so much with the sufficiency or efficiency of the atonement, but with its *design*. What was God's original purpose or intent in sending his Son into the world? Was his divine plan to make redemption possible or to make it certain? (Sproul 194)

The atonement is sufficient for all.
The atonement is efficient for some.

Sufficient: the value is enough to cover all

Efficient: applied only for those who believe

At this point there is agreement among all orthodox Christians.

This distinguishes us from universalists.

This doctrine is concerned with what was the original purpose / plan / design of God sending Jesus into the world to die on the cross.

Was it to make salvation possible for everyone?

Did God, from all eternity, have a plan of salvation by which, according to the riches of His grace and eternal election, He designed the atonement to ensure the salvation of His people?

Definite Atonement

He laid down His life for His sheep.

Jesus' death secured faith and repentance for the elect.

Faith is a gift purchased by the cross.

God provides for his elect all that is necessary for their salvation, including the gift of faith.
(Sproul)

In the cross, God designed to achieve faith.

Consider the blood of the new covenant.

Luke 22:20 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Blood seals the new covenant.

The new covenant secured a new heart.

Ezekiel 11:19 And I will give them one heart, and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh,

Ezekiel 36:26-27 [26] And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

In the cross there was a design to purchase that new heart.

The redemption of specific sinners was an eternal plan of God, accomplished by the atoning work of Christ.
(Sproul)

John 10:11,15 [11] I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. [15] just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Matthew 1:21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”

Summary Statements

“The redemption of Christ is sufficient for all humans and effective for those who trust Him. It is not limited in its worth or sufficiency to save all who believe, but the full saving effectiveness of the atonement that Jesus accomplished is limited to those whom that saving effect is prepared. The availability of the total sufficiency of the atonement is for all people – whosoever will / whoever believes – will be covered by the blood of Christ. And this is a divine design in the death of Christ to accomplish the promises of the New Covenant for the chosen bride of Christ. Thus, Christ died for all people, but not far all in the same way.”
(Simple Theology - Piper)

“In summary, the biblical point of limited atonement is that in the death of Christ God had a particular design for His elect. He was purchasing not just a possibility for them to believe and be saved, but he was purchasing the belief itself. The conversion of God’s elect is blood- bought. The overcoming of our deadness and rebellion against God is not performed decisively by us so that we then qualify for the atonement. God’s sovereign grace overcomes our deadness and rebellion. And that grace is purchased for us in the death of Christ.” (Piper)

The atonement of Christ is *sufficient* for all humans and *effective* for those who trust him. It is not limited in its worth or sufficiency to save all who believe. But the *full, saving effectiveness* of the atonement that Jesus accomplished is limited to those for whom that saving effect was prepared. The availability of the total sufficiency of the atonement is for all people. Whosoever will — whoever believes — will be covered by the blood of Christ. *And* there is a divine design in the death of Christ to accomplish the promises of the new covenant for the chosen bride of Christ. Thus Christ died for all people, but not for all in the same way.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-definite-atonement-and-why-does-it-matter>