For Whom Did Christ Die?

1 TIMOTHY 2:3–6

The history of limited atonement, and a biblical response



INTRODUCTION

Was the cross for everyone, or only for the elect?



Every Christian agrees that Christ's death saves sinners.

*The question is its **intent**: did God send His Son to provide for all people, or only for those chosen?*

1. **What it teaches**
   The doctrine defined, and how its defenders argue
2. **A brief history**
   From the early church to the Synod of Dort
3. **What Scripture says**
   The texts on God's love and the world
4. **Honest objections**
   The Calvinist replies, answered
5. **Why it matters**
   The gospel offer and our assurance

PART 1 · WHAT IT TEACHES

Limited atonement in a nutshell

THE CLAIM

Christ died to actually save the elect, and only the elect.

The “L” in TULIP

The acronym later summarized the five points of Dort, written against the Remonstrants.

Other names

Particular redemption, or definite atonement.

Its logic

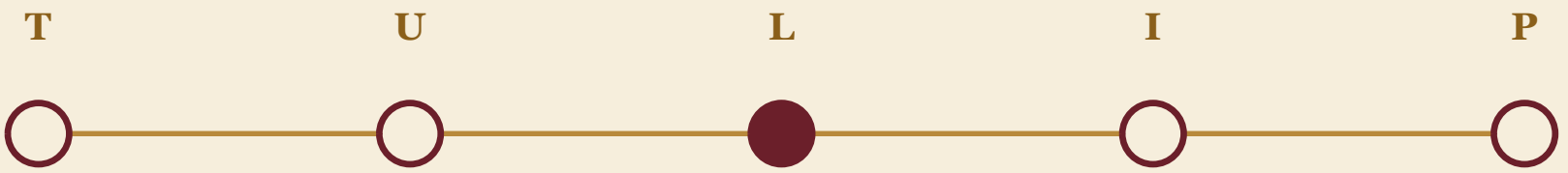
The cross is sufficient in value for all, but intended and effective for the elect alone.

Where we agree

Christ’s blood has infinite value · Salvation is by grace · Not everyone will be saved

PART 1 · WHAT IT TEACHES

Limited atonement holds the five points together



Total depravity

Sinners are spiritually dead and cannot save themselves.

Unconditional election

God chose a people before the world began, not for anything he foresaw in them.

Limited atonement

Christ died to save those chosen, and only them.

Irresistible grace

The Spirit brings to faith all those for whom Christ died.

Perseverance of the saints

Everyone redeemed is kept by God and will not be lost.

On this view, limited atonement links the points: the Father elects, the Son redeems the elect, and the Spirit applies that redemption to every one of them.

A short history: where the doctrine came from



Christ died for all

The view commonly taught by the early church Fathers.

Christ died only for the elect

Taught by Gottschalk; condemned at Mainz and Quierzy.

Sufficient for all

Peter Lombard: Christ's death is "sufficient for all, efficient for the elect."

The cross tied to election

Held by Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor.

Particular redemption

Confessed by the Synod of Dort against the Remonstrants.

The view spreads

The Westminster Confession and John Owen's Death of Death spread it.

Limited atonement was formally confessed only after the Reformation, and even then, godly Reformed teachers such as Davenant, Amyraut, and Baxter held that Christ died for all.

PART 1 · WHAT IT TEACHES

The doctrine defined: three claims in one

1 Intent

Before the world began, the Father and the Son *purposed* that the cross would save *a particular people*: the elect.

2 Accomplishment

The cross does not merely make salvation possible. It actually secures redemption, forgiveness, and reconciliation *for those for whom it was intended*.

3 Application

Everyone *for whom Christ died will be given faith and be saved.* None of them can be lost.

In short: the cross was designed to save, and does save, everyone for whom Christ died, and ***Christ died for the elect alone****.*

PART 1 · WHAT IT TEACHES

How its defenders argue for it

1

The cross really saves

Romans 5:10 · Ephesians 1:7

Christ's death is said to reconcile and redeem, not merely to make salvation possible. If it did that for everyone, everyone would be saved.

2

Cross and intercession unite

Romans 8:32–34 · John 17:9

The One who died is the One who intercedes. Jesus says He is not praying for the world, but for those the Father gave Him.

3

The Bible names a specific people

John 10:15 · Acts 20:28 · Eph. 5:25

His sheep, His church, His people: Christ's death is described as being for them in particular.

4

Father, Son and Spirit as one

John 6:37–39

The Father gives a people to the Son, the Son saves them, the Spirit applies it. The Son would not die for those the Father did not give.

Reading it fairly: what it does and does not say

What its defenders affirm

- Christ's blood is infinitely valuable, enough to save every sinner.
- The gospel is to be preached to everyone.
- Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone.

What it does not claim

- That we can tell who the elect are.
- That anyone who repents and believes will be turned away.
- That the gospel offer is insincere. Most Calvinists affirm a sincere offer.

Both sides say "sufficient for all, efficient for the elect." The question is whether it was provided for all.

PART 1 · WHAT IT TEACHES

Three answers to “For whom did Christ die?”

POSITION 1

Limited (definite) atonement

Christ died to save the elect only. The cross was paid for them alone.

Held by: strict Calvinists and the Westminster tradition

POSITION 2

Hypothetical universalism

Christ died for all on condition of faith, but God gives faith only to the elect.

Held by: Amyraut, Davenant and some Reformed teachers

POSITION 3

Unlimited atonement

Christ died for all. His death provides salvation for everyone, and it is received by faith.

Held by: most evangelicals, Arminians and some Calvinists

PART 3 · SCRIPTURE

God loves the world and desires all to be saved

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

1 Timothy 2:3–6

God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved… Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

Ezekiel 33:11

I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is… not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.



If God loves the world and desires all to be saved, then the gift of His Son was for the world.

PART 3 · SCRIPTURE

The cross is for “the world” and for “everyone”

John 1:29	*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*
2 Corinthians 5:19	*In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them.*
1 Timothy 4:10	*The living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.*
Hebrews 2:9	*By the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*
1 John 2:2	*He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.*



Same author, same phrase

John writes “the whole world” in 1 John 2:2 and again in 5:19: “the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.” There it cannot mean the elect only.

PART 3 · SCRIPTURE

Christ died even for some who perish

2 Peter 2:1

False teachers, "even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction."

The Master bought people who are headed for destruction.

Romans 14:15

"By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died."

A believer can be harmed by a brother for whom Christ died.

1 Corinthians 8:11

"This weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died."

Paul speaks of Christ dying for one who may be ruined.

PART 4 · OBJECTIONS

“But Christ died for his sheep”

THE OBJECTION

John 10:11

The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Matthew 1:21

He will save his people from their sins.

Ephesians 5:25

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Naming some, they say, excludes the rest.

1

Naming is not excluding

Paul writes, “the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20). He does not mean for Paul alone.

2

“Especially” assumes “all”

“Savior of all people, especially of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:10). The church is the special beneficiary, not the only one.

3

The Bible never says “only”

No verse says Christ died for the elect only and not for the rest. That word is added by Calvinists.

PART 4 · OBJECTIONS

“Then the blood is wasted, or everyone is saved”

OWEN’S ARGUMENT, 1647

If Christ paid for all the sins of all people, all would be saved.

If he paid for some sins of all, no one would be saved.

So he paid for all the sins of the elect only.

1

Provision is not application

Scripture says the benefit is received by faith (Rom. 3:25). Even the elect were “by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:3) until they believed.

2

Sin is not a ledger

The Bible speaks of ransom and sacrifice, not a bill paid item by item. God freely applies Christ’s work to those who trust Him.

3

Unbelief is the verdict

People are condemned for not believing (John 3:18, 36), not because no atonement was made for them.

PART 5 · WHY IT MATTERS

What is at stake for the gospel and for us



A sincere offer

Can we say to *anyone*, “Christ died for you”? Paul pleads, “We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20).



Real assurance

We do not need to search for *secret proof that we are elec*t before we trust. The Father “has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).



God’s character

God’s love for sinners isn’t kept behind a secret decree. The God who is perfectly just is also the God who so loved the world.



THE INVITATION

“Let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price.”

Revelation 22:17

- **Christ died for the world He loves**
- **The offer of the gospel is sincere**
- **Come to Him today, and love those who differ**