

# Limited Atonement

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well if we could this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read in 1st John, the first letter of John and to chapter 2.

1st John chapter 2 and we'll just read again the first two verses. 1st John chapter 2 where John writes, My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

This evening we're going back into what we've called the Christian's greenhouse and we're going to check that one flower. That one flower that should always be in the forefront of the Christian's mind.

Because as we said before, we're studying a flower that should never be allowed to wilt or to die.

Because this flower should, in many ways, it should shape the way that we walk.

[ 1 : 18 ] The flower should shape the way that we worship. And the flower should also shape the way that we witness as Christians. The tulip is a flower that we need to know.

It's a flower that we need to understand. Because I believe that when we understand this flower, the tulip, when we understand tulip and all its beauty and all its complexity, it will cause us to respond in praise and adoration for the Lord.

Because tulip, it ought to remind us that our salvation, it's not of ourselves. It is the gift of God. It's all of grace. It's all of grace. And as we said before, the tulip, it's an acrostic.

It's an acrostic for what has become known as the five points of Calvinism. And as we said before, these five points of Calvinism, they were the outcome of a synod that took place in the Netherlands in the 17th century.

And the five points of Calvinism, they were written in order to directly refute the five points of Arminianism. And the five points of Calvinism, they became popularly known as the tulip, or summarised using the acrostic tulip, where T-U-L-I-P, total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.

[ 2 : 38 ] And we've already considered the first two letters of this acrostic. We considered T for total depravity. And we saw there that when Adam sinned against God in the Garden of Eden, he brought the entire human race into an estate of sin and misery.

Totally depraved. And the misery that came into our experience was the misery of death. We're dead in trespasses and sins. In Adam, we're spiritually dead.

It doesn't matter if we're spoken to with wisdom or eloquence or passion. We're dead. But we're not only dead, as we said before, we're in a dungeon. We're in chains because of our sin.

We're imprisoned. We're enslaved to sin. And without the Lord intervening in our lives, without the Lord working in our heart, without the Lord taking the initiative, then we will not respond.

We can't be saved. The Lord is the only one who can bring a sinner from darkness to light, from death to life, from the dungeon to liberty.

[ 3 : 42 ] And so, says the Calvinist, if our salvation is all of the Lord, if the Lord is the one who takes the initiative, then the Lord has chosen who will be saved and who will not be saved.

If our salvation is all of grace, if it's all of the Lord, then there must be an elect. And that brought us on to our second letter, which, in our acrostic, we saw this last week, we looked at the letter U in tulip, which is unconditional election.

And the Bible tells us that election is part of the gospel. We might not think it, but election is actually good news. Because were it not for election, no one would be saved, regardless of how privileged they are.

And our unconditional election, it ought to remind us that the Lord didn't have to do anything. The Lord didn't have to save anyone. He didn't have to elect anyone.

He was under no obligation whatsoever to save any of us. Because the whole of humanity is totally depraved. But the wonder of our salvation is that the Lord, in his grace and in his mercy, he chose to save some.

[ 4 : 53 ] And the wonder of our unconditional election is that we have been loved and chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world.

Before the world was, we were loved by God. And because of this, what we discover is that we all have a responsibility. Because of unconditional election, we have a responsibility, whether we are a Christian or not.

Because the sinner has a responsibility to respond to the gospel. And the saint, you and me, we have a responsibility to share the gospel.

The sinner has a responsibility to respond to the gospel, but the saint has a responsibility to share the gospel. Which brings us now onto our next question and our next letter in this tulip acrostic.

The question is, what is the gospel? What is the good news that we are to share with the world? And what are we to tell sinners who are totally depraved and unable to save themselves?

[ 6 : 02 ] And to answer this, we have to look at the letter L of the tulip. Limited atonement. Limited atonement. And we can look at limited atonement under three headings.

So, three headings. The appointment of the atonement, the accuracy of the atonement, and the application of the atonement. So, the appointment of the atonement, the accuracy of the atonement, and the application of the atonement.

So, let's look first of all at the appointment of the atonement. The appointment of the atonement.

Read again in verse 1 of chapter 2. John writes, My little children, I am writing these things to you, so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous. Now, I'm sure that many of us in here this evening, we were brought up to recite the shorter catechism.

But in our youth, we'd all confess that the catechism, it didn't make much sense to us. It was just words. But since grace came into our lives and our hearts were opened by the Lord, we've been enabled to see the wonder and the beauty of the shorter catechism.

[ 7 : 23 ] Now, the catechisms that relate to what we're looking at this evening are catechisms 20 and 21. Because having considered our total depravity and then our unconditionally election, catechism 20, it brings before us the importance of limited atonement.

Catechism 20 asks, Did God leave all mankind to perish in the restate of sin and misery? And the answer given is, God, having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life.

And he did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of their estate of sin and misery and bring them into an estate of salvation by a redeemer.

And then following on from that is question 21. Who is the redeemer of God's elect? And the catechism answers, gives this wonderful answer. The only redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was and continueth to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.

And you know, it's always good to reflect upon these catechisms. They're full of theology, full of doctrine. And it's always good for us to go back to them. Because, you know, it's by reflecting upon why we need this redeemer and who our redeemer is.

[ 8 : 50 ] That's what removes doubt. That's what gives us assurance of our salvation. And you know, that's what John was actually doing here as he wrote this letter to the churches.

John wasn't writing to a particular congregation like Paul often did, like Paul wrote to the Ephesians, to the Galatians. John's letter was just a general letter because the problem John was seeking to address was present in almost every New Testament church.

And the problem facing many of the churches was this false teaching of Gnosticism. Gnosticism claimed that Jesus couldn't have been a real man.

He couldn't have had real human flesh because according to Gnosticism, your flesh is sinful. The spirit, the spiritual life is holy and knowledge is power.

And as you'd expect, all this false teaching had caused confusion with all these Christians and they began to doubt their salvation and then question whether or not they were actually saved. But you know, from the outset of his letter, John makes clear that Jesus Christ was both God and man.

[10:05] He was God and man, two distinct natures, one person forever. And that's how John begins his letter in chapter one. He says, that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands concerning the word of life.

The life was made manifest, it was revealed, and we have seen it and testified to it and proclaimed to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.

That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you so that you too may have fellowship with us and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

And what John is saying right at the outset of his letter is that Jesus Christ really is the God-man. He was and he continues to be both God and man.

Because John says right at the beginning of his letter, we've seen him, we've touched him, we've heard him speak. Therefore, he's a real living person.

[11:10] A person we can have fellowship with. He really was a man. He wasn't a phantom. He wasn't a spirit. He wasn't a ghost. No, he was a real human being. He was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh.

And understanding the humanity of Jesus is so important for John and for his letter. Because as John says at the beginning then of chapter 2, he says, if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father who?

Jesus Christ, the righteous. And what John is saying is that if we sin, which we do frequently, if we sin, we have someone who can relate to God the Father who is holy and at the same time, we have someone who can relate to us who are sinful human beings.

And what John is saying is that in Jesus Christ, we have an advocate with the Father. We have someone who can relate to both parties. We have an intercessor. We have someone who's able to stand on our behalf and represent us and plead our cause.

And you know, that's why Paul wrote to Timothy and he said that when we pray, we have a mediator. Always remember, he says, you have a mediator between God and men.

[12:31] He is the man, Christ Jesus. He's not just God, he's the God man, the man, Christ Jesus. We have someone who can relate to both God and man. We have someone who is both divine and human.

And this is why our catechism states the only redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ. Because being the eternal Son of God, he became man and so was and continueth to be.

He's still man. He's still God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever. My friend, in order to be the redeemer of God's elect, Jesus had to become and remain both God and man in one person.

And you know, for John, as he addresses the church and all these Christians who doubted their salvation and they were even doubting the efficacy of Christ's atonement, John says the appointment of the atonement was that God the Father and God the Son, they entered into that covenant of redemption in order to deliver us from our total depravity.

and they did it by an unconditional election bringing us into a state of salvation by a redeemer. And that redeemer, says John, he had to be both God and man in one person because he would have to be our advocate for the Father.

[14:03] He would have to be our intercessor. He would have to be our mediator between God and men. And it could only be in the man, Christ Jesus. My friend, our atonement couldn't be achieved in any other way except through the appointment of the person Jesus Christ.

As John says, Jesus Christ, the righteous. If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.

And so we've considered the appointment of the atonement. This is the appointment that was made by God the Father and God the Son that he would be, Jesus would be the redeemer of God's elect. So the appointment of the atonement. But secondly, I want us to think about the accuracy of the atonement. The accuracy of the atonement. We'll read these verses again.

Chapter 2 and verse 1. My little children, I'm writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.

[15:13] He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. When we talk about atonement, what do we mean?

When we use this word atonement, what are we talking about? Well, the Bible actually uses four words to describe the atonement that was achieved by Jesus Christ on the cross.

Four words. Our sin has separated us from God so therefore we are at enmity with God and we need to seek peace. Therefore, we need reconciliation.

We need reconciliation. That's the first word that describes atonement. Reconciliation. Second word is that we're enslaved to sin. We're in bondage to sin. We're imprisoned by our sin.

We need to be released. Therefore, we need redemption. We need redemption. That's the second word. Redemption. The third one is that we're under God's wrath because of our sin.

[16:16] God is of purer than to behold iniquity and to look upon our sin. We need our sin to be covered. We need God's wrath to be removed. Therefore, we need propitiation.

We need propitiation. Which is what John mentions here in verse 2. That Jesus is the propitiation for our sins. And that's the third word for the work of the atonement.

Propitiation. But in order to live, we need someone to die in our place. We need a lamb to be slain for us. We need someone to die that we might have life.

We need a substitute. We need a substitute. That's the fourth word. Substitution. And all four words, they all relate to Jesus Christ's work of atonement.

Reconciliation, redemption, propitiation, and substitution. All four words relate to atonement. And what's remarkable is that all four words, they all point to the blood of Jesus.

[17:22] They all point to the blood of Jesus Christ. Because the Bible says that we receive reconciliation through the blood of his cross. We experience redemption because we're redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

We know propitiation or we experience propitiation by the blood of Jesus covering our sin from the sight of a holy God and then God's wrath being removed against our sin.

And then we discover substitution. That the death of a spotless lamb of God is slain and dies in our place. And it's all through the blood of Jesus.

Which is what John emphasised in chapter 1. He said, the blood of Jesus Christ. It cleanses us from all sin. And so these words, they all emphasise atonement, reconciliation, redemption, propitiation and substitution.

And they're all, they're all brought together. They all point to the blood of Jesus Christ. And you know, it's no wonder the hymn writer, when considering the atonement, he confessed, bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood.

[18:40] Hallelujah. What a saviour. All four words, reconciliation, redemption, propitiation and substitution, they all relate to the atonement achieved by the blood of Jesus Christ being shed on the cross.

But the question we now have to ask is, how accurate was this atonement? How accurate was this atonement?

In other words, did Jesus' work of atonement save everyone? And remarkably, this question has caused a lot of difficulty for those who come into the Christian's greenhouse and look at the tulip. Because the Christian who loves and admires this tulip, they will say that Jesus Christ is the only redeemer of God's elect and therefore the atonement of Christ is limited.

Not limited in power but limited in purpose. Where Jesus Christ only died on the cross for the elect, those whom he foreknew and predestined and chose in love and in Christ.

[19:47] Those whom the Father gave him from before the foundation of the world. That's who Jesus died for. That's the wonder of God's grace that there's an elect at all.

So he said none of us deserve it, no one has earned it, no one has a claim on God whatsoever. God wasn't obligated to do it. Therefore, if the elect is a limited number of people, then the people for whom Christ died must be limited.

Jesus Christ's work of atonement must be limited, not limited in power but limited in purpose. So the Christian who loves and admires this tulip, the five points of Calvinism, they will say that Jesus Christ is the only redeemer of God's elect.

They are what you would call a five point Calvinist. This is what we've been called, a five point Calvinist. But because the doctrine of limited atonement is so misunderstood, it's become a very controversial subject.

To the extent that there are some Christians who would refer to themselves as a four point Calvinist. And they're a four point Calvinist because they don't believe in this L.

[ 21 : 04 ] They'd rather a tulip than a tulip. They want to get rid of limited atonement altogether. They don't like the tulip. Which means if they don't believe in limited atonement, they believe that the atonement of Christ is unlimited.

They believe in unlimited atonement. And I want to be clear here, an unlimited atonement, or a belief in an unlimited atonement, leads to chaos.

Absolute chaos. Because an unlimited atonement means that Jesus Christ died for everyone. Therefore, everyone is saved. And everyone will go to heaven regardless of how they've lived their life.

an unlimited atonement means that no one will be punished for their sin because Jesus was punished on the cross for everyone's sin.

And if no one will be punished for their sin, then there's no such place as hell. And if there's no such place as hell, then all that Jesus said about hell and the last judgment was a lie.

[ 22 : 13 ] And the Bible can't be trusted. And you see the progression that one move away from truth opens the floodgates to a tidal wave of error.

And of course it's more appealing and more comforting to believe in an unlimited atonement and a universal salvation. That's why there are so many liberals preaching a false gospel.

But you know the wonder and glory of God's salvation is that God graciously chose to save some. And the catechism reminds us that God didn't leave all mankind to perish in the restate of sin and misery.

God out of his mere good pleasure from all eternity elected some to everlasting life. But you know even though rejecting limited atonement will lead to heresy and error and chaos many Arminians they will argue their position on the basis of God's love.

They'll say to you or to me if God is love and if God is all loving how could Christ not die for everyone? Doesn't God love each and every person in the world?

[ 23 : 34 ] Isn't that what John 3 16 says? For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. And the Arminian will say to limit atonement is to deny that God loves everyone.

And the Arminian will then quote this passage verse 2 He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

And following on from there the Arminian will then tell you they'll quote John 1 29 that John the Baptist said behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

They'll then quote John 4 42 Jesus is the saviour of the world. They'll quote then John 12 32 and I if I am lifted up where Jesus said I will draw all men to myself.

And they'll quote another one. They'll quote 1 Timothy 2 There's one God, one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all.

[ 24 : 41 ] Then they'll quote 2 Corinthians 5 which says twice Christ Jesus died for all. And the Arminian will tell you that to limit the atonement of Christ is to deny God's love and actually withhold the message of the gospel.

But my Christian Calvinist here tonight to present an unlimited atonement is to deny the gospel and to misunderstand God's love for sinners.

Because the gospel, the good news, as we've said again and again, the good news is that there is an elect at all and that Jesus Christ is the redeemer of God's elect and that Jesus Christ died for the sins of God's elect.

That's the gospel. That's the gospel. And to say that John summarises that Jesus is the saviour of the whole world. You know, John talks about the world all the way through his gospel and his letter. But he uses the word world. It's an interesting study if you want to do it. He uses the word world in ten different ways throughout his gospels and his letter, his gospel and his letters.

[ 26 : 00 ] world. And to say that every use of the word world refers to all humanity without exception, that would be a very unwise thing to do.

What would the Arminians say about Jesus' high priestly prayer to his father in John 17, where Jesus says, I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours.

You see, every verse in scripture must be read in light of scripture. The greatest commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself.

Every verse of scripture must be read in light of scripture. And every text of scripture must be taken within its context. Because as the saying goes, a text taken out of context and used as a proof text

is a pretext that makes a con of the text.

I'll repeat that one. A text taken out of context and used as a proof text is a pretext which makes a con of the text. Every verse of scripture must be read in light of scripture and every text must be taken within its context.

[ 27 : 22 ] And so we've considered the appointment of the atonement. Jesus Christ is the only redeemer of God's elect. We've considered the accuracy of the atonement. It's a limited atonement to the elect.

But lastly, I'd like us to consider the application of the atonement. The application of the atonement. Read in chapter 1 and verse 5. The application of the atonement.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you that God is light and in him is no darkness at all. If the atonement of Christ is limited only to the elect, then how are we to preach the gospel?

How do we present the gospel to sinners? Can we tell sinners that Christ died for them when we don't know if he has or has not?

And you know, this is actually one of the arguments that the Arminian has for their position and holding to their position. The Arminian will say that a limited atonement destroys the gospel. It destroys the power of preaching the gospel because they'll say that how can an evangelist preach that Christ died for you if Christ didn't die for all people?

[ 28 : 44 ] How can we say to people Christ died for you if he didn't die for everyone? The preacher, the Arminian will say the preacher will lack confidence in the message that he's preaching because what can we tell sinners if we can't tell them that Christ died for their sins?

What hope can we give these people if we can't give them the hope that Jesus died for all people? What can we tell them if we can't say that Christ died for them? And the Arminian will say to us doesn't the Bible say the Lord is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance?

Doesn't the Bible say that the Lord desires everyone to be saved and that all will come to a knowledge of the truth? And the Arminian will say as a Calvinist how do you square your theology with all that?

but you know the Calvinist going into his Christian greenhouse and then looking at the beauty and the complexity of the tulip the Calvinist will realise that they can have total confidence in the preaching of the gospel absolute confidence because when the gospel is preached and when it is presented to sinners the elect will come the elect will come not by eloquence the eloquence of the preacher not by the wisdom of words not even by passion or persuasion the elect will come because they are irresistibly drawn by God's grace they're irresistibly drawn by God's grace and that of course is the next petal in the tulip which we'll consider next week irresistible grace but I just want to conclude by saying that as a Calvinist we can have total confidence in preaching the gospel we can have confidence when we witness for our faith we can have confidence when we speak a word in season we have no reason to fear no reason to hold back no reason to cower away because when the gospel is put forward the elect will come the elect will come because they're drawn not by our words and not by our wisdom not by our passion not by our persuasion they are drawn by God's irresistible grace we don't know who the elect are we just have to be faithful in our presentation of the gospel so what do we preach what's our mantra what do we say to sinners who may be in the elect but have not been drawn yet how can we preach that Christ died for you if Christ didn't die for all and you know that's an age old question it was there in the 16th century with the Calvinists and the Arminians it was also there in the 17th century because in the 17th century there was a book published called the marrow of modern divinity and it was a book written by the Puritan Edward Fisher and Edward Fisher his book sought to answer two simple questions what is the gospel and for whom is the gospel and the marrow of modern divinity it served its purpose in the 17th century but then it disappeared for over a hundred years and so it went through this age old question was in the 16th 17th and then it reappeared in the 18th century there was a young Scottish minister by the name of Thomas Boston he was on a pastoral visit to the home of one of his parishioners and Boston he noticed a book on the shelf and he took it off and he asked if he could borrow the book and he borrowed the book and he read the book and he discovered that the marrow of modern divinity was the answer to all his problems that were plaguing the church in

[ 32 : 47 ] Scotland during the 18th century because during the 18th century in Scotland there were two extremes there were the Armenians and those who were hyper Calvinist but the marrow the

marrow of modern divinity the book it sought to re-emphasize the teaching of scripture it sought to set this middle ground between these two extremes of Arminianism and hyper Calvinism and the middle ground would be Calvinism the middle ground would be to stand and look at the tulip and so when it came to the marrow there was no ambiguity the book was clear the book said the gospel is for everyone and anyone but the marrow didn't present this Arminian view of universal atonement where everyone is saved but it did advocate for a universal offer a universal offer of the gospel the marrow of modern divinity it unashamedly stated go and tell every man without exception that there is good news for him

Christ is dead for him that's what they said go and tell every man without exception that there is good news for him Christ is dead for him and what the marrow said was don't tell them that Christ died for them like the Arminian would tell them that Christ is dead for them don't tell them that Christ died for them but tell them that Christ is dead for them.

In other words, tell them what Jesus has done for sinners. Tell them about the cross. Preach to them the cross, Christ and him crucified. Tell them what Jesus has done.

And see that the Lord will irresistibly draw them by his grace. Grace alone. And you know, my friend, we can have total confidence in our presentation of the gospel because the offer of the gospel, the offer of the gospel is to whosoever.

Whosoever will let him come. But when the gospel is preached, the outcome of that gospel will be that only the elect will come.

[ 35 : 11 ] And they will come because they are being irresistibly drawn by God's grace. But as the Maro stated, our responsibility, our responsibility is to go and tell everyone without exception.

Go and tell everyone without exception that there is good news. Christ is dead for them. Christ is dead for them. And when you tell them, if they're in the elect, the Lord will irresistibly draw them by his grace.

It's wonderful. Go and tell everyone without exception. There is good news. Christ is dead for them. So may the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. O Lord, our gracious God, we thank Thee that we have an advocate with the Father.

O Jesus Christ, the righteous, we thank Thee that He is both God and man, and He continues to be God and man in those two distinct natures, and one person forever.

[ 36 : 25 ] We marvel, Lord, that we are part of the elect, that Thee that Thee that Thee that Thee that Thee that has chosen us and loved us, even from before the foundation of the world, that we would be the children of God.

O Lord, we marvel at Thy grace, and Lord, we marvel even more that Thee that Thee that Thee that we are the one who irresistibly drew us, the God who drew us to Himself, that even when we were rejecting, when we were kicking against the pricks, Lord, when we were running, and yet, Lord, O the one who drew us, drew us with cords that could not be broken.

Lord, help us, we pray Thee, to see the wonder of Thy salvation. Help us to be fearless in our presentation of the Gospel. Help us, Lord, we plead, always to be willing to tell it to the generation following that this God is our God and that He will be our guide, even unto death.

Keep us then, we pray. Keep us, Lord, as we go forth with this good news, that we might tell it to everyone, that this Jesus, He died, that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

Bless us together, we pray. Go before us and keep us, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 130.

[ 37 : 57 ] Psalm 130, in the Scottish Psalter, page 421. Psalm 130, we're singing the whole psalm.

A psalm that begins in the depths and ends in the heights. Lord, from the depths to Thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do Thou hear, unto my supplications' voice, give an attentive ear.

And the testimony of the psalmist was, as he concludes, and plenteous redemption is ever found with him, and from all his iniquities, he, Israel, shall redeem.

So the whole psalm, to God's praise. Amen. Lord, from the depths to Thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do Thou hear, O Lord, who shall stand, if Thou, O Lord, O Lord, choose my iniquity, but yet with Thee, or kindnesses, the fear of me as be.

I wait for God, my soul doth wait, my hope is in His word.

[ 40 : 21 ] Lord, Lord, Lord, may God, for more may watch, my soul waits for the Lord.

I say, Lord, may God, may God, who watch, the morning light, to see, let Israel come down.

I hope in the Lord, save men. Amen. For with Him stata, May God, Wyatt, may God's Christ sing,  
Ph.179 and Verse." is ever far within but from all his iniquities he Israel shall redeem the grace of  
the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all  
now and forevermore  
Amen