

# Landon - Sharp Debate on the Scope of the Atonement

**David Landon** (Reformed Presbyterian Church)

and

**Keith Sharp** (Church of Christ)

## ***Propositions***

**The Scriptures teach that Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation.**

*Affirm:* Keith Sharp

*Deny:* David Landon

**The Scriptures teach that Christ died only for the elect.**

*Affirm:* David Landon

*Deny:* Keith Sharp

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# Affirmative

## Keith Sharp

This third debate between David Landon and myself covers the third of the five points of Calvinism, generally called "Limited Atonement." Dave is still my esteemed friend. Our differences are doctrinal, not personal. There will be no rancor in our exchange.

One cannot imagine a more important subject. The death of Christ is the only hope for lost humanity. If He died for all mankind without exception or limitation, then all lost sinners may in reality look to Jesus for salvation (John 3:14-15). If not, then only those individuals whom God has predestined to life can seek salvation in the Son, and the rest are doomed to irremediable, eternal despair.

Proposition: **The Scriptures teach that Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation.** I think the proposition is sufficiently clear. If Dave calls for definitions, I will oblige.

I will follow a principle of Bible study stated by the great Calvinistic theologian Charles Hodge:

*"... it is the duty of the theologian to subordinate his theories to the Bible, and teach not what seems to him to be true or reasonable, but simply what the Bible teaches."* (Hodge. 2:559)

This simply means we must elevate divine revelation above human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:13). Thus, I will only reference those passages which explicitly state universal atonement.

These passages may be divided into two categories: those that say Christ died for "all" and the ones which state He died for the "world."

First the scriptures that state Jesus died for "all." I realize the word "all" is limited by its context. But unless the context does limit the term, it is universal. In other words, it means **"all lost humans without exception or limitation."**

*"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself. This He said, signifying by what death He would die."* (John 12:32-33)

Jesus, death was for the purpose of drawing "all peoples" to Him. The "world" of verse 31 is a specific reference to the non-elect. *"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out."* Rather than limiting the "all peoples" to the elect, the context specifically demands that the phrase refers to **"all lost humans without exception or limitation."**

*"Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life."* (Romans 5:18)

The "all" who may be righteous as the result of Jesus, sacrifice is as broad as the "all"

condemned by sin. In other words, Jesus **"died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."**

*"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)*

The Lord died for as many as died. **"All lost humans without exception or limitation"** have died spiritually. Therefore, **"Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."**

*"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time." (1 Timothy 2:5-6).*

The "all" for whom Christ died are the "all" God desires to be saved (verses 3-4). In context, "all" of 1 Timothy 2:3-6 refers to everyone lost, whether elect or condemned (verses 1-2).

*"For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." (1 Timothy 4:10)*

God is the "Savior" in that, among other things, He sent His Son to die on the cross for our redemption. The "all" for whom He is Savior is a larger group than "those who believe." Thus, **"Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."**

*"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone." (Hebrews 2:9)*

The "everyone" for whom Jesus tasted death includes the elect (verses 10-13) but is not limited to them. Rather, it includes **"all lost humans without exception or limitation."** (verses 5-8). Therefore, **"Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."**

The second set of passages state that Christ died for the "world." Certainly the term "world" is often used in a limited sense, but when so used it denotes the wicked in contrast with the elect (John 12:31; 15:19). Will Dave contend that God's saving love is for the wicked but not for the elect? I made this observation in our debate on election, and Dave has yet to respond to it. Why?

*"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)*

Either the "world" means only the non-elect, or it means **"all lost humans without exception or limitation."** Certainly Christ did not die only for the non-elect. Therefore, **"Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."**

*"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. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." (John 3:16-17)*

The "world" for whom Christ died includes all whom God loves. Dave, does God love **"all lost humans without exception or limitation"**?

*"Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.'" (John 4:42)*

Again, either the "world" means only the non-elect, or it means **"all lost humans without exception or limitation."** Which is it?

*"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:33)*

The "world" for whom Jesus is the bread of life includes those who refuse to believe Him (verses 32, 36). Jesus is the "bread of life" in that He gave His "flesh ... for the life of the world." (verse 51) Therefore, **"Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."**

*"And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world." (John 12:47).*

The "world" Jesus came to save includes both those who believe Him (verse 46) and those who reject Him (verse 48). Though He did not come the first time to judge the "world" (verse 47), one day, by His Word, He will judge the "world." (verse 48) The "world" He will judge includes both the saved and condemned (John 5:22-29). Thus, **"Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."**

*"Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 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." (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)*

The "world" God is reconciling to Himself in Christ is the "all" who died (verses 14-15). So, **"Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."**

*"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. 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)*

The "whole world" for whom Jesus Christ is the "propitiation" (verse 2) is a larger group than those for whom He is Advocate (verse 1). I cannot comprehend how John

could have made it clearer that "**Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation.**"

*"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world."* (1 John 4:14)

Jesus is not only "the propitiation for our sins" (verse 10), He is also the "Savior of the world," a "world" larger than the group for whom He is Advocate.

These fifteen passages emphatically, plainly state Christ died for "all," i.e., for the "world." If the Lord had wanted to teach that the scope of the atoning sacrifice of His Son is universal, unlimited, among lost, human sinners, how could He have more emphatically and plainly stated it? **The Scriptures teach that Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation.**

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### **Work Cited**

Hodge, Charles, **Systematic Theology**.

# Negative

David Landon

I certainly agree with my friend Keith when he says, quoting Charles Hodge, that we should teach "simply what the Bible teaches." It is noteworthy that Hodge, using this rule, went on, in the very chapter Keith quotes from, to prove the doctrine of limited atonement. But he did this, not by stringing together texts (if that would decide controversies this debate must be a draw, for I also cited fifteen passages in my affirmative) but by what he called the analogy of Scripture, that is, by weighing each text in the light of what the entire Bible has to say on the subject of redemption (Hodge 2:560). I might add here that the passages Keith quotes do not "explicitly state universal atonement." One passage (2 Cor.5:14-19) is in my affirmative as a proof of limited atonement, and another (Hebrews 2:9) is subject, as Hodge points out, to at least five interpretations. Hodge writes, "So far as the mere signification of the words is concerned, one is as correct as another." This debate, then, is not between human theories on the one hand, and "simply what the Bible teaches" on the other. This debate, rather, is between two conflicting views of redemption, both claiming to be Biblical.

Perhaps the best approach to Keith's affirmative would be to show how it completely fails to address the real issues. The "preliminary remarks" in my affirmative stated those issues.

## Issue #1

"Calvinists do not limit the intrinsic value of the atonement." Understanding this principle will keep one from false dilemmas, such as the one Keith puts forth in the second paragraph of his affirmative. According to Keith, Christ dying for all men without exception is the only ground upon which we may offer the gospel to all men. But is that Biblical? Can Keith give even one instance from Scripture where anyone was commanded to believe that Christ died for them in particular? The reasons why we believe in the free offer of the gospel are these: all men are sinners, all men are commanded to repent, and all men may have the assurance that the blood of Christ can cover the greatest sin, and if they trust in Him they shall be saved. The further exercise of faith that says, "I believe that Christ died for me," is not necessary for salvation; it often comes much later (see Galatians 2:20). The fact that God did not intend that the atonement should be efficacious in the case of reprobates is not rendered less true simply because it is not a part of the gospel message.

## Issue #2

"It is impossible not to limit the atonement." If this is true, then Keith's proposition is not "sufficiently clear." Keith also believes in a limited atonement, limited in power and efficacy. An illustration from the Reformed theologian Loraine Boettner may help us here,- the Calvinist's atonement, says Boettner, is like a narrow bridge that goes all the way across the stream; for the rest, it is like a wide bridge that only goes halfway across (Reformed Doctrine Of Predestination, p. 153). We believe that the "narrow

bridge" model of the atonement is the Biblical one. We have a Saviour that actually saves and does not require that we build the other half of the bridge. As John Owen put it, "A saviour of men not saved is strange."

Understanding this principle would have kept Keith from asking, "Dave, does God love all lost humans without exception or limitation?" For it is obvious that the answer is no. No for Keith as well as for me, for he also limits the atonement. As the question was based on the assumption that any limitation in the atonement must of necessity call into question God's love Keith must answer his own question. Consider Keith's wide bridge model of the atonement. God loves all men equally, Christ died for all men without exception and yet, for all of that, this bridge from God to sinful man only goes halfway to them. Sinful man, using certain materials (faith, repentance, good works) must complete the bridge. Yet, most men die without ever having heard about a half-bridge available for them, nor are they given any information about the materials (conditions) necessary on their part. Ours is a God that loves His people enough to build both halves of the bridge. A possible salvation for all that must be completed by man's contribution is no revelation of the love of God. A certain salvation for some is.

### **Issue #3**

God's design or purpose in the atonement determines its extent. God's purpose in the atonement was that His people would be saved. But we must be careful on this question: Who are the people God intended to save? If we are thinking only in terms of Calvinism versus Universalism we will be tempted to view every text that has the word all or world in it as a proof of universal atonement. If, however, we allow our thinking to be guided by the analogy of Scripture, and, further, consider the mindset of the early church (comprised largely of Jewish converts who had been raised believing that the promises of the covenant belonged to their nation alone) we will then see that the tension is between the Jewish nation on the one hand, and all nations or the whole world on the other. It is a limited universality. It is "one which respects the classes of individuals, not the individuals of classes." (Francis Turretin, Institutes Of Elenctic Theology, 2:460).

As Keith divided his proof texts into two categories, we will answer each set separately.

#### **1. Those texts that have the word 'all' in them.**

Some of these texts make sense in light of the above principle that the Apostolic writers are not addressing the subject of Calvinism, but that of Jewish exclusivism. It is not the Jews only that Christ will draw to Himself, but all men (John 12:32). Christ gave Himself a ransom for all men, not merely for the Jews (1 Timothy 2:5-6). Other texts require further comment...

**Romans 5:18.** Charles Hodge writes, "When in Romans 5:18, it is said that by the righteousness of Christ the free gift of justification of life has come upon all men, it is of necessity limited to the all in Christ of whom the Apostle is speaking." (Hodge 2:559)

**2 Corinthians 5:14-15.** The Apostle does not say, as Keith supposes, that Christ died for all that were dead, but, rather, that all were dead for whom He died. An entirely different thing. This death that Christ[s people experience is not a spiritual death. It is a death to sin and to the law. They become new creatures in Christ (vs. 17).

**1 Timothy 4:10.** As John Owen (vol. 10:190) and John Gill (The Cause Of God And Truth pg.52) point out, this text almost certainly has to do with God the Father and with His providential care over all His creatures.

**Hebrews 2:9.** In this particular text we can find the meaning of "every man" from the immediate context. They for whom Christ tasted death are His "many sons," (vs 10), "they who are sanctified" (vs 11). "my brethren," (vs 12) "the children whom God hath given me," (vs 13; cp. John 10:29) and the "seed of Abraham" (vs 16).

## **2. Those texts that have the word "world" in them.**

Keith admits that the word world is often used in a limited sense, but, he asserts, "when so used it denotes the wicked in contrast with the elect." Keith notes that he had made this observation in our debate on predestination and asks why I have not yet responded to it. I gave no response because Keith gave no proof and, according to the rule, things gratuitously asserted may be gratuitously denied (or even gratuitously passed over in silence). True, Keith referenced two texts that show the word world limited to the wicked, but that only amounts to a proof that the word may be thus limited. It does not prove that that is the only limitation possible. This is important to understand, for Keith's entire argument from this word is built on the false assumption that it can only be limited in one sense. That being the case, one verse showing a different or contrary limitation will necessarily show the futility of relying on this line of defense. Consider the following:

**Luke 2:1.** *World* is used in a limited sense, but includes more than merely the wicked in contrast with the elect. The word is used similarly in Romans 1:8; Colossians 1:6; and Revelation 3:10.

**Hebrews 2:5.** *World* here is limited to the elect or believing world, "the world to come." Ever since the fall of man it has been God's purpose to recreate and redeem the world. Therefore we often see this word used of the elect in contrast with the wicked. See also 1 Timothy 3:16; John 1:29; 4:42; 6:51; Romans 4:13.



## Response

Keith Sharp

Again I congratulate my friend for effectively presenting Calvinism without rancor. Thanks, readers, for studying our exchange.

The heart of the gospel is, "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:1-5). Calvinism has people being saved without believing the gospel. I can tell every lost sinner to believe "Christ died for you." Calvinists cannot. What a pity!

Dave repeats a mistake he made in our last debate. Because I endorse a quote from Charles Hodge, Dave wants me to accept Hodge on limited atonement. When I quoted Albert Barnes on Ephesians 2:8-9, Dave wanted me to accept Barnes' Calvinism. Did Paul agree with everything Greek poets wrote? (Acts 17:28)

Calvinists teach concerning the atonement, "So far as the mere signification of the words is concerned, one is as correct as another." God has revealed His will in "mere...words" (1 Corinthians 2:9-13). If we can't know by "the mere signification of the words" the scope of the atonement, then God hasn't revealed His will on the matter. Why, then, do Calvinists contend for limited atonement? This tacitly admits the weakness of Calvinism.

Calvinists contend "the analogy of Scripture....on the subject of redemption" upholds limited atonement. This means that, since they believe in total hereditary depravity and unconditional election, limited atonement must be true. Calvinists don't let the Scriptures tell them what to believe. They use their theology to determine what they believe the Scriptures teach. Calvinism is human philosophy.

Rather than stringing texts together, I made a formulated argument on each of fifteen passages that state either that Christ died for "all" or for the "world." Dave presented a number of passages also. Some teach Christ died for the elect, some do not even deal with the atonement, but none of them even hint that He died **only** for the elect. Who is accepting the Scriptures, and who is following human philosophy?

"Can Keith give even one instance from Scripture where anyone was commanded to believe that Christ died for them in particular?" **1 Corinthians 15:1-5.**

I don't believe the atonement is "limited in power and efficacy." The death of Christ is sufficient in efficacy to save every lost sinner. We both think it takes something in addition though to actually save. Calvinists look to the direct operation of the Holy Spirit to regenerate the sinner. I believe it takes the obedience of faith brought about by the power of the gospel (Romans 1:5; 16:26; 1:16-17; 10:17). We both believe the gap between God and sinful men was completely bridged by the atoning sacrifice of Christ (Romans 3:20-28). Nothing we do earns or helps us earn salvation. But I believe all lost, sinful men may freely and voluntarily cross that bridge by believing and obeying the gospel (Matthew 11:28-30; Mark 16:15-16). Calvinists believe God forcibly

yanks unwilling sinners across that bridge. This is no "caricature." Calvinists believe that we have nothing to do with our salvation and that, before the Holy Spirit supernaturally regenerates the elect, they are just as unwilling to come to God as the non-elect.

Neither Paul nor John believed "A saviour of men not saved is strange." (1 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:1-2).

Calvinists do not believe God's saving love is for all. Why not rip the golden text, John 3:16, out of the Bible?

God intended to provide a way of salvation for everyone and to actually save those who believe (1 Timothy 4:10; 1 John 2:1-2).

Calvinists assert that "all" means the elect among both Jew and Gentile. The same argument, if valid, proves sin is not universal. All, both Jews and Gentiles, are guilty of sin (Romans 3:9). So this "is a limited universality." Romans 3:10-12 does not disprove the argument, for Paul (and David) were using hyperbole. There have always been some righteous people (Genesis 6:9; 7:1; Luke 2:25). By the Calvinistic argument, there are many who have not sinned and do not need the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

On Romans 5:18 Calvinists argue that the "all" who died is limited to the "all in Christ." But on hereditary depravity, they argue that verses 12-21 apply to every human since Adam who has ever lived save Christ.

The "all" of 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 is the "all" who will "appear before the judgment seat of Christ." (verse 10)

Calvinists assert 1 Timothy 4:10 deals with the Father's "providential care over all His creatures." The inspired apostle Paul spoke of the salvation of believing men. I'll take the apostle.

The context of Hebrews 2:9 is verses 5-8, a quotation of Psalm 8:4-6, which is in turn a reference to Genesis 1:28, which is applicable to every individual human who has ever lived.

First my friend accused me of gratuitously asserting that the term "world," when limited, is used of the lost in contrast to the saved; then he admits I gave two passages to sustain the argument. When the Bible uses the word "world" of people in a contrast between righteous and wicked, it means the wicked (Psalm 17:13-14; Isaiah 13:11; Luke 16:8; John 1:10; 7:7; 8:23; 12:31; 14:16-19; 15:18-19; 16:8-11,20; 17:6,9,14; 17:25; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 1:20-21,27-28; 2:12; 3:19; 5:10; 11:32; Hebrews 11:38; 2 Peter 2:5; 1 John 3:1,13; 4:5; 5:19; Revelation 12:9). Luke 2:1; Romans 1:8; Colossians 1:6; and Revelation 3:10 refer to physical realms. Hebrews 2:5 refers to a spiritual realm. Romans 4:13 refers to God's people from out of the world. 1 Timothy 3:16 is unlimited. John 1:29; 4:42; 6:51 are disputed passages, and Dave "gratuitously" claims them without argumentation.

I made specific arguments on John 6:33; John 12:47; and 1 John 2:1-2 to show that the term "world" in each context had to include the lost. Dave made no attempt to answer any of these arguments. Any one of them is enough to sustain my proposition.

I cannot comprehend how the Holy Spirit could have made it clearer that "**Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation.**"

# Affirmative

David Landon

The Scriptures teach that Christ died only for the elect.

The doctrine of limited atonement is, of all the Reformed distinctives, the one most reviled and misunderstood. Therefore the following preliminary remarks should be considered.

1. Calvinists do not limit the intrinsic value of the atonement. The popular way of putting this is to say, "the atonement is sufficient for all, but efficient only for the elect."
2. It is impossible not to limit the atonement. Calvinists limit its extent; all others limit its power or efficacy.
3. It can be demonstrated, as has been done by virtually all the Reformed when treating this subject, that the extent of the atonement is determined by the design or purpose of the atonement. The purpose of the atonement is either definite or indefinite. The former view, which we affirm, teaches that the Father, in sending the Son to die for sin, purposed by that death the actual salvation of His people. The indefinite view holds that the atonement, being for all men without exception, makes the salvation of anyone in particular uncertain. The importance of this distinction is of immense importance, for, as Charles Hodge points out, it is to offer two different atonements and that amounts to "virtually another gospel." (The Orthodox Doctrine Regaining The Extent Of The Atonement Vindicated, vi).

The following points are offered as proofs of a definite design in the atonement. and therefore of a limited extent numerically considered.

1. The definite atonement more gloriously displays the unity of the Godhead in the salvation of men. Scripture everywhere portrays a purposeful harmony in the redemptive acts of the Father, Son and Spirit. The Father elects a people, the Son redeems and intercedes for the same, and the Spirit, in time, regenerates and applies the benefits of salvation to the elect of God. All indefinite views of the atonement compromise this inter-trinitarian harmony.
2. The definite atonement is the only model that makes the means of salvation (the death and intercession of Christ) equally extensive. The prophet Isaiah joined these two acts of Christ together in the 53rd chapter of his book: "he hath poured out his soul unto death and made intercession for the transgressors." (See also Romans 8:34.) These two acts of Christ, we say, are of equal extension. His death was for His sheep, John 10:11, and for the Church, Acts 20:28. As for His intercession, it was "not for the world," but for "them whom thou hast given me," John 17:9. Did Christ die for all but only intercede for some? That, as the Puritan John Owen showed, were to make Him "but half a priest," (works vol. 10 p.184).

Did He die and intercede for all? Then, writes Owen, we must "own this blasphemy, that Christ is not heard of His Father, nor can prevail in His intercession."

3. The benefits that accrue to believers as a result of the death and intercession of Christ are given in terms that naturally denote design and purpose, and are therefore best explained by the definite and limited model. These terms include ransom, redemption, reconciliation, and justification.

Concerning ransom, Matthew 20:28 says that the Son of man came "to give his life a ransom for many." The purpose of that ransom, according to Galatians 1:4, is that "he might deliver us from this present evil world."

The word redemption carries much the same idea as ransom and includes the concepts both of purchase and delivery from captivity. These benefits come to believers "through his blood," that is, by the death of Christ, resulting, as Colossians 1:14 shows, in the "forgiveness of sins."

Reconciliation is that act whereby two, who were previously enemies, are made friends. According to Romans 5:10, this reconciliation was effected by the death of Christ.

Justification is that act of God wherein He declares righteous all those who come to Him through Christ. It is a gift freely bestowed and made effectual by the death of Christ. "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," Romans 3:24.

We believe that it is impossible to square these Biblical doctrines with the notion of universal atonement. To represent those who are now in hell as having been as fully ransomed, redeemed, reconciled, and justified as those who are now in heaven is inconsistent with the ideas expressed by these terms.

4. The definite or limited atonement alone is able to afford comfort to believers during times of trial. The death and intercession of Christ (see #2 above) are cited by Paul in Romans 8:32-34 as two certain proofs of the believer's freedom from condemnation. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died.. .who also maketh intercession for us." What possible consolation could be secured to the believer by these redemptive acts of Christ if, in fact, these acts were intended equally for all? When Paul boldly declares in verse 32 that God will "freely give us all things," it is clear that this is no mere assertion, but rather follows as a necessary consequence of what he had just written, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." If by this word "all" Paul intended all without exception what becomes of his conclusion? For, were this his argument, there are many for whom Christ died who, in fact, have not been "given all things." This "all" then, in 32a, must refer to all believers. It is, in other words, a limited all.
5. The Scriptural teaching of substitution finds its clearest expression in the definite atonement, 2 Corinthians 5:14,19,21. *"If one died for all, then were all dead."* "God

*was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them..."* (Here the word world is clearly limited to the believing world, for many individuals in the world do have their trespasses imputed to them.)

6. The witness of Scripture supports a definite atonement. Following is a partial list:
  - A. **Ephesians 5:25.** *"Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..."* Paul is here showing Christ's peculiar love to the church, and, as John Owen points out, "If Christ had a love to others so as to die for them, then is there in the exhortation a latitude left unto men, in conjugal affections, for other women besides their wives."
  - B. **John 10:11.** "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."
  - C. **Acts 20:28.** It is the church that Christ "hath purchased with his own blood."
  - D. **Hebrews 9:15.** It is "by means of death," that "they who are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."
  - E. **Revelation 5:9.** The blood of Christ did not ransom every tribe and tongue and people and nation, but "men for God from every tribe" etc.

#### Questions:

1. If Christ died for all men, why does He not also intercede for all?
2. How can God be just if He lays the punishment of the reprobate's sins first upon Christ and then, secondly, upon the reprobate himself in hell? Is this not exacting two punishments for one crime?
3. What good end did Christ achieve by giving His life for Judas, as well as for Peter? Christ foreknew that Judas would betray Him and would "go to his own place."
4. If the death of Christ is in fact for all men without exception, but made effectual only when certain conditions are performed by the sinner, why are these conditions not made known to all men without exception?
5. If conditions are required to make Christ's death effectual, how does it appear that these conditions are not meritorious?

It is the last question above that touches the real nerve of this issue. The Reformed doctrine of definite atonement is, as I mentioned above, greatly reviled in our day. It is thought to be a narrow doctrine, and they who hold it are considered uncharitable. We, however, agree with the Synod of Dordrecht in its declaration that other views of the atonement "tend to the despising of the wisdom of the Father and of the merits of Jesus Christ, and [are] contrary to Scripture," and that "these adjudge too contemptuously of the death of Christ [and] in no wise acknowledge the most important fruit or benefit thereby gained," (Rejection of errors, ch. 2, sec. 1,3). That fruit

or benefit is the salvation of the soul and all that includes: ransom, reconciliation, redemption, justification, and sanctification. Even the faith, whereby we apprehend and lay hold of this salvation is His gift, purchased with the price of His blood and freely bestowed upon the people of God. In the definite atonement alone is the idea of *Solo Christo* preserved. "*Salvation is of the Lord*," Jonah 2:9. "God saves sinners," as one writer has said, and only those who believe in a limited atonement can say that in truth.

## Negative

**Keith Sharp**

Again I congratulate my friend Dave Landon on doing as good a job as possible of defending Calvinism. This makes possible a fair investigation of the issues.

Dave correctly states that his last question "touches the real nerve of the issue." How can God set conditions for salvation which man must meet by his own will and effort without man earning or meriting salvation? It is here that Calvinists are consistently wrong, consistently maintaining man has no part in his own salvation, whereas Arminians (modern evangelicals) are inconsistently wrong, insisting man must respond of his own volition by believing, but claiming any other conditions for salvation would mean meritorious salvation. Both are dead wrong in assuming that conditional salvation means meritorious salvation.

Noah was saved by grace through faith (Genesis 6:8; Hebrews 11:7).  
Unconditionally?

*By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. (Hebrews 11:7)*

Noah's obedient faith was the means of his salvation and righteousness, but he was still saved by grace.

God gave Jericho to Israel as a divine gift (Joshua 6:2). But Israel had to march around the walls thirteen times, blow on the rams, horns and shout with a great shout to receive the city (Joshua 6:3-5).

Gideon defeated the numberless Midianite host with three hundred men (Judges chapter 7). God rather than Israel received the glory (Judges 7:2), and God saved Israel (Judges 7:7,9,14-15). But Gideon and his men had to blow on trumpets, break pitchers containing torches, and shout, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" to defeat Midian (Judges 7:17-21).

Both Calvinists and evangelicals fail to recognize that the Bible mentions several kinds of works. Works of the flesh will cause us to be lost (Galatians 5:19-21), works of the law will not save (Galatians 2:16), and works of faith are essential to salvation (Galatians 5:6).

Suppose a climber were on Mt. Washington in New Hampshire illegally in the winter, fell off a cliff, and had to be saved by a rescue team. His rescuer commanded, "Grab the rope!" If he by faith in his rescuer took hold of the rope, would he have earned his salvation? Who would receive the glory for his salvation, the foolish climber or his brave rescuer? Would his salvation be by grace or because he earned it? Works of faith do not earn salvation; they unite our faith to God's grace.



*"So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" (Luke 17:10)*

Calvinists contend that belief in the general atonement of Christ for all lost sinners is "virtually another gospel." If I be branded an heretic for affirming the plain meaning of the golden text of the Bible, so be it.

*"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)

Because I take the words "world" and "whoever" in their normal, biblical meaning and accept the Master's words in childlike trust, am I an heretic? Truly, the doctrine that Christ died only for a select few denies the great love of the Father for all lost sinners and rips the heart from the good news of salvation for a lost world. It is not "virtually another gospel," it is another gospel (Galatians 1:6-9), rooted, not in the teaching of Scripture, but in the philosophies and creeds of uninspired men. I can look the poor, miserable, lost sinner in the eye and plead without reservation, "Christ died for you." Calvinists cannot.

Conditional salvation no more limits the power of the atonement than conditional rescue from Mt. Washington ("Grab the rope!") limits the power of the rope or the rescuer.

Rather than going directly to Scripture to accept what it says about the scope of the atonement, Dave resorts to convoluted arguments based on passages that do not even deal with the atonement. Remember the rule of Bible study propounded by the Calvinistic scholar Charles Hodge: "... it is the duty of the theologian to subordinate his theories to the Bible, and teach not what seems to him to be true or reasonable, but simply what the Bible teaches." Why not just accept what the Scriptures plainly state about the atonement? Calvinism is human philosophy rather than the teaching of Scripture.

God loves the world and sent His Son to save the world (John 3:16), Christ died for the world (John 1:29), and the Holy Spirit calls the world (Revelation 22:17). Looks symmetrical to me.

Dave assumes and asserts that Christ's atonement and intercession are coextensive. It is true that the **benefits** of his atonement are coextensive with his intercession, because the benefits of his atonement are conditional. We must by faith be baptized into Him to receive the benefits of his blood (Romans 5:8-10; 6:3-4) and his intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25; 10:19-22).

Of course our salvation in Christ is the result of "design and purpose." God designed and purposed before the world began that all who would come to Him through faith in His Son would be saved, i.e., ransomed, redeemed, reconciled, justified (Ephesians

1:3-14).

I have far greater comfort in trial than the Calvinist can possibly have. Of course my comfort is grounded in what God has done for me in Christ (Romans 8:32-34). But I can know that as long as I maintain my obedient faith in Him I am saved (1 John 1:4,7; 5:13). The Calvinist can never really know if he is truly one of God's elect or if he is just deluded. And there's nothing he can do about it, for he believes he has no part in his own salvation. Such a miserable condition is unknown to Scripture.

Since salvation is voluntary (Revelation 22:17), Christ will only be your substitute if you accept Him by obedient faith as your substitute. The "world" of 2 Corinthians 5:19 is the "all" who "died" of verse 14. It is everyone dead in sin. The "all" who "died" is not a reference to death to sin of the believer, for the believers in this verse are "those who live." (verse 15). God is reconciling the world to Himself in Christ (verse 19), but we must be willingly reconciled (verse 20). We must do something to be saved.

Certainly the Scriptures teach that obedient believers receive the benefits of the blood of Christ, but where is the scripture that teaches that Christ died **only** for the elect? Christ gave Himself for Paul (Galatians 2:20). Did He give Himself **only** for Paul?

Calvinists cannot find a single passage that even seems to teach that Christ died only for the elect. They must have the doctrine to retain their precious philosophy of unconditional salvation. The faith of Calvinists is in a human philosophical system rather than the Word of God (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5; Colossians 2:8).

Answers to Questions:

1. Because not all men accept His intercession
2. Lost sinners reject Christ's death for them and thus must bear their own guilt. Salvation is a gift (Romans 6:23). As such, it must be voluntarily received and may be rejected (Acts 13:46).
3. What good end does God serve by sending the gospel to those He knows will reject it? (Mark 16:15). The good end served is God's glory. If anyone is lost it is his own fault rather than God's. If Calvinism is true, sinners are lost because God so wills it. This slanders God rather than glorifying Him (1 Timothy 2:3-4).
4. It is God's will that all men without exception know the gospel (1 Timothy 2:3-4). But he has left that work to His people (Mark 16:15). If not all people hear the gospel, it is our fault and theirs (Matthew 7:7-8), not God's.
5. Already answered.

According to Calvinism, the saving love of God and the atoning blood of Christ are only for the elect few (cf. Matthew 7:13-14). If you are lost it is because God wills that you be lost. Yes, that is a most uncharitable system and slanders God. Calvinists cannot fathom the greatness of God's love. The Savior's tender plea, *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,"* is not a cruel taunt to

wretched sinners whom the Father wills to punish eternally. It is the gracious, sincere invitation of the Savior to all lost, sinful mankind, without exception or limitation. Thanks be to God I can accept without reservation the plain meaning of the golden text.

*"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."*

# Response

David Landon

When certain 16th century critics asked Luther why he had added the word "alone" to the word faith in Romans 3:28, Luther responded that, "the text and the thought of St. Paul imperiously demand it," and that, if that word scandalized, Paul scandalized more by his formula "without the works of the law." Keith insists that Calvinists cannot find a single passage that says that Christ died "only" for the elect. We say that the analogy of Scripture imperiously demands that we put this limitation on the death of Christ. We say, moreover, that if Keith is scandalized by this word "only," then how much more will he be so by those texts that declare that Christ died for His sheep, for His friends, and for the church; for what sense can be made out of such restrictive language if, in fact, Christ died for all without exception?

Keith says that Calvinists need the doctrine of Limited Atonement to, "retain their precious philosophy of unconditional salvation." The problem with this claim is that there is no Calvinistic philosophy of unconditional salvation, and I call upon Keith to produce a single reputable Calvinist who has ever taught it. What Calvinism does teach is unconditional election. Election is not salvation, it is unto salvation. Keith ought to have known this for I made this distinction in our debate on the doctrine of election. In the affirmative of that debate I wrote the following, "This decree (of election) is unconditional, proceeding from God's mere good pleasure. Salvation, on the other hand, is conditional, for God has decreed to save no man of mature age apart from faith and repentance."

This being the case, it should be obvious to the reader that Keith's examples of the necessity of obedient faith in order to salvation or deliverance are pointless. We do not deny that it was necessary for Noah to build an ark, for Gideon to blow his trumpet, and for the army of Israel to march around Jericho. We, as well as Keith, teach conditional salvation.

Why then, if I and Keith both teach the necessity of faith and good works for salvation, do I say that for him conditional salvation means meritorious salvation, but for me it does not? The answer to this question will show why we put such a premium on the doctrine of limited atonement. Observe the following:

1. Merit must reside somewhere, else we could not be forgiven the great debt we owe to God. This merit either belongs to Christ alone, or to man alone, or it is shared between Christ and man.
2. They who merit a thing have a right to the thing merited. This is Paul's point in Romans 4:4, "To him that works (merits) is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." Upon such a "worker" the blessing not only may be bestowed, it ought to be bestowed.
3. Paul's question in 1 Corinthians 4:7 is of importance at this point. Paul asks, "Who

maketh thee to differ, one from another?" If merit resides in man, it is obvious that man himself makes himself to differ from other men.

It is our position that all merit is in Christ, and that although salvation comes to men by way of grace alone, yet, as it concerns Christ, we say that it is just and proper that He receive that which He merited by His death. The fact that all men are not saved indicates that Christ's merit (atonement) did not extend to all men, but only to his sheep, the Church. The reverse is also true. If you say that Christ died for all men without exception, and yet admit that not all men are saved, you necessarily make merit to reside in man. It becomes man himself who, by his works of the flesh, or by the works of the law, or even by his works of obedient faith merits salvation. Yes, even obedient faith can be turned into a meritorious work if it is represented as something man can accomplish in his own strength, and by which he makes himself to differ from other men. This seems to be Keith's position, taking comfort on the one hand from "what God has done for me in Christ," and also saying "as long as I maintain my obedient faith in Him I am saved." We continue to wonder how Keith is able to be comforted by something God has done for the reprobate as well as for him. Don't forget that the Pharisee in Luke 18 had a certain thankfulness towards God ("I thank thee that I am not as other men") yet, ultimately his trust was in those things by which he made himself to differ.

With certain modifications, Keith's illustration of a climber falling off Mt. Washington can be used to show the glory that is in the Christian atonement. Keith and I both believe in the necessity of grabbing the rope, but the issue is somewhat obscured by Keith's portrayal of only one victim. Set the case as it really is: every man without exception is at the bottom of the cliff, and a rope is lowered to each one of them. Yet, only some grab the rope. Questions arise: why do only some grab the rope, are these men better, smarter, or stronger? Focus (and praise) is eventually taken off the rescuer and placed on the victim who, by his rope-grabbing ability has made himself to differ from his fellows. It is easy to see where the merit is. It is not in the rope-extending (for that was done equally for all), but in the rope-grabbing.

Our rescuer saves start to finish. He not only extends a rope, but He goes down it Himself, breaths life into the dead victim, and enables him to see the sufficiency and desirability of the rope.

We conclude that the death of Christ was for His people, the Church.