

THE FALSE DOCTRINE OF LIMITED ATONEMENT

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BACKGROUND

John Calvin was a French theologian who moved to Geneva, Switzerland in 1536, where he published his "Institutes of Christian Religion."

Calvin's belief system reflected earlier teachings by Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD), and later became known as Calvinism. Calvin's theology states that due to man's inherited sinful nature, he cannot come to God; rather, God must come to him. God has already determined (predestined) who He will save and who He will condemn, and therefore, His Son only died for the saved, otherwise known as the "elect." The members of the "elect" cannot resist being saved, and having been chosen by God, they cannot fall away.

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Calvin's concept of predestination and election is summarized in the acrostic **TULIP**:

Total Depravity
Unconditional Election
Limited Atonement
Irresistible Grace
Perseverance of the Saints

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Our focus in this study is on the doctrine of Limited Atonement (the **L** in the TULIP acrostic), the belief that before time began, God elected (or predestined) some for salvation and others for condemnation, therefore His Son did not die for all men, but only for the saved, otherwise known as the "elect."

"Atonement" means the blood of Christ paid the price for sins, to redeem or to reconcile man back to God.

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Let us examine some Bible verses commonly used by Calvinists to justify this belief.

Supposed proof texts:

"I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours ..." (John 17:9)

"... for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."
(Matthew 26:28)

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First, let's examine the passage in John 17:9.

"I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours ..." (John 17:9)

Does this teach that Christ only died for some? No.

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John 17:9 is a part of what is sometimes called Jesus' "High Priestly" prayer; the first part of this prayer concerns the disciples of Christ, as seen in verses 6 and 7:

"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You ..."
(John 17:6-7)

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We see that in John 17:9, Jesus is saying that He is praying for "these." Exactly who is under discussion is made evident in verse 11:

"I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are." (John 17:11)

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Then, Jesus prays in John 17:20-21 for all who would believe:

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me."
(John 17:20-21)

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Therefore, we can conclude that Jesus is not saying in John 17:9 that God has given to Him only some, but that during His lifetime on earth, the twelve plus the seventy given to Him have learned of Him. His prayer is clearly being given on behalf of all of His disciples, including any who will believe in Him and in His Father from that time on.

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Next, let's examine the passage in Matthew 26:28.

"... for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."
(Matthew 26:28)

Matthew 26:28 says that Christ's blood was poured out for "many" to receive the forgiveness of sins. Does this mean that Christ's blood is limited to a few? No.

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The Hebrew writer says that His sacrifice was offered once for all.

"But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption."
(Hebrews 9:11-12)

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The Hebrew writer says that His sacrifice was offered once for all, and the "all" is not qualified. So, he is telling us that Christ's blood was sacrificed for all men.

It is inaccurate to say that Christ died to cleanse the sins of a few, or of many; Christ died to cleanse all men of sin.

"... and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." (1 John 2:2)

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Jesus taught that whoever believes can be saved.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (John 3:16-17)

John the baptizer also taught the need for obedience.

"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:36)

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The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus tasted death "for every man."

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

John Calvin reasoned that if Christ died for everyone, then everyone is redeemed, yet in the day of Judgment, some are lost (Matthew 7:21). Therefore, he concluded that these were lost because they were not included in those for whom Christ died.

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The error in Calvin's reasoning lies in the conclusion that the benefits of redemption provided by Christ's death are unconditionally received.

Believers in Christ are given the right to become children of God, but the choice is ours.

"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." (John 1:12-13)

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Christ's payment at Calvary is sufficient for the release of all, however only those who "come and drink" or who "fear God and keep His commandments" will receive its benefits.

"The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost." (Revelation 22:17)

"Opening his mouth, Peter said: 'I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him.'" (Acts 10:34-35)

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Consider these passages from the Word of God:

"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)

"For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf." (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

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Consider these passages from the Word of God:

"The next day he saw Jesus coming to him and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29)

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
(Romans 1:16)

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We can know with certainty that the doctrine of the limited atonement of the blood of Christ is false. Christ died for sins once for all.

"For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit ..." (1 Peter 3:18)

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However, redemption is only found in Christ.

"... being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus ..."
(Romans 3:24)

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Ephesians 1:7)

"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."
(Colossians 1:14)

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When are we redeemed? The price paid to atone for our sins was Jesus' death on the cross. However, the actual deliverance, the release from the bondage of sin, occurs when one is baptized into Christ.

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ." (Galatians 3:26-27)

"Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life." (Romans 6:3-4)

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We are made free from sin when we choose to obey the form of teaching we have received from His word.

"Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness? But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed, and having been freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness." (Romans 6:16-18)

HOW TO OBEY THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST

Hear the word (2 Thessalonians 2:14-15; James 1:21)

Believe the gospel (Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24)

Repent of sins (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30-31)

Confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:10; Matthew 10:32-33)

Be Baptized (Galatians 3:26-27; Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38)

Remain Obedient (Matthew 7:21; Revelation 2:10; Hebrews 3:12)