

## ***LIMITED ATONEMENT***

Preached September 30, 1958, by Pastor Fred Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church,  
Topeka, Kansas

My subject again today is the Particular Atonement, or the Limited Design in the Atonement. I give you again this description by Mr. Spurgeon:

*“Many divines say that Christ did something when he died that enabled God to be just, and yet the Justifier of the ungodly. What that something is they do not tell us. They believe in an atonement made for everybody; but then, their atonement is just this. They believe that Judas was atoned for just as much as Peter; they believe that the damned in hell were as much an object of Jesus Christ's satisfaction as the saved in heaven; and though they do not say it in proper words, yet they must mean it, for it is a fair inference, that in the case of multitudes, Christ died in vain, for he died for them all, they say; and yet so ineffectual was his dying for them, that though he died for them they are damned afterward. Now, such an atonement I despise—I reject it. I may be called Antinomian or Calvinist for preaching a limited atonement; but I had rather believe a limited atonement that is efficacious for all men for whom it was intended, than a universal atonement that is not efficacious for anybody, except the will of man be joined to it.”*

But, though we friends are perhaps thought strange for preaching the bible doctrine of Particular Redemption or the Limited Atonement, it deserves to be known that the ablest and most pious men of bygone years, such as Jonathan Edwards, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, Charles Spurgeon, John Newton, Isaac Watts, George Whitfield, William Cowper, Augustus Toplady, and so forth and so forth unanimously believed and espoused it. Christ died for His own, and all for whom Christ died will certainly and invincibly and inevitably be saved.

This is a very simple question of exactly what was done at the cross. We say that Christ in his death on the cross suffered for all the sins of every *believer*. If the believer should go to hell, He would suffer for the same sins that Christ suffered for. Both the believer and Christ would then be paying for the same sins, and God in punishing two men for the sins of one would be the most unjust tyrant of the universe. Perish the thought. The judge of all the earth must do right.

But this argument has no force if Christ died for all without exception, for one as much as for another, which He must have done if He made salvation possible for all, removing all legal obstacles out of the way of their salvation. Moreover, according to this argument, and also according to truth and logic, all those who affirm that Christ suffered the penalty of the law for every man, make God the most unjust tyrant of the universe.

Now consider with me this morning these arguments from scripture: *Isaiah 53:11*. In this passage, the prophet in speaking of Christ's sacrifice, says that God "***shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.***" We take this to mean that the just demands of God and the penalty of the broken law were satisfied in the death of Jesus Christ. But for whom? If for every son of Adam, then God cannot in justice damn any of them. Satisfied justice can demand nothing more. But some say that the lost in hell will suffer not for their sins in general, but only for the sin of rejecting Christ. But who gave them warrant to differentiate between sins? *Matthew 1:21* "***And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.***"

Unbelief is, admittedly, a sin; but Christ saves His elect, His sheep, and His own, from their sins. Therefore, when a sinner is saved from the sin of unbelief, he straightway becomes a believer. Furthermore, this same passage in Isaiah 53, represents God as saying "by His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities." This tells how Christ justifies men, that is, by bearing their iniquities. And note that this justification is not made to depend on anything else. If Christ had to bear men's iniquities to justify them, then it follows as the night the day that those whose iniquities he bore must receive justification. By accepting this satisfaction at the hands of Christ, God puts himself under obligation to Christ, not to the sinner, to communicate justification to everyone for whom satisfaction is made, which he does by working repentance and faith in the heart.

***"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."*** (*John 15:13*) If Christ laid down His life for every man, without exception, then He has the greatest love for every man, and therefore loves those who perish in hell as much as those He saves. But could Christ ever be satisfied with some of the objects of His greatest love in hell? Moreover, if it were true that Christ loves those that

perish, as much as those that are saved, we should have to attribute our salvation to ourselves, rather than the love of Christ.

***“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Romans 8:32)*** This passage argues that God’s greatest gift of His son guarantees all lesser gifts, hence it follows that God delivered up His son for none, except those to whom he freely gives all other spiritual blessings, including repentance and faith. That is, those who believe. ***“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen.” (Romans 8:33-34)*** These verses tell us that no charge or condemnation can be brought against the elect; that God will not charge them, for it is He who justifies, and that Christ will not condemn them, because he died for them. This passage would be deprived of all logical force if Christ had died for any that He should someday condemn. Hence, he died for none, except those that shall escape judgement.

***“For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died.” (2 Corinthians 5:14)*** There is here the undeniable assertion that all for whom Christ died, died representatively in Him. One died for all, therefore all died. Hence, death has no more power over them, and none of them will suffer it, but all will receive justification and eternal life through faith. In commenting on the last three words of this passage, that is ***“therefore all died,”*** A.T. Robertson, renowned Greek scholar says:

*“Logical conclusion, the one died for the all and so the all died when he died, all the spiritual death possible for those for whom Christ died.”*

***2 Corinthians 5:19*** says: ***“God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.”*** This tells what God was doing in the death of Christ, and how he was doing it. He was reconciling men to himself, and He was doing it by laying their trespasses on Christ, and therefore not imputing, reckoning, charging them to those for whom Christ died. Christ in his death accomplished full objective reconciliation for the objects of his death, which necessitates their being brought to experience subjective reconciliation. The only right conclusion from this is that Christ died for those and those only who eventually receive reconciliation.

Consider *John 10:15*, *Acts 20:28*, and *Ephesians 5:25*. In these passages, Christ is said to have purchased the church, to have given Himself to it, to have laid down His life the sheep, and so forth. Mr. Parks says:

*“I know that universal terms are sometimes connected in the scriptures with the atonement, but if these are to be interpreted in their widest sense, why should the sacred writers have explored the restrictive terms at all? The universal terms may be readily made to harmonize with the restrictive, but no man can make the restrictive harmonize with the unlimited.”*

Now my friends, let me consider with you this morning a few passages of scripture taken by some to teach a general atonement, the most popular of which being *John 3:16* and *1 John 2:2*: **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son”** and **“He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”** They say **“world”** means every single individual son of Adam. Now, against the interpretation given of the passages by the advocates of a general atonement, we reply first that a love that would cause God to give Christ to die for each individual man of Adam’s race, would also cause him to save each one. Why should God discriminate between men in saving them, if He loved all of them with the greatest of all love? And second, there would be no real expression of love in sending a savior to die vainly for men. What kind of love is it that performs and act that cannot really benefit? Would there be any real love shown by a father in buying a beautiful picture for a son that is totally blind? Then would there be any real love for God to send His son to die for the sinner’s sins, and then withhold repentance and faith, so that the death of His son would avail that sinner nothing. And third, that God does not love all men without exception is proved by such declarations as **“Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated.”** (*Romans 9:13*) This is a hard saying; who can bear it? But it is universally almost supposed today, and the pulpits of the land espouse it without exception, that God loves everybody. But the scriptures infallibly deny it. Did God love Pharaoh? (*Romans 10:17*) Did He love the Amalekites? (*Exodus 17:14*) Did He love the Canaanites, whom He commanded to be extirpated without mercy? (*Deuteronomy 18:3*) Does He love the workers of iniquity? *Psalms 5:5* says He **“hatest all the workers of iniquity.”** Does He love the vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction? Ah my friends, He endures them with much longsuffering. It is said in the scripture that God pities men and that He has compassion upon them, but that He hates all those who are not interested in the

covenant of Christ. Finally, the word “*world*” by no means alludes to all men without exception in every case in the scripture, and therefore it remains to be proved that it means this in these passages. “*World*” is used of unbelievers in distinction from believers, as seen in *John 7:7, 12:31, 14:17*, and so forth and so forth. It is used of Gentiles in distinction from the Jews, as seen in *Romans 12:11-15*. It is used of the generality of known people, as in *John 12:19*, where we read: “*The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, the world is gone after him.*” Can anyone reasonably suppose every single son of Adam, of all ages, had gone after Christ, at that particular time? No; the fact of the matter is that the word “*world*” in the scriptures has very many different meanings, and we believe in the two passages under consideration (namely *John 3:16* and *1 John 2:2*), that the word alludes not to all men without exception, but to all men without distinction. That is, to men of all nations, tribes, and tongues, revealing that Christ did not die for the Jews alone, but for Gentiles also, even to the uttermost parts of the earth.

Mr. John Gill, famous and noteworthy and scholarly Baptist of two centuries back, said:

*“It was a controversy agitated among the Jewish doctors, whether when the Messiah came, the Gentiles, the world, should have any benefit by him; the majority was exceeding large on the negative of the question, and determined they should not . . . that the most severe judgments and dreadful calamities would befall them; yea, that they should be cast into Hell in the room of the Israelites. This notion the Baptist, Christ, and His apostles oppose, and is the trite reason of the use of this phrase in the Scriptures which speak of Christ's redemption. As a typical Jew, Nicodemus thought God loved nobody but Jews, but our LORD told him that God so loved the world (Gentile as well as Jew), that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever (Gentile or Jew) believeth on Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

This is Fred Phelps, Pastor of Westboro Baptist Church. Next week, the LORD willing, at this same time, more of the same. And now, peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the father and the LORD Jesus Christ, and grace be with all them that love our LORD Jesus Christ in sincerity.

Amen.