

Ransom Paid

DOES THE BIBLE LIMIT
THE ATONEMENT?

by PHILLIP KAYSER, Ph.D.



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Contents:

Both Arminians and Calvinists oppose universalism	1
Syllogism of Universalists.....	2
Both Arminians and Calvinists believe the atonement is limited	3
Exegetical examples where both Arminians and Calvinists are forced to recognize some form of limitation	3
Example #1	3
Example #2.....	4
Let's accurately understand the difference in views.....	6
Arminianism is illogical	6
Arminianism is unbiblical	7

Both Arminians and Calvinists oppose universalism

- Both Arminians and Calvinists deny that all men will be saved by Christ's death, because Scripture teaches that some men will be punished forever in hell (Matt. 7:13; 25:46; Mark 9:43-44; Luke 16:19-31; Rev. 14:11; 20:10,15).
- Both Arminians and Calvinists deny that the devil or any of his angels will be saved by Christ's death, because they too will be punished forever in hell (Matt. 25:41,46; 2 Pet. 2:4; Rev. 20:10,15).
- Thus, both Arminians and Calvinists disagree with the conclusion of the following syllogism proposed by Universalists:

Syllogism of Universalists

Premise one: God in Christ purposed to save all men (i.e., there is no limit in the *purpose* or design of the atonement).

Premise two: Christ's atonement has provided everything necessary for salvation (i.e., there is no limit in the *power* of the atonement).

Conclusion: All men will be saved.

Both Arminians and Calvinists believe the atonement is limited

- Both Arminians and Calvinists agree that since the Bible contradicts the conclusion of the previous syllogism, one of the premises must be wrong (since it is a valid syllogism).
- Arminians deny premise two. They limit the number of people who will be saved by limiting the power of the atonement.
- Calvinists deny premise one. They limit the number of people who will be saved by limiting the purpose of the atonement.
- Thus every passage that is posed as a “problem” for the Calvinist is also a “problem” for the Arminian. Both schools of thought limit the atonement by either limiting its power or its purposed extent. To fail to do so would involve both in the heresy of universalism.

Exegetical examples where both Arminians and Calvinists are forced to recognize some form of limitation

Example #1

John 1:29: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Both the Arminian and the Calvinist maintain the Orthodox doctrine of hell by denying that this verse means that everyone will be saved. However, the Arminian seeks to maintain Orthodoxy by changing the meaning of the phrase, “takes away the sin,” whereas the Calvinist simply takes one of the seven dictionary definitions of the word “world” that fits the context and maintains non-contradiction in the Bible.

The Arminian argues that “world means world” and it includes every man, woman and child in the world.

The Calvinist objects that Scripture uses the word “world” in seven different ways, at least three of which could fit this context without violating the full intent of the phrase “takes away the sin of.” The Calvinist insists that the Arminian has completely changed the meaning

of “takes away” from one of actuality (“takes”) to one of potential (“makes the removal of sin possible”). The Calvinist says that if God says that the sins of the world are taken away, then they are taken away and the world (as defined properly) has no more sins to answer for.

The Calvinist observes that the word “world” means seven different things in Scripture, four of the senses of the word “world” fit perfectly with this passage:

- Certainly all sin will be removed from the planet (world) on the final judgment day because of Christ’s work of redemption: “we... look for a new heavens and new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Pet. 3:13) and we will inherit the “world” (Rom. 4:13; 1 Cor. 3:22; Heb. 2:5).
- Certainly the effects of Adam’s sin upon the creation which cause it to groan and travail will be removed because of Christ’s redemption, according to Romans 8:19-23. This is not a potential; it is a guarantee that we will have a renovated world.
- Certainly the salvation of the Gentiles (called “world” in Rom. 11:11-12,15) is something that is also guaranteed (Rom. 11).
- Finally, the word “world” often refers to the final stage of history when all nations will be saved (John 3:17; 4:42; 6:51; 17:21,23; Rom. 11:15)

Thus, we do not need to accept a Universalist sense of the word “world” in order to make perfect sense of the phrase, “who takes away the sin of the world.”

Example #2

2 Corinthians 5:19: “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.”

The Arminian argues that the word “world” must include every man, woman and child who has ever lived, and that the Calvinist doesn’t really believe the word “world.” (But see the comments on previous verse.)

The Calvinist objects that the Arminian doesn’t believe the phrase, “not imputing their trespasses to them.” If God no longer imputes sin to every man, woman and child in the world, then there is no basis for eternal punishment. When God no longer imputes sin to a person, that person is saved (Rom. 4:5-8). Therefore, if we are to take the Arminian

definition of “world,” then we are forced to the Universalist interpretation that everyone is saved.

The Arminian weakens the power of the atonement in order to maintain a preconceived definition of “world” that is imposed on the text.

The Calvinist observes that the word “world” means seven different things in Scripture, and there are various senses of the word “world” which fit perfectly with this passage.

Let's accurately understand the difference in views

Thus both Calvinists and Arminians believe in limited atonement in some sense, and therefore the label is not helpful. Calvinists prefer the label particular redemption (that Christ died for the purpose of saving particular individuals, not just a nameless mass) or effectual atonement (that the atonement of Christ is effectual in accomplishing all that God intended it to accomplish).

Arminians deny effectual atonement because they believe that God's intention in the atonement (that all men be saved) will be frustrated. This position is both unbiblical and illogical:

Arminianism is illogical

The Arminian position is illogical because it says that Christ died with the intention of saving all men, when many men were already in the torments of Sheol when Christ died on the cross. How could Christ intend to die to make salvation possible to those who were in hell (for whom salvation was already impossible!)?

The Arminian position is illogical when it says that God foreknows all future events and actions and yet also says that God intends to save those whom He knows will not be saved. There must be certainty of the future if there is absolute foreknowledge of the future. But if God already knew an exact number who would be saved in the future, can it be said that He intends to save more? Certainly He may (on the Arminian system) desire to save more, but He cannot intend to save more without contradicting His own knowledge. It is for this reason that several Arminians have been logically forced to deny the Biblical doctrine of foreknowledge. (See paper on the foreknowledge of God.)

The Arminian position is illogical because orthodox Arminianism agrees that God foreknows certainly who will be lost, yet it insists that it is not God's will that they be lost.

“If God does not will that they be lost, then why did He create them? ...God could have just as easily refrained from creating those that go to Hell. He knew where they were going before He created them.

Since He went ahead and created them with full knowledge that they would be lost, it is evidently the will of God that they be lost. He evidently has some purpose in it, which we human beings cannot fully discern.... As a matter of fact, it is a problem that no Arminian can face. If he faces it, he will have to admit either the error of his Arminianism or deny foreknowledge. But he might say that God had to create those that perish, even against His will. This makes God subject unto fate.” (Youth’s Living Ideals)

Arminianism is unbiblical

The Arminian position is unbiblical because Scripture does not say that God’s purpose was to make salvation possible. Rather, His purpose was to accomplish or guarantee the salvation of His people.

- “You shall call His name Jesus, for he *will save* his people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:21)
- “For the Son of man came to seek and *to save* that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10)
- “The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world *to save* sinners.” (1 Tim. 1:15)

The Arminian position is unbiblical because it says that Christ’s atonement does not accomplish anything until men accept it by faith, whereas the Bible says that the atonement reconciled God’s people to Himself before they had faith. It provided the basis for God doing anything on behalf of His people. It secured their salvation before they were even born.

- “For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son...” (Rom. 5:10)
- “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to Himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them...” (2 Cor. 5:18,19)
- “...He entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.” (Heb. 9:12)

The Arminian position is unbiblical because it says that many whom the Father gave to Christ for Him to die for will be lost, whereas Scripture says that all who were given to Christ will be saved.

- “*All that the Father gives Me will come to Me; and him who comes to Me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up at the last day.*” (John 6:37-39).

The Arminian position is unbiblical because it denies that Christ purchased everything that is necessary for salvation. They say that faith must come from the individual and they deny that it is a gift of God. Scripture indicates that the atonement purchases faith and repentance and that God grants these graces to men.

- “This is the *work of God*, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” (John 6:29)
- “*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.*” (John 6:44)
- “But there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. And He said, “Therefore I have said to you *that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father.*” (John 6:65)
- “the faith which *comes* through Him” (Acts 3:16)
- “helped those who had *believed through grace*” (Acts 18:27)
- “as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.” (Rom. 12:3)
- “fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, *faith..*” (Gal. 5:22)
- “who believe according to the working of His mighty power” (Eph. 1:19)
- “For to you *it has been granted* on behalf of Christ, not only to *believe* in Him, but also to suffer for His sake...” (Phil. 1:29)
- “those who have *obtained like precious faith* with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ...” (2 Pet. 1:1)
- “His divine power *has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness*” (2 Pet. 1:3)

The Arminian position is unbiblical because the Bible explicitly excludes the non-elect from Christ's redemption:

- ἐξαγοράζω (*exagorazo* = “to acquire out of a forum”) See Galatians 3:13; 4:5. The sense is that some were redeemed and the rest in the forum were left.
- ἀγοράζω ἐκ (*agorazo ek* = “to acquire at a forum, out of”). The sense is that some of the class were redeemed and the rest were not. Examples: “You were slain and have *redeemed* us to God by Your blood *out of every tribe* and tongue and people and nation.” (Rev. 5:9); “redeemed *from the earth*” (Rev. 4:3); “These were redeemed *from among men.*” (Rev. 14:4)
- λύτρον (*lutron* = ransom). When the ransom is paid, the person's safety is secured. It may take a process to exchange hands, but there is nothing more that is needed to effect the freedom of the individual. Thus, Scripture always limits those who are ransomed by Christ's blood: “to give His life a ransom for *many.*” (Matt. 20:28); “to give His life a ransom for *many.*” (Mark 10:45)
- ἀντίλυτρον (*antilytron* = a ransom in place of). This contains both the concept of ransom (*lutron* - the full price being paid) and substitution (*anti* - “in the place of”). Where a substitution has occurred, to punish both would violate the justice of God that forbids double jeopardy. (1 Tim. 2:6)

The Arminian position is unbiblical because while it claims to believe in substitutionary atonement, it effectively denies that a true substitution took place. The Bible teaches that all for whom Christ died, died in Christ; died in virtue of His death—“...For the love of Christ constrains us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died.” (2 Cor. 5:14) The following verses show in what respect “they all died.” It is necessary that all in behalf of whom Christ died are legally seen as “dead with Christ,” because Christ's substitutionary death is real, not hypothetical. If in history an individual appropriates Christ's death, a life has been substituted for a life. If the person rejects the atonement and he receives death, no substitution has taken place or could even be envisioned.

- Therefore:
 - Proposition 1: All for whom Christ died, died in Christ (2 Cor. 5:14,15; Rom. 6:3-11; Col. 3:3).

- Proposition 2: All who died in Christ were also resurrected with Him (Rom. 6:4,5,8,9; 2Tim. 2:11).
- Proposition 3 To die with Christ is to die to sin and to ourselves; and to rise with Christ is to live to obedience to Christ (Rom. 6:4,5; 2 Cor. 5:14,15).
- Proposition 4. Thus those for whom Christ died are those, and only those who die to sin and live to righteousness. Cf. *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, pp. 59-75, John Murray.
- The idea of Substitution is seen in its strictest sense in the word ἀντί (*anti*) instead of.
 - Example: ‘**Arche lauß** was reigning over Judea instead of (ἀντί [*anti*]) his father Herod.” Matt. 2:22
 - Scripture uses the word ἀντί (*anti*) in the following places with the word λύτρον (*lutron*) - redemption price, or ransom (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45; 1 Tim. 2:6 etc.). Substitutionary or vicarious suffering carries with it the idea of the actual exemption of the person for whom substitution has been made. i.e. if Christ paid the penalty for a person, that person no longer has to pay it.
 - John Owen said,
 - “The Father imposed His wrath due unto, and the Son underwent punishment for, either:
 1. All the sins of all men.
 2. All the sins of some men, or
 3. Some of the sins of all men.
 - In which case it may be said:
 1. That if the last be true, all men have some sins to answer for, and so none are saved.
 2. That if the second be true, then Christ, in their stead suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the whole world, and this is the truth.
 3. But if the first be the case, why are not all men free from the punishment due unto their sins?

You answer, because of unbelief. I ask, is this unbelief a sin, or is it not? If it be, then Christ suffered the punishment due unto it or He did not. If He did, why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which He died? If He did not, He did not die for all their sins!”

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The heresy of Universalism teaches that all humans and all demons will be saved and none will be in hell. In response to this, both Arminians and Calvinists agree that the atonement is limited. Now the question remains... how is it limited? This booklet explores the Bible's answer to that question.

Founder and President of Biblical Blueprints, **Phillip Kayser** has degrees in education, theology, and philosophy. Ordained in 1987, he currently serves as Senior Pastor of Dominion Covenant Church, a conservative Presbyterian (CPC) church in Omaha, NE. He also serves as Professor of Ethics at Whitefield Theological Seminary and President of the Providential History Festival. He and his wife Kathy have 5 children and 9 grandchildren.



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