

Title: Limited Atonement
Scripture: Romans 5:6-9
Series: God's Saving Grace

1. Introduction:

- a. After showing us the benefits that accompany justification—peace with God, access to God's presence, and hope—Paul turns his attention to the doctrine of the atonement of Christ.
- b. The Doctrine of Atonement teaches that there is an actual price for human sin, which is the wrath of God. The Bible states that Christ has atoned for the sins of believers by paying our price. God's wrath on sin falls onto our willing substitute, Jesus Christ.

2. Verse 6 - For while we were still weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly.

- a. At this point, Paul discusses the 'when' and the 'why' of our atonement, the point in history at which the redemption of the people of God was accomplished.
 - i. In this passage, Paul tells us that **God poured his love** into the hearts of sinners "**while we were still weak**," that is, helpless, totally unable to rescue ourselves from the effects of the fall. Christ, motivated by sovereign love and not by any human merit or accomplishment, died for us, **the ungodly**.
- b. Original Sin - Original sin does not refer to the first sin committed by Adam and Eve but to the consequences of that sin on the entire human race. All the children of Adam and Eve are born in a state of spiritual death and moral corruption. This is why Paul calls all of us "**ungodly**."
 - i. The effects of sin are so great and penetrate so deeply within our souls that we are left in a state of spiritual death.
 1. Spiritual death means that even though we are still alive biologically, our humanity has been so damaged by the fall that our state, by nature, is one of moral inability.
 2. In other words, we have been plunged so deeply into sin that we do not have the moral capacity to want God.
 3. If God, in his mercy and grace, offered complete forgiveness and salvation in Jesus Christ but did nothing to make us come to Jesus, we would never come on our own. We simply do not have the moral ability.

- a. **John 6:44** No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.
- c. Beloved, consider that the overwhelming preaching in America today among professing evangelical churches is that God offers the gospel to everybody and that those who exercise their own free will to receive Jesus, to decide for Christ, are the ones who are saved. This teaching is simply unbiblical!
 - i. In this view, although God does 99 percent of the salvific work, the 1 percent that decides our eternity is in man's hands as he chooses or rejects Jesus Christ.
 - 1. The Bible is clear. Dead men can not choose God.
 - a. Unless the Holy Spirit empowers the word of preaching and the outreach of evangelism, no one will come to Christ. That is the point that Jesus made when he said in **John 6:65** And he said, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father."
 - 2. In heaven, we will not have any reason to boast. We read in **Ephesians 2:8-9** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, (9) not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
 - 3. So Paul tells us that Christ died for the **ungodly while we were still weak**. The strength that Paul has in view is spiritual. We have no strength in and of ourselves to effect our salvation.
- d. At the Right Time - God did not wait for us to exercise our wills, incline ourselves to him, repent our sins on our own, or fix ourselves. No, while we were still in this state of sin, which Paul later, in his letter to the Ephesians, describes as spiritual death, **while we were dead in trespasses and sin, Christ died for us**.
 - i. Beloved, the point here is that Christ came into the world in real time, in real history. He was born on the date and place the Father had decreed. Throughout the Old Testament, God was preparing history for the moment Christ would come. Jesus came "**at the right time**." God ordained the day of Christ's visitation.
- e. For the Ungodly - Whenever Paul mentions the death of Christ, he speaks of its purpose. Paul does not see the death of Christ as a

tragedy in the history of human affairs. Christ's death was **for the ungodly**.

- i. Beloved, we have one of the most controversial phrases in the Scriptures. **Christ died for the ungodly**. But what does Paul mean by **the ungodly**? Does he mean every individual ever born (we could not argue that all men are **ungodly**)? Or does Paul mean Christ died specifically for a group of **ungodly** individuals and only for that group?
 1. Beloved, the Bible does not teach the false doctrine of universal atonement. It does not teach that everybody goes to heaven! Only believers who belong to Christ go to heaven. Every saved believer was at one time completely **ungodly**. Christ certainly died for the **ungodly** whom He intended to bring to faith.
 2. **Ephesians 2:1-5** And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—
 3. Beloved, if Christ paid for everybody's sins and not for the sins of a specific group, then we could ask the question: Who is in hell?
- ii. At its root, the Doctrine of Universal Atonement teaches that Christ died to make salvation possible. In other words, Christ died for every sin except unbelief, and we must conquer our unbelief to be saved. This type of thinking is heretical.
- iii. No, Beloved! The Bible teaches that the death of Christ accomplished salvation for his sheep.
 1. **John 19:30** When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
 2. **John 10:14-15** I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, (15) just as the Father knows me

and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.

iv. Jesus laid down his life for His sheep (this group), and when he did, there was never a doubt in heaven that all the elect for whom he died had their sins removed and would spend eternity in heaven. To his disciples, Jesus said the following in **John 6:39** 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 on the last day.

v. Beloved, this all leads to the Doctrine of Limited Atonement. This is the Biblical teaching that Christ did not die for all but only for a specific group made up of all the nations, tribes, and tongues. In other words, Christ's death is sufficient for all but efficient only for those whom God will bring to faith.

1. The scope of Limited Atonement is this: What was God's eternal purpose in designing the death of His Son? We know that God had a plan of salvation from all eternity. Did God intend to save everybody? We know that cannot be true because if God intended to save everyone, everyone would be saved.

a. However, the Scriptures teach that few are saved! **Matthew 22:14** For many are called, but few are chosen.”

b. **Mark 10:45** For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

vi. Beloved, the Doctrine of the Limited Atonement of Christ accomplishes salvation; it did not just merely make salvation possible. If the efficacy of Christ's death depended on us, Christ would have no fruit from his death. No, Christ did not die for people who could help themselves through belief; he died for the **weak and ungodly**.

3. Verse 7 - For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—

a. If someone is kind, perhaps a person would consider giving his life for this righteous or good person. But none of us would dare to die for the unrighteous man. We do not believe that the unrighteous man is worth the sacrifice. This is what separates God from us.

- i. The unique character of God’s love becomes apparent when we consider the fact that while we were still in our **helpless and sinful state**, Christ died for us.
 - b. This is the difference between Universal and Limited Atonement.
 - i. Universal Atonement falsely claims that we can help ourselves by coming to Christ. We must exercise faith as God hopes and pleads with us to do so. God never violates man’s free will. In this view, God is reactive, and man is in control.
 - ii. Limited Atonement rightly teaches that we **are powerless, ungodly, and dead** in our natural condition. We will never come unless God overcomes us with His love and allows us to come. Even the faith necessary to believe is secondary to a new heart that can believe. We choose God only because he first chose us. In this view, God is sovereign, and man receives God’s grace.
4. Verse 8 - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- a. There is a shift in language here as Paul moves from the term “**ungodly**” to “**for us.**” We, you and I, saved by grace, were the **ungodly** whom Christ died to save.
 - i. God sent His Son for us while we were in a state of sin. The ‘**us**’ can only refer to saints, the believers.
 - b. What about this love of God for the elect? That is the point Paul emphasizes: **God shows his love for us**. Does God not love the unbeliever? In a general sense, yes, but in a salvific sense, no. We must distinguish among the three distinct types of God’s love.
 - i. Benevolence - This is God’s basic goodwill towards this fallen world. God is not unkind or mean-spirited. Every person in the world experiences God’s goodwill. The fact that people are alive is an indication of God’s goodwill. Every moment a sinner continues to exist in this world, he does so only by the goodwill of God. In this sense, they all experience God’s benevolent love.
 - ii. Beneficence refers to God’s good acts. The Bible tells us that God’s rain falls on the just and the unjust. All people, repentant or not, believers or not, receive specific kindnesses from the hand of God. In this sense, they all experience God’s beneficent love.

- c. **Side note** - When ministers preach that God loves all unbelievers unconditionally, mixing up what the Bible teaches regarding love, the pagan thinks that God loves him no matter what he does or does not do. He thinks he can depend on the love of God even if he rejects Jesus Christ and never repents of his sins, but that's not the biblical message. When it comes to salvation, all unbelievers are enemies of God.
 - i. When we talk about the unconditional love of God, the love that never fails, we are talking about his **complacent** love. This is his love, supremely, in his Son, Jesus Christ. God's love for His Son is without measure or qualifications; He loves His Son fully and perfectly. The love the Father has for His Son extends beyond His Son to those who belong to His Son through the redemptive work. Therefore, only those for whom Christ died experience the complacent love of God as they move from being enemies to the status of children of God.
 - 1. We do not receive this love because of anything in us but because God gives gifts to his Son. From all eternity, He has loved His Son and planned to give Him a portion of humanity so His Son might be the firstborn among many brothers. God loves his Son with the love of complacency, and he demonstrates complacent love for us in that "**while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**"
 - a. **1 John 4:10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
5. Verse 9 - Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.
- a. Wrath of God - Some theologians have opposed the teaching that the Son satisfied the wrath of the Father at the cross. They take exemption to the thought that God's wrath must be satisfied. Some say God does not need satisfaction, and his love is so great that it cancels his wrath.
 - i. According to this view, God is at war with God. God the Father is at odds with God the Son. God the Father is angry at sinners and would pour out his wrath upon the ungodly, but God the Son arrives on the scene and rescues poor humanity from the wrath of the Father. God the Son persuades God the

- Father to set aside his wrath because of love, and love wins. This type of thinking is simply untrue.
- ii. That whole idea presents an internal conflict in the Godhead that is unbiblical.
 - iii. However, the biblical view is that the son comes and satisfies God's righteousness by taking God's wrath upon himself. He comes because the Father sends him. It is the Father's idea from all eternity, to which the Son and the Spirit agree. This is called the Covenant of Redemption. From all eternity, there is one purpose and one mind in the Godhead, and it is the redemption of God's elect.
 - iv. The most basic meaning of salvation is to be rescued from some calamity. Because of Christ, we are rescued from the worst of all possible catastrophes, God's wrath.
- b. Sadly, the modern church does not believe this anymore. Many believe in a god with no wrath, but there would be no need for Christ if sins did not deserve the wrath of God.
- i. **RC Sproul**: Unbelievers say, "That's fine for you, but I do not need Jesus," yet there is nothing in heaven or on earth they need more than Jesus. As long as people are unconcerned about the wrath of god, they feel no need to come to Jesus. If God is real, so is His wrath, and the biblical view of salvation rescues from wrath.
- c. Paul concludes with the thought that we will never be disappointed in our hope because, in Christ, God loves us so profoundly that the Savior died for us while we were still sinners. If we were justified by the death of Christ (by His blood), we are also saved from any future outpouring of God's wrath. If God has done the greater (**justifies us by Christ's blood**), then he will do the lesser (**save us from the wrath of God**).
- i. **1 Thessalonians 1:10** and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.
 - ii. **1 Thessalonians 5:9** For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,

6. Benediction

- a. **John 17:6** “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

Public Reading of Scripture
John 17:1-12