

# Blood of the Covenant: The Atonement as the Work of the New Covenant Mediator

Selected Scriptures

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## Introduction

Well, we return again to our series entitled, *O Perfect Redemption!*—a study on the perfection of the atonement of Christ through the lens of the controversial question, “For whom did Christ die?” And we’ve seen how the doctrine of the extent of the atonement is inextricably linked to the design and nature of the atonement—really to the Gospel itself. And therefore we’ve seen that the matter of the extent of the atonement is intensely practical, because it has significant implications for our understanding of the character of God as well as the virtue of Christ.

We’ve learned what a glorious, unique, bottomless fount for worship is a well-informed understanding of the design and nature of Christ’s sacrifice. To have an absolutely sovereign God, who loves His people unfailingly, and who can never fail in bringing His saving purposes to pass! To have an absolute Champion of a Savior, who with shoulders broadened stands in the place of His people, and bears every ounce of the punishment, wrath, and condemnation that His people are owed because of their sin, drains the cup of divine wrath to its dregs, and infallibly secures every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places for everyone for whom He died!

When your heart grabs ahold of those truths, it’s like you begin to see the glory of God revealed in the face of Christ with greater acuity—like a blurry image gets sharper and sharper, and the beauty it reveals so captures the heart that it frees us. It liberates us from the burden of having to make up for the Father’s failed intentions. It frees us from the bondage of having to complete what the Son left unfinished. It points us away from ourselves and the labyrinth of our own doings, and leads us to rest in the warm embrace of a Savior who declares in victory, “It is finished.”

And we’ve found that when we consider Scripture’s teaching on those matters—on the design and nature of the atonement—we are shut up to understand that the extent of the atonement is particular rather than universal. If the Father always accomplishes His intentions, and if His intention in the atonement was to save sinners, then all for whom Christ atoned will be saved. If the nature of an expiatory sacrifice is that it actually takes away sins, if a propitiatory sacrifice actually satisfies wrath, if Christ’s work of reconciliation actually restores the relationship between God and sinners, if redemption actually secures the release of captives by the payment of a price, then everyone for whom Christ died will be saved. And since hell will not be empty,

since not everyone without exception will finally be saved, we are constrained to conclude that Christ did not die for all without exception. As we've been saying: the **efficacy** of the atonement implies the **particularity** of the atonement. And so a perfect redemption must be a particular redemption.

### **Review: Christ as Priest**

And last week, we looked into another aspect of the nature of the atonement that I mentioned is often not considered in the debate over the extent of the atonement. And that is: seeking to understand the atonement in the context of the high priestly ministry of Christ. We saw how often Scripture speaks of Christ as the great high priest of His people—how especially the Book of Hebrews borrows the conceptual framework of the Levitical priesthood under the Mosaic Covenant in Israel, and in particular the imagery of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, and presents Christ as the greater fulfillment of that entire priestly system. He is “the Apostle and High Priest of our confession,” Hebrews 3:1, having been “designated by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek,” rather than the order of Aaron. There simply is no atonement divorced from the priesthood of Christ. To consider the extent of the atonement apart from Christ’s New Covenant priesthood is to take it out of context.

And *as* our great high priest, Jesus came to do what a high priest had always done: to offer **sacrifice**, and to make **intercession**. He offered sacrifice by laying down His own life as the once-for-all sacrifice that took away our sins and satisfied the wrath of God. Hebrews 2:17 says that He is “a merciful and faithful *high priest* in things pertaining to God,” because He took on human flesh in His incarnation in order “to *make propitiation* for the sins of the people.” But in addition to offering Himself as **sacrifice** in His death, our great high priest now “always lives to make **intercession**” for His people, says Hebrews 7:25. Hebrews 9:24 says, “For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (ESV).

And we saw that from the very beginning of the concept of priesthood, this twofold priestly ministry of sacrifice and intercession are inextricably linked. They are inseparable. We saw how, on the Day of Atonement, the same priest brought the same blood from the altar of sacrifice to the altar of intercession—how he was to take hot coals from the altar of sacrifice and use those very coals to start the fire of intercessory incense. And we saw how the high priest interceded for every worshiper who offered sacrifice. It could never be the case that a priest would refuse to intercede for anyone for whom he offered sacrifice. That would be to abandon the work of the priesthood. Only a terribly faithless high priest would do something like that. No, the high priest offered for everyone for whom he would intercede, and he interceded for everyone for whom he offered. And so we also learned that the **scope** of priestly intercession was identical to and grounded in the scope of priestly sacrifice. They were **co-extensive**.

And we found that Scripture teaches that same is true for Christ's priestly ministry. He offers Himself as sacrifice for the very same number for whom He intercedes before the Father. Just like the Old Testament priests, Christ intercedes for everyone for whom He died, and He died for everyone for whom He intercedes.

But then we asked the question, "For whom does Christ intercede? All without exception, or the elect alone?" And we found that in John 17:9, Jesus explicitly limits His priestly intercession to the elect. He says, "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." And so, since (a) the priestly work of sacrifice and intercession are inextricably linked—so much so that the extent of the two priestly acts must be identical, coextensive; and since (b) Christ says He does not intercede for the world but only for His people; therefore, (c) it's right to conclude that He offered Himself as a sacrifice not for all without exception, but for those whom the Father had given Him. The extent of Christ's atonement—like the extent of His intercession—is limited to the elect.

### **Christ and Covenant**

And so that was last week. This week, I want to focus on a related point, which is also often overlooked in discussions about the atonement. And that is the concept of covenant. The two concepts—priesthood and covenant—are, as I say, intimately related. In Hebrews chapter 7, verse 11, the author argues that the Levitical priesthood could not have been perfect, and that it awaited a perfect fulfillment in Christ, because Psalm 110:4 prophesied of another priest who would arise according to the order of Melchizedek, rather than according to the order of Aaron.

Also in Hebrews 7:11, he says that it was on the basis of the Levitical priesthood that the people received the law. What law? Well, the laws of the Mosaic Covenant. The law is a covenant law. Deuteronomy 29:21 speaks of "the curses of the *covenant* which are written in this book of the *law*." At the foot of Mount Sinai, God enters into covenant with the nation of Israel by revealing to them the law that is summarized in the Ten Commandments. And in Exodus 19:5, God says, "Now then, if you will indeed *obey My voice* and *keep My covenant*, then you shall be My own possession." In other words, the keeping of the Mosaic Covenant was inextricably bound to obeying the law of Moses. Now, back to Hebrews 7. Verse 11 says: On the basis of the Levitical priesthood, the people received the Law, that is, the Mosaic Covenant.

Then, in verse 12, he goes on, "For when the priesthood is changed, of necessity there takes place a change of law also." A change of priesthood requires a change of law, which is to say, a change of covenant. Skip down to verses 18 and 19: "For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment because of its weakness and uselessness (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a *better* hope, through which we

draw near to God.” The “former commandment”—“the Law”—is set aside because of its weakness and uselessness. This can only refer to the Old Covenant. And that becomes plain as we read on. Verse 20: “And inasmuch as it was not without an oath (for they indeed became priests without an oath, but He with an oath through the One who said to Him, ‘The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, “You are a priest forever”’); so much the more also Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant.” You see? A change of priesthood means there has been a change of law. And a change of law means a change of covenant—because there was the setting aside of the old law and an ushering in of a better hope, and Jesus has become the guarantee of a better *covenant*. And He is the priest of that covenant according to the order of Melchizedek. The change from the Aaronic priesthood to the Melchizedekian priesthood is the change from the Mosaic Covenant to the New Covenant.

And so, the New Testament—and especially the Book of Hebrews—reveals that Christ is the priest, or the mediator, of the New Covenant. We’ve already seen Hebrews 7:22. Jump down to chapter 8 verse 6. Our high priest “has obtained a more excellent ministry [than Old Covenant priests, who served a copy and a shadow of the heavenly things], by as much as He is also *the mediator of a better covenant*, which has been enacted on better promises.” Hebrews 9:15: Because His blood truly cleanses the conscience, “For this reason He is the *mediator* of a *new covenant*.” Turn to Hebrews 12:22: “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God,” and, verse 24, “to Jesus, the *mediator of a new covenant*, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.” And you don’t have to turn there, but you remember that wonderful verse in 1 Timothy 2:5, “For there is one God, and *one mediator* also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” Jesus, the God-man, stands as the mediator between God and men—mediating as a priest the salvation-blessings promised to those who partake of the New Covenant—blessings which He won by the great work of atonement that He accomplished on the cross.

And so Christ’s being the mediator of the New Covenant is absolutely essential to and inseparable from His priestly work of atonement. It is *as* this New Covenant priest that Christ offers and intercedes for His people. His mediatorial work is the mediation of the New Covenant. In fact, in Isaiah 42:6, the Father tells the Son that He is going to send Him to save His people, and He actually calls the Son “a covenant to the people.” He says the same thing in Isaiah 49:8: “I will keep You and give You for a *covenant* of the people.” The Son Himself *is* the covenant! In Malachi 3:1, the coming Messiah is called “the *messenger* of the covenant.” His atoning death is the death that is required by a covenant. Hebrews 9:16: “For where a covenant is, there must of necessity be the death of the one who made it.” And so Jesus dies to ratify the New Covenant. His blood is the blood of the covenant. Look at Hebrews 9:19: “For when every commandment had been spoken by Moses to all the people according to the Law, he took the blood of the calves and the goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, ‘*This is the blood of the covenant* which God commanded you,’” Exodus

24:8. But does that sound familiar? At the Last Supper, Jesus gives the cup of communion to the disciples and tells them to drink of it. Matthew 26:28: "...for this is *My blood of the covenant*, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." In Luke 22:20, the phrase is, "This cup which is poured out for you is the *new covenant in My blood*." In Hebrews 13:20, the author says that God "brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through *the blood of the [everlasting] covenant*." And that "everlasting" covenant is, of course, the New Covenant, which does not fade away (2 Cor 3:10).

And so, Christ's work of atonement cannot be abstracted from the New Covenant. What He accomplishes in His priestly mediation of sacrifice and intercession, He accomplishes as the priest of the New Covenant. As one commentator put it, "Jesus' whole work was a *covenant* work; His blood *covenant* blood, His priesthood *covenant* priesthood, His office as Mediator a *covenant* office" (Barcellos and Waldron, *Reformed Baptist Manifesto*, 59–60). And so if we are going to understand the nature, design, and extent of the atonement, we must understand the atonement in light of the New Covenant.

And in my judgment, at least **two key questions** immediately arise. The **first** is the question of **participation**: How is this covenant established with those who partake of its benefits? How do I get into this covenant? How do I lay hold of the blessings that it promises? The **second** is the question of **substance**: What are the promises, or benefits, or blessings of this covenant that Christ purchases by His death? And so we'll spend the rest of our time this morning answering those two questions from Scripture. And similar to last time, after working through the Bible's answers to those two questions, we'll consider a significant **objection** that's often raised, and we'll answer that from Scripture as well.

## **I. Union to the Covenant Head**

In the first place, then, let's consider the question of **participation**. How is this New Covenant established with those who partake of its benefits? And the answer to that question is: **union to the covenant head**. The blessings of the New Covenant purchased by the atonement of Christ are communicated by virtue of our **union to Christ**, the head of the covenant.

And for this, I want to start in Ephesians chapter 1, and verse 3. You know it well. There, Paul praises God, "who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"—where? What are the next two words? "In Christ." Every spiritual blessing that will ever be bestowed upon anyone is communicated to them "in Christ"—which is to say, by virtue of the believer's union with Christ. Christ has purchased, by His blood, every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. And it is only as we are **united** to Him all that He purchased for us becomes ours.

If we had time, we could walk through the New Testament and demonstrate how each blessing of salvation is said to come to us in Christ. We see so many in this passage in Ephesians 1 alone. Verse 4: chosen in Christ; verse 5: adopted through Christ; verse 7: “In Him we have redemption through His blood”; verses 10 and 11: “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance”; verse 13: “You were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise.” Second Corinthians 5:17 says that we are new creatures in Christ, which means regeneration is a consequence of union. Galatians 2:16 says we are “justified in Christ.” And so we lay hold of justification by union with Christ. First Corinthians 1:2 calls Christians “those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus.” Romans 8:38–39 says that nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God which is *in Christ Jesus* our Lord,” and so you could say that the gift of persevering faith is by virtue of our union with Him. First Thessalonians 4:16 calls us “the dead in Christ,” and so not even death will sever this union. And First Corinthians 15:20–22 says that all who are *in Christ* will be made alive in glorification. So, from election to glorification, the only saving blessings granted by the New Covenant are laid hold of **by union to the head** of the New Covenant.

Now, why do I use that language: “*head* of the New Covenant”? It’s because Scripture often represents the believer’s union with Christ as the relationship between the head and the body. Ephesians 5:23 calls Christ “the head of the church,” and “the Savior of the body.” First Corinthians 12:27 says we “are Christ’s body, and individually members of it.” So much is this the case that what happens to Christ the head can be said to have happened to the body the church, and vice versa. In 1 Corinthians 6:15–17, Paul says that if a member of the body of Christ unites himself to a prostitute, he unites Christ the head to that prostitute. In Acts 9:4, the ascended Christ asks Saul why he is persecuting Him. But Paul’s not persecuting Jesus; Jesus is in heaven. Paul’s persecuting Christians. But because the body is united to the head, what you say of the body can be said of the head.

And we see this preeminently in the way that Paul talks about Adam and Christ, because Adam and Christ stand as the two covenant heads of humanity. Adam was the head of the first humanity, and “in Adam,” 1 Corinthians 15:22, “all die.” Those **in union with** Adam bear the punishment of condemnation and spiritual death. As Paul says in Romans 5:19, “As through the one man’s disobedience, the many were constituted sinners.” Adam was the representative head of humanity, and by virtue of humanity’s union with Adam, God counted the actual disobedience of Adam against all who were united to him. Well, in the same way, Jesus, the second and last Adam, is the covenant head of the new humanity, and so His obedience brings justification and righteousness to all who are united to Him. In the second half of Romans 5:19 Paul says, “Even so through the obedience of the One the many will be constituted righteous.” And back to 1 Corinthians 15:22: “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.” That is, everyone united to Christ belongs to Him in such a way that His obedience counts as our obedience. The very works of obedience to Father that He accomplished in His life are credited to our account, and they make up that pure, white robe of righteousness that each believer is

clothed with in justification. And Scripture goes on to say that we have been crucified with Christ (Romans 6:6), we have died with Him (Romans 6:8); we were buried with Him (Romans 6:4); we were raised with Him (Colossians 3:1); and we have even been seated in the heavenly places with Him, Ephesians 2:6 says, “in Christ Jesus.”

Do you see? What happens to the head happens to the body. This **union with Christ** is such that His life is our life; His punishment our punishment; His death our death; His resurrection is our resurrection; His righteousness is our righteousness; His ascension and glorification are our ascension and glorification! Everything that Christ did while He was on earth with respect to the **accomplishment of salvation**, His people are said to have done in Him.

And notice: it is not as if Christ performed His work of mediation without reference to anyone in particular, and then only after we come to faith we’re credited with His actions. No, again: Christ’s people are said to have been crucified with Him and to have died in His death. Though they had not yet been born, God nevertheless counted His people to be in union with their Savior throughout the accomplishment of His redemptive work. The body was always reckoned to be united to the Head—even back to eternity past, because Ephesians 1:4 says, “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.”

Now, all of Christ’s atoning work is inextricable from His role as the high priest of the New Covenant, right? His blood *is* the blood of the New Covenant, and no other covenant. And the only way to lay hold of those blessings purchased by the blood of the New Covenant is through union with Christ, whereby we are united with Christ in His life and in His death, such that His doing and dying are counted as our doing and dying. Since the New Covenant is entered into only by virtue of **union to the covenant head**, we must ask: with whom is Christ united? Are all people without exception united to Christ, or is His union limited to the elect alone? Has anyone who has finally perished in unbelief ever been said to have been “in Christ”? Is it right to speak of any unbeliever as united with Christ in His death?

No, that’s absolutely impossible. Turn to Romans 6. Paul says in verse 5, “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection.” And then in verse 8: “Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.” The only way we can lay hold of the covenant benefits of Christ’s death is to be **united to Him** in His death. But Paul says that there is no such thing as union with Christ in His death without union with Christ in His resurrection. But will any non-elect person be raised to spiritual life with Christ? No. No one who has finally rejected the Gospel will rise unto a resurrection of life on the New Earth after the pattern of Christ’s own bodily resurrection. No one who perishes in their sins will ever be united with Christ in His resurrection. And that means that no one who perishes in their sins has ever been united to Christ in His death.

Follow the argument: (1) We can only receive the New Covenant blessings of salvation purchased by Christ death by being united to Him in His death. (2) Christ is not united to anyone in His death unless they are also united to Him in His resurrection. (3) No one who is united to Christ in His resurrection fails to be raised from the dead unto eternal life in fellowship with Him. (4) Not all without exception are raised from the dead unto eternal life in fellowship with Him; only the elect are. (5) Therefore, not all without exception are united with Him in His death, and His priestly work of atonement as the mediator of the New Covenant was not for all without exception, but for the elect alone.

## II. The Blessings of the New Covenant

The blood of Christ shed in His atoning death on the cross *is* the blood of the New Covenant. And that being the case, then what His blood accomplishes in the atonement is that it purchases the promises and blessings of the New Covenant alone. There are no blessings that accrue from Christ's death apart from union to Him; and there is no union to Him apart from covenant; and therefore, it is only the blessings of the covenant that traverse that connective tissue of union. Well, that brings us to the **second** key question. We've answered the question of participation. Now we come to the question of **substance**. What are the promises, or benefits, or blessings of this New Covenant that Christ purchases by His death?

Well, there are several passages in the Old Testament that prophesy the coming of this New Covenant to replace the Old. We'll limit ourselves to three: one in Jeremiah and two in Ezekiel—each of which speak of a time when God will regather Israel from exile and once again pour out His blessings upon them. Let's turn first to Jeremiah 31. This is the one passage in the Old Testament that mentions the "new covenant" by name, and it's the one that the author of Hebrews quotes in its entirety in Hebrews chapter 8 to say that the church partakes of it. Jeremiah 31, starting in verse 31: "'Behold, days are coming,' declares Yahweh, 'when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them,' declares Yahweh. 'But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,' declares Yahweh, 'I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, "Know Yahweh," for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,' declares Yahweh, 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.'" Now let's turn to Ezekiel chapter 11, and verses 19 and 20. There we read the Lord announcing some of these same promised blessings: "And I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them. Then they will be My people, and I shall be their God." And now turn over to Ezekiel chapter 36,



and we'll start in verse 25. God says, "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances."

So, from these passages, what are the blessings of the New Covenant that are purchased by the blood of the covenant? At minimum—there may be others but there are certainly not less than—First: spiritual cleansing (Ezekiel 36:25). Second: the removal of a heart of stone and the implanting of a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26). And what is that? It is regeneration. It is the new birth which brings forth saving faith in the heart. Third: the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart (Ezekiel 36:27). Fourth: the writing of the law on the heart (Jeremiah 31:33) so as to ensure obedience ("I will *cause* you to walk in My statutes," Ezekiel 36:27). Fifth: the knowledge of God, such that evangelism becomes unnecessary (Jeremiah 31:34); Sixth: restoration to a proper relationship with God ("They will be My people, and I shall be their God"). And seventh: the forgiveness of sins (Jeremiah 31:34). These are the blessings that were obtained by the great high priest and mediator of the New Covenant, when He shed His blood—the blood of the covenant—for those united to Him. And so we must ask: Do all people without exception receive these blessings promised in the New Covenant? Do all people without exception experience spiritual cleansing, regeneration, Spirit-indwelling, the knowledge of God, the forgiveness of sins? No. Sadly, they do not. The only ones who can be said to be beneficiaries of the New Covenant blessings are those who actually experience the spiritual cleansing, regeneration, faith, Spirit-indwelling, obedient life, and forgiveness that was purchased for them. And who are they? They are the elect alone.

Those who deny particular redemption claim that we've misunderstood. "Christ has provisionally obtained these New Covenant blessings for all without exception," they say. "But He only applies those blessings to those who believe." But that just won't do. In the first place, it militates against the efficacy inherent to every single term the Scripture uses for "atonement." Second, it divorces redemption accomplished (by the death of Christ) from redemption applied (by the intercession of Christ). It's to claim that Christ offers Himself as priest for those whom He later refuses to intercede. And we saw last week that that is an utter impossibility. But third, that's just not what these New Covenant passages say. They don't say the New Covenant will *provide* the *possibility* of regeneration. They don't say that the New Covenant will make the indwelling Spirit and forgiveness of sins *available*. They say that God will *do* these things. The blessings of the New Covenant are salvation realities, not possibilities. John Piper makes this observation when he says, Piper observes, "The blood of Christ did not merely purchase possibilities; it purchased actualities. The faith of God's chosen and called was purchased by "the blood of the covenant" (Matt. 26:28). The promise of the new covenant, that a heart of unbelief would be replaced by a heart of faith (Ezek. 11:19; 36:26), was invincibly obtained by

the death of Jesus. The term definite atonement refers to this truth—when God sent his Son to die, he had in view the definite acquisition of a group of undeserving sinners, whose faith and repentance he obtained by the blood of his Son” (*FHHC*, 642–43).

So you see, Jesus does not die for His people as a mere romantic demonstration of how much He thinks of us. No, our great high priest dies because by His death He secures the benefits of the New Covenant for His people. And those benefits include the Holy Spirit’s certain application of those blessings purchased by Christ’s death. Therefore, every one for whom Christ has died cannot fail to be saved. And since not all without exception come into possession of such things, it is evident that the blood of the New Covenant was not shed for them.

Now, sometimes, people say, “Well, OK. I agree that Christ’s atonement purchased the salvation of the elect. But since Scripture also says He died for all, I think He died to do more than that! He bought salvation for the elect, but then He purchased other, non-saving blessings for the non-elect.” You say, “What would those be?” Like the universal free offer of the Gospel to all we come in contact with. Like other common-grace blessings short of salvation, like the blessings of family and friendship, or the capacity to enjoy the beauty of the creation. Now, don’t get me wrong: I believe in the universal free offer of the Gospel, as well as in the existence of common grace. And while those are in some sense a logical, indirect result of Christ’s atonement, I do not believe that the cross purchased those blessings.

Why? Because common grace and the universal Gospel offer are not provisions of the New Covenant. We read nothing about them in all those passages that prophesy New Covenant blessing. To suppose that Christ died to purchase non-saving benefits for all without exception is, as one theologian put it, “to remove the work of Christ from its new covenant context. . . . Christ’s atoning work cannot [in any sense] be extended to all people without also extending the new covenant benefits and privileges to all, which minimally includes regeneration, forgiveness of sins, and the gift of the Spirit” (Wellum, *FHHC*, 522). To do so would be to make Christ something other than the mediator of the New Covenant. It would be to conceive of His blood as something other than the blood of the New Covenant. But Scripture never does this. Christ dies as the priest of the New Covenant, and not of any other covenant.

### **III. Objection: The Mixed Community of Israel**

And so we have answered the question of participation: sinners partake of the blessings of the New Covenant by union to the covenant head. And yet, since not all are united to Christ in His death, His atonement is particular rather than universal. And we have answered the question of substance: Christ purchases by His blood the blessings of the New Covenant alone, and those blessings are salvation blessings. And yet, since not all are finally saved, His atonement is particular rather than universal.

That brings us to a **third point**, a significant **objection** raised against the argument that the high priest of the New Covenant only mediates on behalf of those who belong to the New Covenant. They argue that, on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16, the high priest of Israel offered sacrifice and interceded for both believers and non-believers. You say, “How does that work”? Well, not everyone in the nation of Israel was a genuine believer in and follower of God. The assembly of Israel included believers and non-believers. The atonement accomplished by the high priest was offered on behalf of all of the assembly alike, but, they say, it was only effective for the remnant of believing ones. They argue, in the same way, Christ’s atonement was offered for all without exception but is effective only for those who appropriate it by faith.

How do we respond? Well, first, we must begin by observing that the ministry of the Levitical priesthood was strikingly particular. In Hebrews 5:1, the author describes the high priests as those “taken from among men” and “appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God.” Both of these designations point to the personal, representational nature of the priesthood. That the high priest was “taken from among men” meant that he stood in solidarity with them; and that he was “appointed on behalf of men” meant that he was there to represent the interests of his fellow sinners before a holy God. Now, whom did the Levites represent before God? All people without exception? No, they represented the covenant people of Israel, and no one else in the world.

This was nowhere more beautifully illustrated than by the vestments of the priests of Israel. Exodus 28:17–21 tells us that the priests were to wear a breastplate that contained twelve precious stones which corresponded with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. When Aaron entered the holy place to minister on behalf of the people in the presence of God, Exodus 28:29 says he was to “carry the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment over his heart.” Verse 30: the names “shall be over Aaron’s heart when he goes in before Yahweh.” This was an intensely personal representation of particular people. The high priest took names into the holy of holies! And they were the names of the tribes of the nation of Israel. And I can’t resist commenting that *your* high priest took names to the cross! And though He wasn’t wearing a breastplate, your name, believer, was on His heart! That’s why we sing, “My name is graven on His hands, / My name is written on His heart!” I’m getting ahead of myself. The point here is: there is never an indication anywhere in the Old Testament that a priest of Israel sacrificed or interceded for the Gentile nations or the world in general. “The covenantal blessings of atonement are [accomplished] only for those within the covenant community” (Wellum, *FHHC*, 525).

That is key to understanding why the objection we’re addressing fails. Those who make that objection frame the comparison between Old and New Covenants as if (a) the believing remnant of Israel corresponded to (a') the Church, and as if (b) the unbelievers in Israel corresponded to

(b') the unbelieving world in the present age. But this is an apples-to-oranges comparison. Instead, the proper analogy is that (a) the covenant community of Israel corresponds to (a') the covenant community of the Church, while (b) the Gentile nations surrounding Israel correspond to (b') the unbelieving world in the present age. For both covenants, the high priest offers and intercedes only on behalf of the covenant community.

We've said it before in our series, but on the Day of Atonement, the high priest did not slay a goat on behalf of the Egyptians. There was no blood sprinkled on the altar for the Canaanites. Leviticus 16 is plain: the high priest made atonement, verse 16, "because of the impurities of *the sons of Israel* and because of *their* transgressions in regard to all *their* sins"; verse 17: "for himself and for his household and *for all the assembly of Israel.*" Verse 21: Aaron laid his hands on the head of the scapegoat and confessed over it "all the iniquities of *the sons of Israel*, and all *their* transgressions in regard to all *their* sins." The priestly ministry was limited to the covenant community alone.

Now, it's true that the covenant community of Israel was comprised of both believers and unbelievers in Yahweh. The Mosaic Covenant was a national covenant, such that all Israelites—elect and reprobate, believing and unbelieving—enjoyed the benefits of the covenant made with the nation. Ahab was a wicked king who did not know Yahweh (1 Kgs 16:30–33), but even Ahab would have received the covenant sign of circumcision according to Genesis 17:10. He would have had the privilege of eating the Passover meal, according to Exodus 12. Though he was a wicked king, he was a king nonetheless, and so he lived and ruled over the land that was promised to David in 2 Samuel 7. Unbelieving Ahab experienced the blessings of the national covenant even though he didn't know Yahweh. And that would have included the blessings of the Day of Atonement, in which the Lord granted that His wrath against Israel's sin would be temporarily (Heb 9:9–10; 10:1–4), though truly (Heb 9:13), propitiated (cf. Rom 3:25–26), so that His anger would not consume them and cut them off from His presence forever.

However, there is marked discontinuity between the Mosaic Covenant community and the New Covenant community. Go back to Jeremiah 31. The Mosaic Covenant community was, by definition, mixed; both true believers and unbelievers made up the covenant nation. In the language of Jeremiah 31:34, each man had to teach his neighbor and each man his brother saying, "Know Yahweh." Evangelism was a necessity within the covenant community of Israel. But a chief distinction between the Old and New Covenants is that the New Covenant community "will *not* teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for *they will all know Me*, from the least of them to the greatest of them,' declares the LORD, 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.'" By definition, the New Covenant community will be comprised of only believers, only those who know Yahweh, only those who have the law written on their hearts, only those who experience the full forgiveness of sin. There is no "remnant" within the New Covenant community. And

that's part of why the New Covenant is so much better than the Old: it is a better covenant, enacted on better promises, because everyone embraced within this covenant is brought all the way home to salvation.

Because of this, the priestly mediation of the high priest of the New Covenant will not include any except those who are His people. Unbelieving Israelites were embraced under the Old Covenant priesthood because unbelievers were embraced as a part of the Old Covenant community, so long as they belonged to the nation by circumcision. But because the New Covenant is a better covenant, and saves all those within its embrace, the priestly mediation of the New Covenant is particular, and not universal.

### **Conclusion**

And so here we are once again, at the foot of the cross, marveling at the power of Christ's blood to save everyone for whom it was shed. I pray, as we take so many looks at the cross from so many different angles, that you do see sharper and sharper images of the glory of God shining in the face of Christ. Jonathan Edwards said, "Tis most sweet to the godly to behold the beauty and enjoy the love of Christ the Mediator. He appears the most beautiful to them of anything in the world; He is to them as the rose and lily, as a bundle of myrrh; His love is a sweet fragrancy. None can tell the power of that joy that they feel from the consideration that so lovely a person loves them so as to lay down His life for them."

For me. For me! Not just for a faceless, nameless group! Not just for anyone who chooses to... fill in the blank. No, *my* name is engraved in precious stones upon the breastplate of my high priest! And to know that One so lovely as that One has loved me so as to lay down His life for me—to have united me to Himself, and to communicate to me all the blessings that He won by His own obedience and sacrifice—O, I can testify to the power of that joy! I can testify to how beautiful He appears to the eyes of my heart! I can testify to the sweetness of the love of Christ my Mediator! And my prayer is that you can say the same.

I want to close with a quote from Spurgeon. He says, "We owe all to Jesus crucified. What is your life, my brethren, but the cross? Whence comes the bread of your soul but from the cross? What is your joy but the cross? What is your delight, what is your heaven, but the Blessed One, once crucified for you, who ever liveth to make intercession for you? Cling to the cross, then, put both arms around it! Hold to the Crucified, and never let Him go. Come afresh to the cross at this moment, and rest there now and for ever! Then, with the power of God resting upon you, go forth and preach the cross! Tell out the story of the bleeding Lamb. Repeat the wondrous tale, and nothing else. .... Proclaim that Jesus died for sinners."