

longings of his heart. In the final analysis, therefore, the success or failure of the entire redemption plan of a sovereign and omnipotent God—a *redemption purchased at so great a price*—ultimately depends, not on the *invincibility* of God's own will, but on the depraved choices of the sinner's enslaved will.

Such a view of the atonement, though, does not square with a number of biblical teachings regarding Christ's accomplishments at Calvary. We don't have space to deal with all of these passages, but I will focus on a few that clearly show dimensions of Christ's redemptive work that teachers today either ignore or avoid. Let's take a look at some of these passages.

**Sacrifices in Israel**—There were many different animal sacrifices required under Mosaic Law. These blood offerings were only temporary and could not actually take away sin. But they were also types and shadows (prophetic pictures) that pointed to what Christ would do when he offered up himself “once for all” to finally and completely redeem his people from their sins.

The most important of these offerings took place annually on the “Day of Atonement” when the high priest entered the “Holy of Holies” with the blood of a lamb and made “atonement” for sin. Was this a universal offering for the sins of everyone in the world, or a specific sacrifice that secured forgiveness for Israel alone? The Bible is clear on this matter: “Aaron shall bear the names of the *children of Israel* in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goeth in unto the holy place...” (*Ex 28:15-21,29-30*). This pictured the love of Christ in his heart for his own as he represented them before a holy God. And again, “Take two onyx stones, and grave on them the names of the *children of Israel*. . . Aaron shall bear their names before the Lord upon his two shoulders” (*Ex 28:9-12*). This pictured Christ, the High Priest, shouldering the responsibilities of the chosen people of God. There were no provisions for the sins of the rest of the world, except for the few individuals like Rahab who through an act of faith effectively became “Jews.”

In many of the other offerings that dealt with individual sin, the hands of the guilty were laid on the head of the sacrificial animal, thus symbolically indicating that that person's sins were imputed to the animal, which then was put to death on that person's behalf. Again, it was not a universal transaction, but designed to deal with a specific person's transgressions.

These few sacrificial “types” are typical of all the rest of the Old Testament sacrifices. Based on their exclusive nature, should we not expect that it would be the sins of a specific people, and not everyone without exception, that would be imputed to the Messiah? In the type, it was only the sins of the Old Covenant people, Israel, that were remitted on the Day of Atonement. In the antitype, only the sins of Christ's New Covenant people, the church, were laid on him on that final and once-for-all Day of Atonement. The point is that all of the Old Testament sacrifices were substitutionary—“in the place of”—specific persons or groups of people. So also was Jesus' death substitutionary—“in the place of”—a specific people, the elect, the church, the bride. Does this mean that only a few will be saved? or that salvation is limited to some specific race or country? Absolutely not, for we are told that the redeemed of the Lord will comprise “a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” (*Rev 7:9*).

**John 3:16**—“*God so loved the world.*” Those who teach a universal atonement are quick to point to the word “world” in this verse as proof positive that Jesus died for everybody. To make such an assertion, however, one must impose a Western understanding of “world” that is quite different from its intended meaning. Who was Jesus speaking to? a bigoted Jewish leader who believed that the Israelites were the exclusive object of God's love. When Nicodemus heard the word “world” connected to God's love, he would have been aghast. To him, “world” meant “everything that is non-Jewish,” or “that which is outside of Judaism”—a very negative exclusion that regarded all Gentiles as “dogs” and certainly unworthy of God's love!

To universalize the word “world” one must also set the High Priestly work of the Son at odds with the redemptive purposes of the Father. If indeed it is a universal love for all mankind that moved the Father to send his Son to suffer and die on their behalf, one must ask why the Son is not equally inclusive in his final High Priestly prayer. In that prayer, however, Jesus deliberately restricts his intercession to a specific number: “Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to *as many as thou hast given him. . . I pray for them: I pray not for the world*, but for them which thou hast given me” (*John 17:2,9*).

**John 4:42**—“*Savior of the world.*” This is another verse that some offer as proof of a universal atonement. Again, however, they are not doing justice to the context and setting. A Samaritan woman had been quite surprised when a Jew spoke to her and asked for a drink of water. She knew that the Samaritans were hated by the Jews. When Jesus revealed himself to her as the Messiah—not only of the Jews, but of the Samaritans as well—she believed him and told her fellow Samaritans. They went to hear him for themselves, and many believed. They were thrilled to learn that the Messiah had come to provide salvation not only for Israel, but for believing “non-Jews” as well. This is what they meant when they testified, “We have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.”

**John 6:37**—“*All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.*” Those who seek to add biblical credibility to their “free will” perspectives often quote the last part of this verse, “Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” But Christ's promise must not be disconnected from the preceding statement: “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” They “come” because they have been “given.” And when were they given? The only biblical answer is “before the foundation of the world” (*Eph 1:4*).

**John 6:44,65**—“*No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. . . No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.*” These two verses are actually a continuation of the truth Jesus had already proclaimed in verse 37—“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me.” In fact, the idea that man's will is not “free” to turn from sin and follow Christ without a prior work of sovereign grace was so offensive that, “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him” (*v 66*). It's still a “hard saying” (*v 60*) for many today. In spite of these clear statements from Christ himself, those who believe in “free will” insist that unregenerate sinners have the inherent power to come to Christ on their own—that it is a completely unaided choice that God leaves up to them.

**John 10:15**—“*I lay down my life for the sheep.*” No one would argue that the expression “lay down my life” refers to the atonement and that “sheep” designates those for whom Christ died. To be consistent, those who believe in universal atonement—that Christ died for “everyone”—must believe that Jesus includes every person in the world when he says “sheep,” since he says it was “the sheep” for whom he made atonement. But in this passage Jesus does not give the word “sheep” a universal meaning. There were those he specifically *excluded*: “But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep” (*v 26*). The “sheep” had been “given” unto him by the Father (*v 29*) and he knew them, “I know my sheep” (*v 14*). He knew all whom the Father had “ordained to eternal life” (*Acts 13:48*). And he gives us here a cause and effect that must not be ignored: “Ye believe not, *because* ye are not of my sheep.” Sinners do not become “sheep” because they believe. They “believe” because they *are* sheep—“*Other sheep* I have. . . them also I *must bring*, and *they shall* hear my voice” (*v 16*).

**The Book of Acts**—While not directly related to our subject, it is significant to note that many of the components of modern evangelism are never found in the Book of Acts, the inspired story of the most effective period of evangelism in all of church history. For example, “*God loves you*” has become an almost trite cliché in modern gospel presentations, yet the word “love” is *never* used in any of the gospel proclamations recorded in Acts. “God loves you” is never said to anyone, nor is the phrase, “Christ died for you.” The apostles never pleaded with sinners to “give your heart to Jesus,” nor did they use “altar calls” or ask anyone to repeat a “sinner's prayer.” Instead, they simply bore witness to the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, proclaiming him as the only Lord and Savior. And what is abundantly clear in the book of Acts is that any believing response to the gospel message is not attributed to an exercise of the sinner's alleged “free will,” but to the sovereign, electing grace of God. There are two passages where this truth is made abundantly clear.

**Acts 13:48**—“*When the Gentiles heard this, they. . . glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.*” Up to this point in redemptive history, the Jews believed salvation to belong to them exclusively. But now, as the gospel was being widely proclaimed, many *Gentiles* were savingly responding. How is it that these people were coming to Christ? Was it simply a matter of “choice”—their “decision” based on the exercise of their own “free will”? Or was this new influx of non-Jewish believers the result of the exercise of *God's will*—an inevitable manifestation of his eternal purposes in Christ? The text is both clear and unmistakable. It does not say, “as many as believed were ordained to eternal life,” as today's popular teaching would require. But it says, “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” We must not reverse *cause* and *effect*. The Gentiles' believing response did not arise from the free exercise of their own wills, but from an enabling act of the Holy Spirit.

By the way, the work of the Holy Spirit is in complete accord with the work of the other persons of the Godhead. Election is the work of the Father. Atonement is the work of the Son. Regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. Their roles in redemption may differ, but not their purpose. Nor are the recipients of their divine favor different. Before time began, the Father chose a bride for his Son from among Adam's fallen race. “In the

fullness of time” Jesus entered human history to redeem his bride, taking their sins upon himself, settling their debt on the accursed tree, and rising from the dead to give them eternal life. But the Father also requires those he has chosen to “believe on him whom he hath sent” (*6:29*). This is where the Holy Spirit does his work. Left to themselves, none of the elect would ever believe. The Holy Spirit's role is to bring the message of the gospel to all who have been “ordained to eternal life,” regenerate their hearts and minds through the new birth, thus not only enabling them to believe, but rendering such faith certain. From beginning to end, it's the same purpose, the same plan, the same “people.”

**Acts 16:14**—“*A certain woman named Lydia. . . heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.*” Some say this verse actually means, “After Paul's message and invitation, Lydia opened her heart and came forward to accept Christ.” But Luke is very specific about the order of events—the *cause* and *effect*. Lydia's conversion did not come about because she simply weighed the evidence Paul provided and made the right “choice.” *First*, the Lord opened her heart; *then* she believed. The *cause* was the enabling power of the Holy Spirit (*see John 6:44,65*). The *effect* was a believing response.

It is commonly taught that there's “one thing God won't do, he won't force you.” Lost sinners are said to have the natural ability to “make the right choice.” But the Bible doesn't teach this—it pictures sinners as *hopelessly depraved* in heart and mind: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? . . . The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. . . The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (*Jer 17:9; Rom 8:7; 1 Cor 2:14*).

Those who say “God won't force you” build a straw man. They say that we are teaching that *unwilling* sinners are dragged kicking and screaming into the kingdom. But that's not so. The Bible says, “Thy people *shall be willing* in the day of thy power” (*Psalms 110:3*). Helpless unbelief is at the very core of the sinner's problem. Not only does the sinner have a natural and insurmountable aversion to the gospel, but his bondage to unbelief is made certain by Satan himself—“The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (*2 Cor 4:4*). But the Holy Spirit, in regeneration, is sent “to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (*Acts 26:18; 2 Cor 4:6*).

**Acts 20:28**—“*Feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*” Christ's precious blood was not shed indiscriminately for all mankind, but specifically for his “people,” his “sheep,” his “bride.” Those who teach universal redemption do not do justice to the “substitutionary” nature of Jesus' death and resurrection. His sinless life, his voluntary death and his victorious resurrection is repeatedly described as “in the place of” someone else. If that “someone else” is all mankind, then all mankind *must* be saved. A just God would not exact a second penalty of death from someone whose death sentence has already been paid. That would be “*double jeopardy*”—a gross injustice that not even human courts allow. Nor would a just God withhold the reward of Jesus' active obedience to the law—eternal life—from those for whom he rendered that obedience.

In Romans 6 Paul uses some strong Greek words to emphasize the death of Christ as *substitutionary*. All those for whom Christ died were *co-crucified, co-buried, and co-raised* with him. When he died, they died with him. When he was buried, they were buried with him. When he arose, they rose with him. When he ascended to his Father's side, they ascended with him. These benefits have not simply been made *available*; they've already been *applied* to all those in whose place Jesus died and rose again.

**Ephesians 5:23-32**—“*Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it*” (v 25). How could Paul have been more specific in defining the object of Jesus' love and the beneficiary of his death? He loved *the church*. He died for *the church*. He is the “head” of *the church* (v 23). He is the “savior” of *the church* (v 23). It is *the church* he made “holy” (v 27). And Paul says of *the church*, he will “present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle” (v 27). Redeeming love did not embrace all of fallen mankind; it was focused on a “chosen people” (1 Peter 2:9)—*the church*.

Actually, the primary focus of this passage is the relationship between believing husbands and wives. To stress the importance of that union, Paul sets up the marriage between Christ and his chosen bride, *the church*, as the ultimate example. If a husband's love is to be focused exclusively on his own wife, is it not clear that the love of Christ for his bride is equally exclusive? Imagine how a wife would feel if her husband told her, “Honey, I love you greatly, but I have to tell you that I love all of the other women in the world just as much.” Yet, when it comes to the extent of Christ's redeeming love, this is what we hear. Christ supposedly loves all sinners equally—*enough to die for all of them*—yet whether any will ever become his “bride” depends solely on them. For most, neither the love nor the death of Christ will be to any avail—they'll perish anyway. While such teaching may seem to glorify the extent of God's love, it's not only contrary to biblical truth, but it actually demeans the husband-like love of Christ for his bride and his bride alone.

**2 Peter 3:9**—As if to settle the issue once-for-all, opponents to the biblical doctrine of a specific atonement will often respond, “But the Bible says that ‘God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.’” This is unquestionably one of the most misquoted and misused verses in all of the Bible. Those who take refuge in this passage conveniently leave out the words “*is longsuffering to us-ward*” that should be included between “God is” and “not willing that any should perish.” They then proceed to define the pronouns “any” and “all” as inclusive of all mankind.

It is not only an argument based on a misuse of Scripture, but on a misuse of English grammar as well. Whether English or Greek, it is inappropriate usage to arbitrarily define a pronoun to suit one's presuppositions without reference to its antecedents. Who Peter had in mind when he used the pronoun “all” in the last half of the verse must be determined by who he had in mind in an earlier antecedent noun or pronoun. The previous pronoun “any” would qualify as an antecedent for the pronoun “all,” but it still would not tell us exactly who the “any” or “all” refers to. In the part that is often left out, we find yet another pronoun that can serve as the antecedent for both “any” and “all.” It is the “us” of the hyphenated “us-ward.” At this point we are getting closer to just who Peter has in mind by the words “any” and “all.” That

he includes himself is clear from his use of the word “us.” We have still not determined who else he includes as the recipients of God's “longsuffering” nature, so we must continue our search for an even more definitive antecedent.

As we work our way backward from 3:9 to the beginning of Peter's letter, we find a number of nouns that might serve as an antecedent to “any” and “all,” but must rule out most because of the “us” that includes Peter. It cannot include the “scoffers” of chapter 3 or the “false prophets” or “false teachers” of chapter 2 since Peter would never include himself in such ungodly company. The first suitable antecedent we discover for the pronouns in 3:9, therefore, is the “beloved” of 3:1—the very same “beloved” he describes in his opening salutation as “them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (1:1).

This wonderful passage, therefore, when properly quoted and understood, does not support the notion of a universal atonement, but rather assures believers that God's “longsuffering” with regard to the compounding evils of a cursed world means that final judgment will not fall until “any” and “all” of those promised to his Son have been born in the normal course of history, regenerated by the Holy Spirit and glorified at the return of Christ. Only then will the accumulated offenses of the enemies of the cross receive their just retribution. It is such an important truth and reason for hope in a world gripped by sin and despair that in his closing words, Peter once again reminds these “beloved” ones that “the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation” (3:15).

**Can Elephants Fly?**—Modern evangelism assumes that a sinner can choose Christ at will. It is taught that sinners *can* “do good,” even though Scripture declares, “There is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Rom 3:12). An elephant may look up in the sky and think, “I'm going to fly just like those birds!” That may work for an imaginary creature like Disney's Dumbo; but for real elephants, flying is not an option. It's a choice they're not free to make, because it's not *according to their nature*. Are unregenerate sinners “free” to make choices? Yes, but only *according to their nature*. This is what Jeremiah meant when he said—“Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (13:23).

Today's notion that sinners have the inherent ability to “do good” also betrays a common misconception about what it means to “do good.” Measured on a horizontal level, sinners are certainly capable of doing “good deeds” to one another. On a horizontal level, the Pharisees were very “good.” They were pillars of the community with impeccable moral standards and generous toward those in need. The typical Pharisee of Jesus' day would be quickly elected to the “board of elders” in the typical church of our day. Horizontally, they were indeed capable of “doing good.” But when Jesus measured them on a vertical plane, he said they were “like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matt 23:27).

Whether the unbelieving Pharisees of Christ's day, or the unbelieving moralists and humanitarians of our day, that which their fellow unbelievers may regard as “good” inevitably and without exception becomes “filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6) when judged by God's uncompromising standards of righteousness. Before

God, the lost are totally incapable of “doing good.” The only good “work” that they can do that is acceptable to God is to “believe” in Christ (John 6:29). But that's the rub. Apart from being born again by the Holy Spirit, they don't have the natural ability to do that good “work.” Left to the natural bent of their own depraved hearts, sinners will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead (Luke 16:31). This is the very essence of God's work of regeneration—a spiritual transformation that enables sinners to believe. The Holy Spirit first “opened Lydia's heart,” then and only then did she possess the power to believe.

Most of us have seen the famous painting that depicts Jesus standing outside of a door, gently knocking to gain admission. It is supposed to represent access to the sinner's heart and deliberately has no knob on the outside. The message is that Jesus is powerless to do anything except to knock and hope that the sinner will let him in. Such a picture is a gross distortion of biblical truth. It is based on Revelation 3:20—a passage that is not dealing with an evangelical call to the unconverted, but with the warnings and exhortations of Christ to a wayward church. True, the passage does say that it is not Jesus himself who opens the door, but rather those who “hear” his voice. But who is it that “hears” his voice? Is it not “sheep”? (see John 10:27). It is not an appeal to unregenerate sinners to “give their hearts to Jesus,” but a rebuke to an assembly whose worldly interests had all but destroyed their former intimate fellowship with Christ.

Those who preach “free will” say God has voluntarily made his own will subservient to man's will. Do you not see that this would make the will of *man* sovereign, not the will of *God*; and the role of the Holy Spirit in salvation merely to be that of a divine cheerleader, trying to coax the sinner into believing, but powerless to actually instill faith? A fair question to ask these who believe that salvation totally hinges upon a sinner's “choice” to believe or to not believe is—*Why do they so often pray with such passion that God will “save” a lost friend or relative?* It seems to me that such prayers are pointless. It's not the will of God that needs convincing, but the will of the lost sinner. Why waste your time arguing with God? He can't answer your prayer even if he wanted to because he has surrendered the power of free choice to the sinner himself. It would be wiser instead to try to argue that sinner into the kingdom, because God can't help you.

God is portrayed today as practically bending over backwards trying to save everyone. *But is everyone saved?* If we accept such a portrayal of God, we have no choice but to conclude that it's possible for God's plans and purposes to be defeated—in spite of his personal assurance—“My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure...I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isaiah 46:10-11; see Dan 4:35). Most professing believers are not serious students of God's word, and are thus easy prey to false teaching. Merely because a teaching is popular doesn't make it true. May God give us all a Berean spirit to more carefully examine every teaching that comes our way—including this tract—they “searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11).

—Adapted from the writings of **Jon Zens**

**“I lay down my life for the sheep”**

**John 10:15**

**Does God Have a Plan?**—Immediately after the tragic story of Adam's deliberate sin and the resulting condemnation and death his disobedience brought to the entire human race, God revealed the broad outline of a redemptive plan: “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). This was not a “patch up” response to something gone wrong, as the teaching of some would imply, but a timely disclosure of an existing plan that was already in place “before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9). Since that wonderful announcement, human history has unfolded with divine precision toward the sure and inevitable consummation of that plan. Whatever twists and turns the Old Testament narratives record, it is an account that is as much or more prophesy than it is history. It is a story that points with absolute certainty to the day when Jesus, the promised “seed” of Genesis 3:15, would appear to provide redemption for all who had been “chosen in him before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4) and destroy Satan and his ungodly “seed” in the process. Neither a minute early nor a minute late, but “when the fulness of the time was come” (Gal 4:4), Genesis 3:15 was fulfilled as promised.

The redemption of the elect and the defeat of Satan were made certain by God's sovereign and irresistible supervision of all providence. Even in the wicked designs of Satan and evil actions of sinful men, it is not their plans that prevail, but God's. The certainty of God's redemptive purpose in spite of all evil intents to the contrary is what Joseph spoke of when he told his brethren, “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen 50:20). Similarly, Acts 2:23 and 4:27-28 record the wicked actions of Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel in conspiring to kill Jesus. Once again, however, it was God's redemptive purpose that prevailed, even in their evil deeds, for it is said that they did “whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” Jesus did not die at their hands because something went wrong, but because: “It pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief” (Isaiah 53:10).

Did Jesus die just to make salvation “*possible*” for all mankind, or to *actually secure* the salvation of many, but not all? The popular message of our day goes something like this:

God loves you. Christ died for you. He wants to save you. His plan for you is heaven. He stands at the door with the ticket paid for the trip. But there's one thing he won't do. He won't force you. The choice is up to you. But he has done everything else. Won't you accept God's destiny for your life, and let him save you?

In other words, God makes salvation *available* to everyone, but *actually secures* the salvation of no one. Only those sinners with the good sense to “*accept*” his offer will be saved. Without the sinner's consent, the infinite and sovereign God of heaven and earth is powerless to save anyone—no matter how intense the