



Limited Atonement?

When Christ died and shed His blood on the Cross, He provided the way for man to be saved from God's judgment. There are professing Christians who believe that this provision made by Christ was not designed for everyone. They believe that Christ's suffering, His shed blood and work of redemption on the Cross was only for an "elect" number of sinners who God predetermined would be saved. Everyone else – those who God did *not* choose for salvation will be eternally lost. In short, people are predetermined by God to belong to an elect or a non-elect group. Christ died only for the elect. This belief is known as the doctrine of "limited atonement." The saving value of Christ's death is limited to those who God has elected to be saved. "Calvinists hold that in the intention and secret plan of God Christ died for the elect only."¹ It is God, they *claim*, who determined this limitation.

"Limited atonement" and the gravity of its error have been noted elsewhere. This article documents the overwhelming case against "limited atonement" by listing some of the biblical passages that unambiguously declare that salvation is provided and available for **ALL** – because all are sinners. It also presents two syllogisms – one biblical, the other diabolical.

¹ L Boettner, http://www.the-highway.com/atonement_Boettner.html

The scriptures below reveal the following:

- God's explicit **intention** as to who should be saved as seen in His **love** and **grace** to **all**.
- God's explicit view of **all** (everyone) as guilty sinners.
- God's view of the purpose and scope **of Christ's death**.

With this revelation in mind we need to ask:

- Are only an "elect" number of people sinners and lost, so that Christ died for them only?
- Does God only love an "elect" number of people?
- Why does God call all men to repentance?
- Is God's unlimited love and grace to all the lost to be compromised by "limited atonement?"

It is Written!

1. Ezekiel 18:23: "Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord GOD: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?"
2. Psalm 145:18: "The LORD is nigh **unto all** them that call upon him, **to all** that call upon him in truth."
3. Matthew 9:13: "But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."
4. Matthew 10:32: "**Whosoever** therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven."
5. Matthew 18:11: "For the Son of man is come to **save that which was lost**."
6. Matthew 11:28: "Come unto me, **all ye that labour and are heavy laden**, and I will give you rest."
7. Mark 16:15: "And he said unto them, Go ye into **all** the world, and preach the **gospel** to **every** creature."
8. Luke 19:10: "For the Son of man is come to **seek** and to **save that which was lost**."
9. Luke 24:47: "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."
10. John 3:15: "That **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."
11. John 3:16: "For God **so loved the world**, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."
12. John 7:37: "In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If **any man thirst, let him come** unto me, and drink."
13. John 10:9: "I am the door: by me if **any man enter** in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture."
14. Acts 10:43: "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name **whosoever believeth** in him shall receive remission of sins."

15. Romans 3:9: "What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both **Jews** and **Gentiles**, that **they are all under sin.**"
16. Romans 3:23: "For **all have sinned**, and come short of the glory of God."
17. Romans 5:6: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time **Christ died for the ungodly.**"
18. Romans 5:12: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that **all have sinned.**"
19. 2 Corinthians 5:14: "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if **one died for all [Christ]**, then **were all dead.**"
20. 2 Corinthians 5:15: "And that He **[Christ] died for all**, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."
21. Galatians 3:22: "But the scripture hath concluded **all under sin**, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe."
22. 1 Timothy 1:15: "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that **Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.**"
23. 1 Timothy 2:3-4: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; **Who will have all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.
24. 1 Timothy 2:5: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Who gave himself **a ransom for all**, to be testified in due time."
25. 1 Timothy 4:10: "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is **the Saviour of all men**, specially of those that believe."
26. Hebrews 2:9: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God **should taste death for every man.**"
27. 1 Peter 3:18: "For Christ also hath once **suffered for sins**, the just **for the unjust**, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:
28. 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish**, but that **all should come to repentance.**"
29. 1 John 2:2: "And he is the propitiation for our sins: **and not for ours only**, but **also for the whole world.**"
30. Revelation 22:17: "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And **whosoever will**, let him take the water of life freely."
31. Titus 2:11: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation **hath appeared to all men**"

What a clear and certain *hope* is given to all men in these unquestionable declarations by God - for *all* have sinned in God's sight. And, that is why the Christian evangelist is commanded by the Saviour Himself, to:

“Go ye into **all the world**, and preach the gospel **to every creature**” (Mark 16:15).

This command would be a hoax of the highest order, if every creature was not in need of the Gospel and further, every creature is not able to accept the salvation it offers because some have been divinely excluded from it.

It is Sufficient!

Let us raise a question. If the Word of God is our only and final source of instruction – as it should be, what conclusion would we come to regarding the scope of God's offer of salvation through Christ?

There are some verses in Scripture which at first sight and taken out of context may appear less straightforward than those listed above regarding God's provision of salvation to all men. However, the guiding principle is that we must allow the Bible to be its own interpreter. So if we come to a verse which at first reading seems a little difficult to understand, then we hold to what we know to be biblically certain and rule out any interpretation which contradicts it. In this way we can confidently determine what a passage does *not* mean. The verses above make it abundantly plain that God's offer of salvation is to *all* and the value, virtue and victory of Christ's death is available to *all*. There it is - plain and clear enough for the sincerest of servants to preach and the simplest of souls to accept in faith!

A Biblical Syllogism

A syllogism is a method of “deductive” reasoning, a process of biblical interpretation frequently used by those who believe in Limited Atonement – sadly, at the expense of *revealed* truth. There are three parts to a syllogism:

- The **main** premise
- The **minor** premise
- The **conclusion**

A typical example:

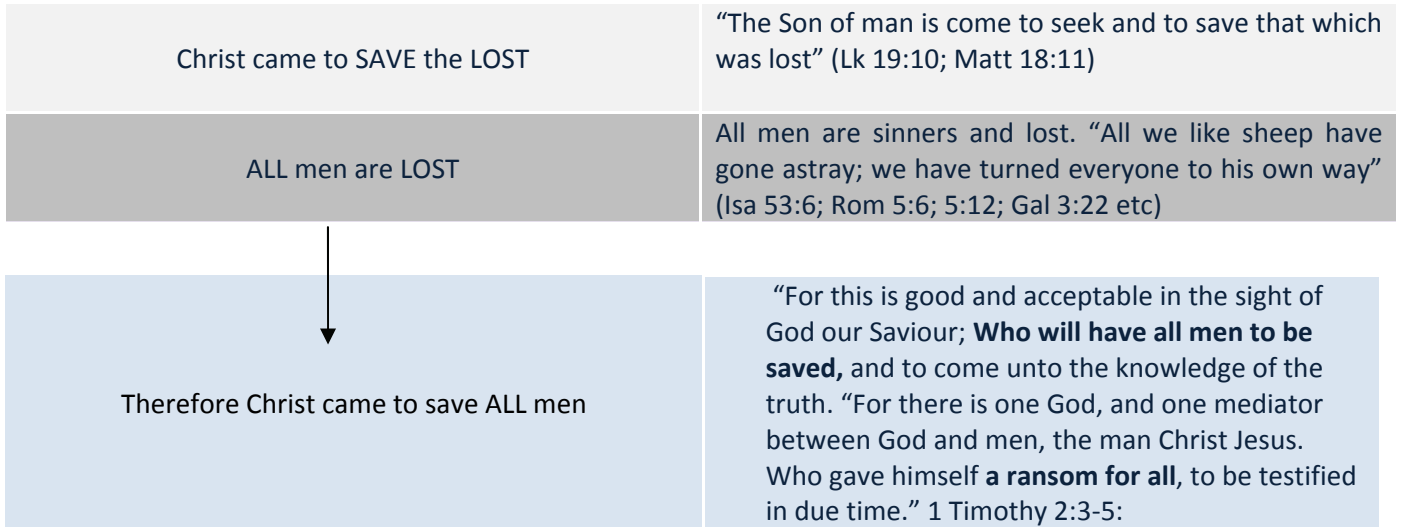
- All men are mortal
- Albert is a man
- Albert is therefore mortal

We observe that the truth of the conclusion depends on the truth of the two premises. Both must be true if the conclusion is to be true. For example:

- All birds fly
- An ostrich is a bird
- An ostrich can therefore fly

Empirically and biologically an ostrich is a bird, but it cannot fly and so our conclusion is false. It is false because our main premise is false. All birds do not fly!

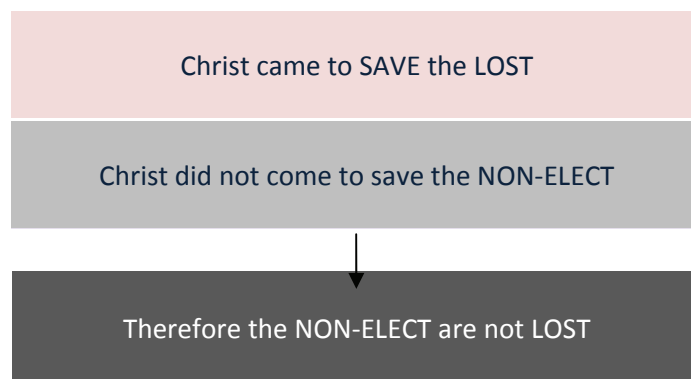
Let us now construct a biblical syllogism relating to God’s universal offer of salvation. We take as our major and minor premises two indisputable truths from God’s Word. These premises are independent of each other i.e., they stand true in their own right. Even those who propose “limited atonement” do not deny their authenticity. The minor premise is supported by their doctrine of the “Total Depravity of Man” – everyone by nature is dead in sin.



The important thing to grasp is that the truth of this conclusion is **NOT** simply the outcome of this deductive syllogism. It is established in the *first* instance by a host of unambiguous passages of Scripture – and **that** is what we rely upon. It is written! We have noted some of these passages above, which plainly tell of God’s wondrous salvation offered to all through the death of Christ.

A Diabolical Syllogism

When we construct a syllogism based on the premise proposed by those who believe in “limited atonement” – that Christ came only to save an “elect,” we plunge ourselves into a maze of uncertainty and a quagmire contradiction.



In this case the conclusion is **FALSE** because the minor premise is **false**. The Bible establishes without doubt that every person is lost, “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23 etc). As we noted above, even those who support “limited atonement” admit that according to their doctrine

of the total depravity of man, *everyone* is lost in sin and under divine judgment. So then where does the syllogism fail? It fails in its minor premise – that “Christ did not come to save a non-elect” - the doctrine of “limited atonement.” This is not surprising since it is not taught in Scripture.

How then, do those who propose “limited atonement” get around this glaring and embarrassing contradiction? The truth of the matter is that try as they may with expedient word changes and natural reason, they cannot do so! It forever remains a damning finger against this diabolical doctrine.

However, what *is* resolved for us by those who propose “limited atonement,” is the that this contradictory conclusion can be traced to the idea that God has predetermined some people for salvation and predetermined all others to hell (by design or default, the dreadful result is the same). The idea we speak of is the unbiblical Calvinist doctrine of “unconditional election.” As admitted by a leading Calvinist: “These two doctrines [unconditional election and limited atonement] must stand or fall together. We cannot logically accept one and reject the other.”²

We have seen that the doctrine of “limited atonement” fails the test of Scripture. Consequently, it and the doctrine of unconditional election fall together on the basis of “logic,” but more importantly, they fail on the basis of what is revealed in God’s Word.

Despite the mountain of biblical evidence against “limited atonement” and the contradiction perpetrated by it, those who hold it appease their hearts with the belief that -

“No one will be in hell that does not deserve to be there.”

On this principle of divine justice we heartily agree because it is endorsed by the Word of God and it speaks of God’s righteousness *and* of man’s responsibility to God. However, we do pray that all who hold this principle dear, will also come to own the glorious principle of God’s redemption that was borne out at Calvary, that while no one will be in hell that does not deserve to be there -

“No one in hell *has* to be there!”

This is the glorious emancipating message of Calvary and the Gospel. “For God **so loved the world**, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).

A merciful and loving God is “longsuffering to us, **not willing that any should perish**, but that **all should come to repentance**” (2 Peter 3:9).

Why? Because “**all** have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

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