

Biblical and Logical Warrant for Definite Atonement

He entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing eternal redemption.

-Hebrews 9:12

The crux of the entire debate surrounding limited atonement is whether Christ is a real Savior or a potential Savior. Did Christ *actually* or *potentially* accomplish His purpose for dying for our sins?

It is my position that Christ's death *actually* accomplished its purpose, that is, that it ensured the salvation of His people rather than merely provide the *possibility* of salvation for everyone who believes. This, therefore, makes Christ's atonement limited in its efficaciousness. David Steele and Curtis Thomas write, "Christ's saving work was limited in that it was designed to save some and not others, but it was not limited in value for it was of infinite worth and would have secured salvation for everyone if this had been God's intention."¹ But as we shall soon see, regardless of your theological assumptions, the atonement is limited. That is why I prefer the term *definite atonement* to limited atonement. I shall be arguing for definite atonement in two parts, the first part consisting of the Biblical basis for definite atonement, and the second part consisting of the Logical basis for definite atonement. This separation should in no way imply that the Bible should or even *could* be divorced from logic. God is a God of logic and His special revelation is consequently inherently logical. The reason for this separation is to show that the doctrine of definite atonement can be supported by both Scriptural proofs and resistless logic. Because definite atonement is a Biblical doctrine, it should be no surprise that any alternative in opposition is not logically sound. Therefore, in the first section I will be fortifying the doctrine of definite atonement by primarily Scriptural proof and in the subsequent section I will be revealing how, specifically on a logical level, any alternative to the doctrine of definite atonement is unsound. In the third section I will address a few Biblical passages that stand as possible objections to definite atonement.

I. Biblical²

These passages indicate the end that was intended and accomplished by Christ's work as the full salvation of His people. They state that Christ came, not to enable men to save themselves, but to *save sinners*:

Matthew 1:21 – "*he will save his people from their sins.*"

Luke 19:10 – "*The Son of man came to seek and to save what was lost.*"

2 Corinthians 5:21 – "*...In Him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

¹ Steele and Thomas, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed. 1963), 39.

² These organized sections are from Steele and Thomas, 40 – 47.

Galatians 1:3,4 – “...Jesus Christ, *who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age...*”

1 Timothy 1:15 - “...Jesus Christ came into the world *to save sinners.*”

Titus 2:14 – “...who *gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a people of his own...*”

1 Peter 3:18 – “For *Christ also died for sins once for all...that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.*”

Christ, by His redeeming work, actually *secured reconciliation* for His people:

Romans 5:10 – “For if while we were enemies we were *reconciled to God by the death of his Son...*”

2 Corinthians 5:18,19 – “All this is from God, who through Christ *reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them...*”

Ephesians 2:15,16 – “...so making peace, and *might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end.*”

Colossians 1:21,22 – “...He has now *reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irrepensible before him.*”

Christ secured the righteousness and pardon needed by His people for their *justification*:

Romans 3:24,25 – “...they are *justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation by his blood, to be received by faith...*”

Romans 5:8,9 – “But God shows his love for us in that *while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.*”

1 Cor 1:30 – “...in Christ Jesus,...God made our wisdom, our *righteousness* and sanctification and redemption.”

Gal 3:13 – “Christ *redeemed us from the curse of the law...*”

Col 1:13,14 – “He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*”

Heb 9:12 – “...he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but *his own blood, thus securing eternal redemption.*”

1 Peter 2:24 – “He himself *bore our sins* in his body on the tree...”

1 Peter 1:18,19 – “For you know that it was not with perishable things...that *you were redeemed*...but with the precious blood of Christ.”

Christ secured the gift of the Spirit, which includes *regeneration and sanctification* and all that is involved in them:

Eph 1:3,4 – “Christ, who has blessed us with *every spiritual blessing*...”

Phil 1:29 – “For *it has been granted* to you that for the sake of Christ you should not *only believe* in him but also suffer for his sake.”

Acts 5:31 – “God exalted him...*to give repentance* to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

Titus 2:14 – “...who gave himself for us *to redeem us* from all iniquity and *to purify for himself* a people of his own...”

Titus 3:5,6 – “he saved us...by the washing of *regeneration* and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly *through Jesus Christ our Savior*.”

Eph 5:25,26 – “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might *sanctify* her...”

1 Cor 1:30 – “...in Christ Jesus...God made our wisdom, our righteousness and *sanctification and redemption*.”

Heb 9:14 – “how much more shall *the blood of Christ*, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, *purify your consciences* from dead works to serve the living God.”

Heb 13:12 – “So Jesus also *suffered* outside the gate *in order to sanctify* the people through his own blood.”

1 John 1:7 – “...and the *blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us* from all sin.”

Jesus was sent into the world by the Father to save the people whom the Father had given to Him. Those given to Him by the Father come to Him (see and believe in Him) and none of them shall be lost:

John 6:35-40 – “...All that the Father gives me *will come to me*...and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose *nothing of all that he has given me*...”

Jesus, as the good shepherd, lays down his life for his sheep. All who are “His sheep” are brought by Him into the fold and are made to hear His voice and follow Him. Notice that the Father had given the sheep to Christ:

John 10:11,14-18 – “The good shepherd *lays down his life the sheep*...I know my own and my own know me...and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; *I must bring them also*, and they *will* heed my voice....this charge I have received from my Father.”

John 10:24-29 – “...*You do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep*. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and *I give them eternal life*, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand.”

Jesus prays not for the world but for those given to Him by the Father. In fulfillment of the Father’s charge Jesus had accomplished the work the Father had sent Him to do – to make God known to His people and to give them eternal life:

John 17:1-11, 20, 24-26 – “...Since thou hast given him power over all flesh, so that *he might give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him*...I glorified thee on earth, *having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do*;...I am not praying for the *world* but for *those whom thou hast given me*, for they are thine; all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them...”

Paul declares that our “spiritual blessings” result from our being “in Christ” which he traces to the eternal decree of God’s choosing:

Eph 1:3-12 - “Christ, who has blessed us with *every spiritual blessing*...even as he *chose* us in him *before the foundation of the world*, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He *destined us* in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, *according to the purpose of his will*, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved...In him, *according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to the counsel of this will*, we who first hoped in Christ have been destined and appointed to live for the praise of his glory.”

The parallel which Paul draws between the condemning work of Adam and the saving work of Jesus Christ the “second man,” the “last Adam,” can best be explained on the principle that both stood in covenant relation to “their people” (Adam stands as the federal head of the race, Christ stands as the federal head of the elect). As Adam involved his people in death and condemnation by his sin, even so Christ brought justification and life to His people through His righteousness:

Romans 5:12, 17-19 – “..Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so *one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men*. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so *by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous*.”

Christ’s saving work understood in *definite* terms for a particular people:

Matt 1:21 – “...for he will save his *people* from their sins.”

Matt 20:28 – “...the Son of man came...to give his life as a ransom for *many*.”

Matt 26:28 – “...for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for *many* for the forgiveness of sins.”

John 10:11 – “...The good shepherd lays down his life for the *sheep*.”

John 11:50-53 – “...one man should die for *the people*...he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but to gather into one *the children of God who are scattered abroad*...”

Acts 20:28 – “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock...to feed the *church* of the Lord *which he obtained for himself with his own blood*.”

Eph 5:25-27 – “...Christ loved the *church* and *gave himself up for her*.”

Rom 8:32-34 – “...he gave him up for us *all*...Who shall bring any charge against God’s *elect*?”

Heb 2:17; 3:1 – “...to make expiation for the sins of the *people*...therefore, holy brethren, who *share in the heavenly call*...”

Heb 9:15 – “Therefore he is the mediator of the new covenant, so that *those who are called* may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred which *redeems them* from the transgressions under the first covenant.”

Heb 9: 28 – “Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of *many*...”

Rev 5:9 – “...Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst *ransom men* for God from *every tribe and tongue and people and nation*...”

J.I. Packer organizes the Scriptural data in this format:

“Scripture speaks of God as having chosen for salvation a great number of our fallen race and having sent Christ into the world to save them (John 6:37-40; 10:27-29; 11:51-52; Rom. 8:28-39; Eph. 1:3-14; 1 Pet. 1:20). Christ is regularly said to have died for particular groups of persons, with the clear implication that his death secured their salvation (John 10:15-18, 27-29; Rom. 5:8-10; 8:32; Gal. 2:20, 3:13-14; 4: 4-5; 1 John 4:9-10; rev. 1:4-6, 5:9-10).”³

Louis Berkof organizes the Scriptural data in this format:

“Scripture repeatedly qualifies those for whom Christ laid down His life in such a way as to point to a very definite limitation. Those for whom He suffered and died are variously called

³ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers. 1993), 138.

“His sheep,” John 10:11,15, “His Church,” Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25-27, “His people,” Matt. 1:21, and “the elect,” Rom. 8:32-35.

“The Bible clearly teaches that the design and effect of the atoning work of Christ is not merely to make salvation possible, but to reconcile God and man, and to put men in actual possession of eternal salvation, a salvation which many fail to obtain, Matt. 18:11; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; 3:13; Eph. 1:7.

“The atonement also secures the fulfillment of the conditions that must be met (faith and obedience of man), in order to obtain salvation, Rom. 2:4; Gal. 3:13,14; Eph. 1:3,4; 2:8; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:5,6.”⁴

A few closing passages to observe. Some of these are repeated from the lists above.

Matthew 1:21. His people are actually saved. Christ’s sacrifice was not an attempt to save everyone but a success in saving “his people from their sins.”

Luke 1:68. “He has...accomplished redemption for His people.” *NASB*

John 6:38-39. This passage either teaches universal salvation or definite atonement. Since universalism is an unbiblical alternative, we can assume that the Son’s purpose is just as limited as the Father’s purpose in election.

John 10: 15,26. Jesus said, “I lay down my life for my sheep,” then boldly informed them, “but you do not believe *because* you are not my sheep.”

John 17:2,9. “For you granted [me] authority over all people that [I] might give eternal life to all those you have given [me]...I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.” J.I. Packer asks, “Is it conceivable that he would decline to pray for any whom he intended to die for?”⁵ Berkhof asks, “Why should He limit His intercessory prayer, if He had actually paid the price for all?”⁶

Titus 2:14. “Jesus Christ...*gave himself for us* to redeem us from all wickedness and *to purify for himself a people* that are his very own, eager to do what is good.”

Hebrews 2:10, 13. “In bringing *many sons to glory*, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering...And again [Jesus] says, “Here I am, and the *children God has given me.*” The children that God has given Jesus to die for and to present to the Father in glory are many. “Many” does not mean every single individual for not every single individual will be presented in glory.

⁴ L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1939), 395.

⁵ Packer, 138.

⁶ Berkhof, 395.

II. Logical

Christ's atonement was either actual or potential in accomplishing its purposes.

If Christ potentially accomplished His purposes the only option⁷ is:

1. Christ died for some who will not be saved.

If Christ actually accomplished His purposes the four options are:

1. Christ died for all of the sins of all men (actual universalism)
2. Christ died for some of the sins of all men (hypothetical universalism)
3. Christ died for all of the sins of some men (Reformed particularism)
4. Christ died for some of the sins of some men (hypothetical particularism)

Let us take this one at a time. The first fork in the road leads us in the direction of an actual atonement or a possible atonement. Let us focus first on the option of "possible atonement."

Horton asks, "Did Jesus satisfy God's justice on the cross? Or do we satisfy God's justice when we believe? If your answer is "at the cross," then you believe that everyone for whom Christ died is cleared of all charges before God. If your answer is "when we believe," one wonders who is the real savior in this matter."⁸ If the assertion be made that the design of God and of Christ was conditional on the faith of man, then there are numerous problems with that.

1. Christ died for some who will not be saved.

If Christ died for some who will be in hell, can His work then be considered a *saving work*? It did not accomplish what it intended. There is no "power in the blood." Rather, the power is in the will of the creature, which leads me to problem number two.

2. We ultimately save ourselves by summoning faith.

This drives us to another fork in which we must decide one way or the other. If Christ died for every single individual, then our two alternatives are:

1. Every person will be saved.
2. There is one sin for which Christ's death did not atone, namely, unbelief.

The response is, "Christ wipes away sin if you choose to accept His gift of salvation. If you do not accept it, you are not saved." The implications of this statement are that your "accepting it" becomes a work in which you save yourself. If you don't accept it, then there is one sin for which Christ did not die - unbelief. Due to the lack of Biblical support for this alternative, we must say that it is a true statement that Christ died to save the elect.

Nineteenth-century Princeton theologian Benjamin B. Warfield said:

⁷ Or at least the only option I can think of.

⁸ Michael Horton, *Putting Amazing Back into Grace* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1991), 141.

“They necessarily turn away from a substitutionary atonement altogether. Christ did not die in the sinner’s stead, it seems, to bear his penalties and purchase for him eternal life; He died rather to make the salvation of sinners possible, to open the way of salvation to sinners, to remove all the obstacles in the way of salvation. But what obstacle stands in the way of salvations besides the sinner’s sin? And if this obstacle (their sin) is removed, are they not saved?”⁹

George Horton makes a wise observation:

“If Christ’s death merely made it possible for us to save ourselves by following his example, by making a decision, and by living a holy life, then everybody loses.”¹⁰

This position could also be classified as *limited atonement* in one sense, which if you remember from above, is why I prefer not to use this term. This position limits the power of Christ’s atonement. Steele and Thomas say this in regard to the limitation of the atonement:

“Since all men will not be saved as the result of Christ’s redeeming work, a limitation must be admitted. Either the atonement was limited in that it was designed to secure salvation for certain sinners but not for others, or it was limited in that it was not intended to secure salvation for any, but was designed only to make it possible for God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe. In other words, one must limit its design either in *extent* (it was not intended for all) or *effectiveness* (it did not secure salvation for any).”¹¹

Charles Spurgeon speaks (quite bluntly) about this as well:

“We are often told that we limit the atonement of Christ, because we say that Christ has not made a satisfaction for all men, or all men would be saved. Now, our reply to this, that, on the other hand, our opponents limit it: we do not. The Arminians say, Christ died for all men. Ask them what they mean by it. Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of all men? They say, ‘No, certainly not.’ We ask them the next question – Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of any man in particular? They answer ‘No.’ They are obliged to admit this, if they are consistent. They say, ‘No. Christ has died that any man may be saved if’ – and then follow certain conditions of salvation. Now, who is it that limits the death of Christ? Why, you. You say that Christ did not die so as infallibly to secure the salvation of anybody. We beg your pardon, when you say we limit Christ’s death; we say, ‘No, my dear sir, it is you that do it.’ We say Christ so died that he infallibly secured the salvation of a multitude that no man can number, who through Christ’s death not only may be saved, but are saved and cannot by any possibility run the hazard of being anything but saved. You are welcome to your atonement; you may keep it. We will never renounce ours for the sake of it.”¹²

Atonement must be limited. It is either limited in its scope (Calvinistic definite atonement) or limited in its nature (Arminian potential atonement). That is why I prefer the term *definite*

⁹ Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerd,ams. 1942, reprinted 1980), 95.

¹⁰ Horton, 138.

¹¹ Steele & Thomas, 39.

¹² *Ibid.*, 40.

atonement, for the atonement that is most Biblical and logical is the atonement that is actual and definite.

So if we abandon the option that Christ's atonement was merely *potential* until met with the faith of the believer, then we must observe the options of assuming that the atonement was *actual*. The four options are again:

1. Christ died for all of the sins of all men (actual universalism)
2. Christ died for some of the sins of all men (hypothetical universalism)
3. Christ died for all of the sins of some men (Reformed particularism)
4. Christ died for some of the sins of some men (hypothetical particularism)

Let us again take these options one at a time.

The first suggests actual universalism, that is, that every individual will be saved because Christ's efficacious atonement was intended for every individual. Charles Spurgeon wittily interjects here, "If it was Christ's intention to redeem all men, how deplorably has He been disappointed." No Bible-believing Christian can assert universalism and so I will bypass this assuming I do not need to give further Biblical support.

The second option suggests that Christ only died for some of the sins of all men. This is doubly incorrect for it assumes one, that Christ died for all men, which would then imply universalism again and as we have seen above, is not Biblical and should therefore be discarded, and second, that Christ only died for some of the individual's sin. This is anti-gospel, for now we have a Christ that died to secure part of man's justification and leaves the believer to make up the remainder on his own. This is a horrible distortion of the Biblical gospel and again, no Bible-believing Christian should take a second glance at this alternative.¹³

The third option suggests that Christ died for all of the sins of a select number of individuals. Christ actually secures the full salvation of some but not all. This, so far, is the most Biblical position. We shall see after examining the fourth option why it is also the most logical.

The fourth option suggests that Christ only died for some individuals but his death only atoned for part of the sins of those selected individuals. As we saw in option two, this is anti-gospel and should be discarded.

From the logical options, we are left with option three – the doctrine of definite atonement. An atonement that doesn't atone, a redemption that doesn't redeem, a propitiation that doesn't propitiate, a satisfaction that doesn't satisfy does not help us at all. We need an actual, salvation ensuring atonement that is not contingent on our ability to summon faith. This is the Biblical and logical paradigm.

III. Objectionable Passages

¹³ Furthermore, see 1 John 1:7.

There are a few objectionable passages that I would like to take into consideration before closing. To give the Arminian position some credit, they do not blindly leap into their assumptions over the atonement but do feel it is Biblically warranted. To their embarrassment, the Biblical support is found wanting.

The most common objectionable passages can be broken into two categories. The first being the passages that teach Christ died for the *world*, John 1:29; 3:16,17; 4:42; 6:33, 51; Rom. 11:12,15; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 John 2:1,2; 4:14; the second being the passages that teach Christ died for *all*, Rom. 5:18; 2 Cor. 5:14,15; 1 Tim. 2:4-6; Heb. 2:9; 2 Pet. 3:9.

With response to the first group, I will let Berkhof handle the first tier of my response:

“The objection based on these passages proceeds on the unwarranted assumption that the word “world” as used in them means “all the individuals that constitute the human race.” If this were not so, the objection based on them would have no point. But it is perfectly evident from Scripture that the term “world” has a variety of meanings, as a mere reading of the following passages will prove conclusively, Luke 2:1; John 1:10; Acts 11:28; 19:27; 24:5; Rom. 1:8; Col. 1:6. It also appears that, when it is used of men, it does not always include all men, John 7:4; 12:19; 14:22; 18:20; Rom. 11:12,15; in some of these passages it cannot possibly denote all men...We do find in these passages, however, an indication of the fact that the word “world” is sometimes used to indicate that the Old Testament particularism (of Israel alone) belongs in the past, and made way for New Testament universalism. The blessings of the gospel were extended to all nations, Matt. 24:24; Mark 16:16; Rom. 1:5; 10:18.”¹⁴

Steele and Thomas also take this line of defense in suggesting that these passages correct the false notion that salvation was for the nation of Israel alone. These passages indicate that Christ died for all men without *distinction* but not without *exception*. Horton writes, “Salvation, then, is universal in that it crosses all barriers and includes every kind of person, but not in the sense that it includes each and every person.”¹⁵

He goes on to say, “Luke records ‘all the world’ was taxed by Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1), but obviously not everybody in the world at that time was taxed by Augustus. The Pharisees said of Christ, “Look how the whole world has gone after him!” (John 12:19), but it is clear from many other statements that “not everybody in the world had gone after him.”¹⁶

And this is just a common way of saying things. When the Olympics were held in Los Angeles, California and we said, “The world is at our doorstep,” no one assumed that this meant every man, woman, boy, and girl on planet earth was literally “at our doorstep.”¹⁷

Whereas, these passages do indicate that Christ died for the “world” we must synthesize these with passages that indicate that Christ’s saving work is spoken of in definite terms to infallibly

¹⁴ Berkhof, 396. He has a much more exegetical examination of these passages that I bypassed for the sake of length.

¹⁵ Horton, 126.

¹⁶ Horton, 126.

¹⁷ I borrow this example from Horton, 127.

save a particular people, namely those given to Him by the Father: Matt 1:21; Matt 20:28; Matt 26:28; John 10:11; John 11:50-53; Acts 20:28; Eph 5:25-27; Rom 8:32-34; Heb 2:17; 3:1; Heb 9:15; Heb 9: 28; Rev 5:9.

We must conclude that the use of the word “world” implies that the atonement includes every nation in the world, not every individual.

The second group of closely related objectionable passages refers to when Christ died for “all.” In all of these passages, the “all” simply means “all” who are in Christ. If the “all” means every single individual, then it again proves too much and therefore proves nothing, for once again it suggests universalism. The passages of 1 Tim. 2:4-6, Heb. 2:9, and 2 Pet. 3:9 simply refer, again, to the revealed will of God that both Jews and Gentiles would be saved. This implies nothing as to the universal intent of the atonement but rather to the scope of the atonement to include every nation in the world.

Horton writes, “In the latter part of Romans, Paul wrote that “all Israel will be saved” (11:26). A bit earlier he wrote that only “a remnant chosen by grace” (11:5) will be saved out of Israel. He then proceeds to show us that “all Israel is saved” via an elect remnant. If “all Israel will be saved...[via] a remnant chosen by grace,” then why can’t we say that “all the world will be saved via a remnant chosen by grace”? This, I believe, is the intent of John 3:16 – God loved the world so much that he sent his Son to save all believers (not those who will die in unbelief). His mission was to save the world, not condemn it. And because of the elect international remnant, the world is, in fact, saved!”¹⁸

There is also the objection in the simple offer of salvation to people. The fact that God calls everyone to believe and offers them salvation in the way of faith and repentance poses a problem. This objection is not valid for 6 reasons:¹⁹

1. The offer of salvation in the way of faith and repentance does not pretend to be a revelation of the secret counsel of God, more specifically, of His design in giving Christ as an atonement for sin. It is simply the promise of salvation to all those who accept Christ by faith.
2. This offer, in so far as it is universal, is always conditioned by faith and conversion. Moreover, it is contingent on a faith and repentance such as can only be wrought in the heart of man by the operation of the Holy Spirit.
3. The universal offer of salvation does not consist in the declaration that Christ made atonement for every man that hears the gospel, and that God really intends to save each one. It consists in (a) an exposition of the atoning work of Christ as in itself sufficient for the redemption of all men; (b) a description of the real nature of the repentance and faith that are required in coming to Christ; and (c) a declaration that each one who comes to Christ with true repentance and faith will obtain the blessings of salvation.
4. It is not the duty of the preacher to harmonize the secret counsel of God respecting the redemption of sinners with His declarative will as expressed in the universal offer of

¹⁸ Ibid., 126.

¹⁹ These six reasons are borrowed from Berkhof, 397

salvation. He is simply an official ambassador, whose duty it is to carry out the will of the Lord in preaching the gospel to all men indiscriminately.

5. Dr. Shedd says: “The universal offer of the benefits of Christ’s atonement springs out of God’s will of complacency, Ezek. 33:11...God may properly call upon the non-elect to do a thing that God delights in, simply because He does delight in it. The divine desire is not altered by the divine decrees of preterition.” He also quotes a very similar statement from Turretin.
6. The universal offer of salvation serves the purpose of disclosing the aversion and obstinacy of man in his oppositions to the gospel, and of removing every vestige of excuse. If it were not made, sinners might say that they would gladly have accepted the gift of God, if it only had been offered to them.

So neither the passages which teach that Christ died for the “world” or for “all” nor the universal offer of salvation conflict with the doctrine of definite atonement, rather they synthesize in perfect harmony.

IV. Conclusion

Christ died for all men without distinction (He died for Jew and Gentile alike) but not without exception (He did not die for the purpose of saving each and every lost sinner), that is to say, Christ’s mission was universal in scope, but limited in its efficaciousness. The Bible says nothing of potential reconciliation, potential redemption, potential propitiation, potential satisfaction, or potential atonement, but rather an actual reconciliation, actual redemption, actual propitiation, actual satisfaction, and actual atonement. As Steele and Thomas write, “Christ did not die simply to make it possible for God to pardon sinners. Neither does God leave it up to sinners as to whether or not Christ’s work will be effective.” The Biblical God always works and acts efficaciously and cannot be frustrated by the actions of man. Christ did not die to purchase the possibility for sinful men to dictate the efficacious worth of the cross. As Louis Berkhof writes, “If it had been His intention to save all men, this purpose could not have been frustrated by the unbelief of man. It is admitted on all hands that only a limited number of people will be saved. Consequently, they are the only ones whom God has determined to save.”²⁰

²⁰ Berkhof, 395.