



Calvinism and Arminianism, Lesson 4: Atonement



Review

History matters, for history is important and necessary for contemporary discussions of Calvinism and Arminianism.



Review

The specific history is that in the early 17th century, the Canons of Dort were a response to the Five Articles of the Remonstrants (Arminians) to settle the Calvinist-Arminian controversy.



Review

A person's position on the basis of God's election is the key difference between Calvinists and Arminians.



Two Views of Atonement: Universal Atonement

That, agreeably thereto, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all, by his death on the cross, redemption, and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins, except the believer . . . (Remonstrance Article 2)



Two Views of Atonement: Particular Atonement

For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son's costly death should work itself out in all his chosen ones, in order that he might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; . . . (Canons of Dordt, II.8)



Two Views of Atonement: Summary

Arminian: Universal for All

Calvinist: Particular for Elect



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Nature

The extent of the atonement is bound up in the nature of the atonement.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Nature

Rom 3:25a: “who God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.”

Through the blood shedding of Christ on the cross, he actually propitiated sins. He did not provisionally do it; he actually did it.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Nature

Rom 5:10a: “for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, . . .”

Reconciliation is accomplished at the cross. Reconciliation is not accomplished by my faith; reconciliation is applied by my faith.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Nature

Eph 1:7: “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.”

We actually have redemption through Christ's death, not the provision for it.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Nature

Col 1:22: “yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.”

He has reconciled you—past tense—through his death. Not a provisional reconciliation but an actual reconciliation.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Nature

Heb 9:26: “Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the age he has been manifested to put away sins by the sacrifice of Himself.”

Christ's death actually and effectively forgives sins!



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Nature

1 Pet 2:24a: “and He Himself bore our sins in His Body on the cross,” . . .

Christ substituted for sin—he actually (not provisionally) bore sins on the cross.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Nature

Summary: Christ's death actually and effectively accomplishes propitiation, redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, and substitution. Neither Calvinist or Arminian would deny this.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Implication

Therefore . . .

Since Christ's death actually and effectively saves people . . .

And since only some people are saved.

. . .

Conclusion: Christ died only to save some people.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Implication

Alternative 1:

Christ' death accomplished the salvation of all the sins of all people. This is universalism.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Implication

Alternative 2:

Christ's death accomplished the salvation of some of the sins of all people. This is Arminianism.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Implication

Alternative 3:

Christ's death accomplished the salvation of all of the sins of some people. This is Calvinism.



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Extent

Matt 1:21: “She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Extent

John 10:11, 15: “I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. . . . even as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep.”



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Extent

John 17:2-3, 6, 9: “even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. . . . I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. . . . 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.”



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Extent

Acts 20:28: “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”



Biblical Basis for Particular Atonement: Extent

Eph 5:25: Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.



Arminian Position

Christ' death obtained actual and effective forgiveness for all → only believers saved.

Problem: If Christ death obtained salvation for all, then all are saved (universalism). . . . Yet, according to Arminianism, only believers are saved.

Then how can people go to hell for sins that have been paid for?



Arminian Position

Thus, Arminians limit the atonement too. They don't limit the extent; they limit the effectiveness, for, according to the Arminian, for the atonement to be effective requires belief.



Clarifying Misconceptions

1. Christ death is sufficient for all people without exception.
2. People must believe in Jesus to be saved.



Clarifying Misconceptions

3. There will never be a person who believes in Jesus whom Christ did not die for.

4. The gospel should be given to all people without exception.



Why Does This Matter?

Arminianism: atonement that is not powerful and effective to save anyone.

Calvinism: atonement that is powerful and effective to save God's elect.



Main Idea

The key difference between the Calvinist and the Arminian on the atonement is the extent of the atonement and thus its accomplishment and effectiveness.

Calvinism and Arminianism, Lesson 4: Atonement

Opening Exercise: Answer the following questions

1. What was the position of the Arminians on the extent of the atonement? What was the position of the Calvinists on the extent of the atonement?
2. Which view of the extent of the atonement is prevalent in churches today?
3. Is the language of “limited atonement” problematic? Why or why not?
4. Do Arminians limit the atonement? If so, in what way?
5. What is the connection between unconditional election and particular atonement?

Notes

Homework

Assignment: Read the Second Main Point of Doctrine and Rejection of Errors both on the topic of atonement and note where you disagree.

The Second Main Point of Doctrine

Christ's Death and Human Redemption Through Its

Article 1: The Punishment Which God's Justice Requires

God is not only supremely merciful, but also supremely just. His justice requires (as he has revealed himself in the Word) that the sins we have committed against his infinite majesty be punished with both temporal and eternal punishments, of soul as well as body. We cannot escape these punishments unless satisfaction is given to God's justice.

Article 2: The Satisfaction Made by Christ

Since, however, we ourselves cannot give this satisfaction or deliver ourselves from God's anger, God in his boundless mercy has given us as a guarantee his only begotten Son, who was made to be sin and a curse for us, in our place, on the cross, in order that he might give satisfaction for us.

Article 3: The Infinite Value of Christ's Death

This death of God's Son is the only and entirely complete sacrifice and satisfaction for sins; it is of infinite value and worth, more than sufficient to atone for the sins of the whole world.

Article 4: Reasons for This Infinite Value

This death is of such great value and worth for the reason that the person who suffered it is--as was necessary to be our Savior--not only a true and perfectly holy man, but also the only begotten Son of God, of the same eternal and infinite essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Another reason is that this death was accompanied by the experience of God's anger and curse, which we by our sins had fully deserved.

Article 5: The Mandate to Proclaim the Gospel to All

Moreover, it is the promise of the gospel that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be announced and declared without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people, to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel.

Article 6: Unbelief Man's Responsibility

However, that many who have been called through the gospel do not repent or believe in Christ but perish in unbelief is not because the sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross is deficient or insufficient, but because they themselves are at fault.

Article 7: Faith God's Gift

But all who genuinely believe and are delivered and saved by Christ's death from their sins and from destruction receive this favor solely from God's grace--which he owes to no one--given to them in Christ from eternity.

Article 8: The Saving Effectiveness of Christ's Death

For it was the entirely free plan and very gracious will and intention of God the Father that the enlivening and saving effectiveness of his Son's costly death should work itself out in all his chosen ones, in order that he might grant justifying faith to them only and thereby lead them without fail to salvation. In other words, it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross (by which he confirmed the new covenant) should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation and given to him by the Father; that he should grant them faith (which, like the Holy Spirit's other saving gifts, he acquired for them by his death); that he should cleanse them by his blood from all their sins, both original and actual, whether committed before or after their coming to faith; that he should faithfully preserve them to the very end; and that he should finally present them to himself, a glorious people, without spot or wrinkle.

Article 9: The Fulfillment of God's Plan

This plan, arising out of God's eternal love for his chosen ones, from the beginning of the world to the present time has been powerfully carried out and will also be carried out in the future, the gates of hell seeking vainly to prevail against it. As a result the chosen are gathered into one, all in their own time, and there is always a church of believers founded on Christ's blood, a church which steadfastly loves, persistently worships, and--here and in all eternity--praises him as her Savior who laid down his life for her on the cross, as a bridegroom for his bride.

Rejection of the Errors

Having set forth the orthodox teaching, the Synod rejects the errors of those

I

Who teach that God the Father appointed his Son to death on the cross without a fixed and definite plan to save anyone by name, so that the necessity, usefulness, and worth of what Christ's death obtained could have stood intact and altogether perfect, complete and whole,

even if the redemption that was obtained had never in actual fact been applied to any individual.

For this assertion is an insult to the wisdom of God the Father and to the merit of Jesus Christ, and it is contrary to Scripture. For the Savior speaks as follows: I lay down my life for the sheep, and I know them (John 10:15, 27). And Isaiah the prophet says concerning the Savior: When he shall make himself an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days, and the will of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand (Isa. 53:10). Finally, this undermines the article of the creed in which we confess what we believe concerning the Church.

II

Who teach that the purpose of Christ's death was not to establish in actual fact a new covenant of grace by his blood, but only to acquire for the Father the mere right to enter once more into a covenant with men, whether of grace or of works.

For this conflicts with Scripture, which teaches that Christ has become the guarantee and mediator of a better--that is, a new-covenant (Heb. 7:22; 9:15), and that a will is in force only when someone has died (Heb. 9:17).

III

Who teach that Christ, by the satisfaction which he gave, did not certainly merit for anyone salvation itself and the faith by which this satisfaction of Christ is effectively applied to salvation, but only acquired for the Father the authority or plenary will to relate in a new way with men and to impose such new conditions as he chose, and that the satisfying of these conditions depends on the free choice of man; consequently, that it was possible that either all or none would fulfill them.

For they have too low an opinion of the death of Christ, do not at all acknowledge the foremost fruit or benefit which it brings forth, and summon back from hell the Pelagian error.

IV

Who teach that what is involved in the new covenant of grace which God the Father made with men through the intervening of Christ's death is not that we are justified before God and saved through faith, insofar as it accepts Christ's merit, but rather that God, having withdrawn his demand for perfect obedience to the law, counts faith itself, and the imperfect obedience of faith, as perfect obedience to the law, and graciously looks upon this as worthy of the reward of eternal life.

For they contradict Scripture: They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ, whom God presented as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his

blood (Rom. 3:24-25). And along with the ungodly Socinus, they introduce a new and foreign justification of man before God, against the consensus of the whole church.

V

Who teach that all people have been received into the state of reconciliation and into the grace of the covenant, so that no one on account of original sin is liable to condemnation, or is to be condemned, but that all are free from the guilt of this sin.

For this opinion conflicts with Scripture which asserts that we are by nature children of wrath.

VI

Who make use of the distinction between obtaining and applying in order to instill in the unwary and inexperienced the opinion that God, as far as he is concerned, wished to bestow equally upon all people the benefits which are gained by Christ's death; but that the distinction by which some rather than others come to share in the forgiveness of sins and eternal life depends on their own free choice (which applies itself to the grace offered indiscriminately) but does not depend on the unique gift of mercy which effectively works in them, so that they, rather than others, apply that grace to themselves.

For, while pretending to set forth this distinction in an acceptable sense, they attempt to give the people the deadly poison of Pelagianism.

VII

Who teach that Christ neither could die, nor had to die, nor did die for those whom God so dearly loved and chose to eternal life, since such people do not need the death of Christ.

For they contradict the apostle, who says: Christ loved me and gave himself up for me (Gal. 2:20), and likewise: Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ who died, that is, for them (Rom. 8:33-34). They also contradict the Savior, who asserts: I lay down my life for the sheep (John 10:15), and My command is this: Love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends (John 15:12-13).