

“L” – Limited Atonement True or False?

Bible Answers About Denominations

“Limited Atonement” is the third of five major errors in John Calvin’s system of doctrine which we have come to identify by the familiar acrostic of the word “tulip.” The “T” stands for Total Hereditary Depravity and the “U” stands for Unconditional Election and both of these are discussed in tracts by those names in this series on Calvinism. Limited Atonement is the doctrine by Calvin that Christ died for, or became the atonement for, only those souls whom God elected to eternal life from all eternity; and of course, this doctrine would naturally follow if the doctrine of total depravity and unconditional predestination be granted. John Calvin wrote the following:

“God willed that Christ, through the blood of the cross, should, out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, efficaciously redeem all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation, and given to him by the Father.”

This doctrine of Limited Atonement is just as false as the doctrines of Total Hereditary Depravity and Unconditional Election. Needless to say, according to this doctrine a non-elect person (a person God did not choose to save) has no means of salvation. This person did not choose to be born, and he/she cannot of his/her own free will choose to honor, reverence, and serve God. Such a doctrine pictures God as showing partiality, and yet, this is the very opposite of what the apostle Peter declared when he said, “I most certainly understand {now} that God is not one to show partiality, but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right, is welcome to Him” (Acts 10:34-35 NAS). Should we believe the apostle Peter, who was inspired of God, or the uninspired man, John Calvin?

This doctrine is also false because it implies that Christ did not really die for everyone, while the Bible affirms that He did. The Hebrew writer wrote: “But we do see Him who has been made for a little while lower than the angels, {namely,} Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone” (Heb 2:9 NAS). Observe also the testimony of John the Baptist concerning Christ, “The next day he saw Jesus coming to him, and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29 NAS). Did John say that Christ takes away the sin of the “elect” or the sin of the “world?” John, the apostle, wrote, “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life” (John 3:16 NAS). Does this mean that God loved only the “elect” when he insisted that “whoever” believes would not perish? Should John have written, “whoever is elect?” (cf. Rev. 22:17). The term “believeth” in Jno. 3:16 is continuous action. What if the “elect” stop believing (or never start)? John also insisted that Jesus is the propitiation (atonement) for the whole world (1 Jno. 2:2). The Scriptures are crystal clear. John Calvin and other false teachers have twisted the Scriptures to teach that God will only save the “elect.”

This doctrine of "Limited Atonement" is also false because it is contrary to the many express statements that show God's desire is that all should be saved by turning from sin. For example: "Say to them, 'As I live!' declares the Lord GOD, 'I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways! Why then will you die, O house of Israel?' (Ezek 33:11 NAS). The apostle Paul wrote, "Who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4 NAS). God wills that all men receive salvation, but then sends His Son to die only for those God elected! How utterly preposterous! The apostle Peter wrote: "The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9 NAS). The reprobation of the wicked, the Calvinist tells us, is according to the good pleasure of God, and the salvation of a predetermined number without condition was His desire from Eternity! We ask the simple question, were Ezekiel, Paul, and Peter mistaken? Is the Lord "just pulling one on us" by offering a glimmer of hope to men in sin, but really has sealed everyone's destiny unconditionally before the world began???? Since Ezekiel, Paul, and Peter were inspired of God and John Calvin and other Calvinists were not inspired of God, who would you trust?

John Calvin and other Calvinists are wrong because this doctrine of "Limited Atonement" makes the Great Commission a cruel hoax. Jesus said, "And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15-16 NAS). Why should anyone bother preaching or teaching the Word of God? The "elect" will be saved without it. The "non-elect" can never believe it and live. Furthermore, the invitation of Jesus Christ in the Gospel is rendered meaningless: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. "For My yoke is easy, and My load is light" (Matt 11:28-30 NAS). Are the "elect" the only ones who are weary and heavyladen with sin? Of course not! All men are burdened by sin just as the apostle Paul said, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23 NAS). According to Calvinists sinners are offered a chance for salvation and redemption by means of words they cannot receive or understand, by propositions that they can neither believe nor reject, and by emotional and intellectual appeals that cannot move them!

In the most distinctive teaching about God in the Epistle to the Ephesians, Paul affirms that God has acted according to the good pleasure of his will, the mystery of his will, and the council of his will (Eph. 1:5, 9, 11) to accomplish His eternal purpose. Before the foundation of the world, God determined that He would be served by a redeemed humanity which plan He has carried out in the uniting of Jew and Gentile in Christ Jesus. God decreed that whoever would render obedience to His beloved Son would be saved as Paul shows when he wrote: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. {This was} to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, {I say,} of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:23-26 NAS; cf. also Jno. 3:36 NAS; Heb. 5:8-9; 2 Thess. 1:7-9). We urge you to believe God, not man.

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