

Marc Roby: We are resuming our study of systematic theology today by continuing to examine soteriology, the doctrine of salvation. We have been discussing the doctrine of limited atonement and in our last session we noted that all true Christians believe that the atonement is limited in some way, since they all agree that not everyone is saved. So the real question becomes, “For whom did Christ die?” Arminians and others say that he died to make salvation possible for everyone, but the biblical position is that he died only for the elect.

We finished last time by showing that one of the best verses used by Arminians to support their position, 1 John 2:2, is actually compatible with either position and can’t decide the question. Dr. Spencer, how would you like to proceed today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to say a little bit more about 1 John 2:2. The verse says that Jesus Christ “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”¹ We showed last time that in speaking of “our sins” the apostle could very well be talking about Jewish believers, in which case the contrasting phrase “the whole world” would simply refer to non-Jewish believers. There is no need to assume that he is including all people without exception.

Marc Roby: Very well, what else do you want to say about that verse?

Dr. Spencer: Well, John Murray also deals with this verse in his book *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*. He notes that the apostle John could have three reasons for using the phrase “the whole world” without intending to indicate that the atonement was universal. His first reason is very similar to what I just discussed. Murray says that “It was necessary for John to set forth the *scope* of Jesus’ propitiation – it was not limited in its virtue and efficacy to the immediate circle of disciples who had actually seen and heard and handled the Lord”.²

Marc Roby: So, in other words, he is saying that when John refers to “our sins”, the group he has in mind is even smaller than all Jewish believers, it is only the “immediate circle of disciples”.

Dr. Spencer: That’s exactly right. In which case, the phrase “the whole world” would refer to all other believers, whether they were Gentiles or Jews. But Murray goes on to give two more reasons why John used the phrase “the whole world”. The second reason he proposes is that John was emphasizing the *exclusiveness* of Jesus as the propitiation. In other words, there isn’t some other propitiation available for other people. Jesus is the *only* possible propitiation for everyone in the world.

Marc Roby: That would certainly make sense. What is the third possibility that Murray discusses?

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² John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955, pg. 73

Dr. Spencer: He points out that it was necessary for John to remind his readers that Jesus' propitiation is of *perpetual* efficacy. In other words, it applies to future sins and future believers just as much as to those who were the immediate recipients of his letter.

Marc Roby: Yes, that all makes good sense. And I think it establishes conclusively that 1 John 2:2 does not argue persuasively in favor of either the Arminian or Reformed position.

Dr. Spencer: No, it clearly does not. And before we move on to make a positive biblical case for the fact that Christ died only for the elect, let's look at one more verse that is sometimes used to support the idea that Christ died to make salvation possible for everyone, John 3:16. In that verse Jesus himself tells us, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Some have claimed that when it says "God so loved the world", it is referring to all people universally. The idea would then be that he gave his Son for everyone, but only those who believe in him "shall not perish but have eternal life."

Marc Roby: And how would you respond to that interpretation of the verse?

Dr. Spencer: I would say that it is reading far too much into the verse. Just as with 1 John 2:2 this verse does not provide clear evidence for either the Arminian or Reformed view. When Jesus tells us that "God so loved the world" there is absolutely nothing in the context or the verse itself that would prevent that from simply meaning he loved people from all different nations, cultures and epochs. In other words, his love was not exclusively to the Jewish people.

Marc Roby: That sounds perfectly reasonable. And even though we already dismissed the idea of universal salvation, I can't help pointing out that if you look just two verses later, in John 3:18, it again provides clear biblical evidence that universal salvation is unbiblical. That verse reads, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Dr. Spencer: That is one of the many verses that make it clear that God is not going to save every person. Only those who place their faith, that is their trust, in Jesus Christ alone will be saved. But in any event, 1 John 2:2 and John 3:16 provide no support for the idea that Jesus died for the sins of every single human being. So we need to look elsewhere to answer the question, "For whom did Christ die?" And God didn't leave us to wonder or speculate on this point. I'm going to begin by following John Murray in putting forward two arguments from Scripture that make the answer clear.³

Marc Roby: Okay, what's the first argument?

Dr. Spencer: The first argument is based on Romans 8:29-39. Romans 8:29-30 set the stage for the following verses by identifying a specific group of people who are being written about, we read, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called;

³ Ibid, pp 65-71

those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.” Now twice in these verses Paul refers to those whom God predestined to be saved. And as we move on and look at the following verses, we must remember this context. Now let’s go ahead and look at the first two of the following verses.

Marc Roby: Very well, the next two verses are Romans 8:31-32, which read, “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

Dr. Spencer: And based on the previous verses, we know who Paul is referring to when he says that God “did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all”, the “us all” in this verse is all of those whom God has predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, in other words, those whom God has chosen to save. God gave Jesus Christ for the salvation of a specific group of people, not for all of mankind.

Marc Roby: These verses do state that quite explicitly. Although I can imagine someone objecting and pointing out that Paul said that God gave up his Son “for us *all*”. Some might say that the word “all” there is important.

Dr. Spencer: Murray deals with this argument decisively. He quite correctly stated that “It would be absurd to insist that the presence of the word ‘all’ has the effect of universalizing the scope. The ‘all’ is not broader than the ‘us.’ Paul is saying that the action of the Father in view was on behalf of ‘all of us’ and the question is simply the scope of the ‘us.’”⁴

Marc Roby: And it is clear given Verses 29-30 that the scope of “us” is all of those whom God has predestined to eternal salvation.

Dr. Spencer: And it becomes even clearer as you go on in the passage. The passage continues in Romans 8:33 where Paul wrote, “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.” Paul is continuing to speak about the same group of people, those who are included in the statement that God gave up his Son “for us all.” The group referred to as “us” in that statement is again spoken of here when Paul asks “Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?” So the “us” are again seen to be those whom God has chosen. And then he says “It is God who justifies.” Which again refers to the same group of people as we see if we go back to Romans 8:30, where Paul wrote, “And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”

Marc Roby: That is solid biblical evidence to support the Reformed view that Christ died only for the elect.

Dr. Spencer: And it becomes clearer and clearer as you go on in the passage. In Verse 34 Paul again refers to the fact that Christ died, and adds that he was raised to life and is “at the right

⁴ Ibid, pg. 66

hand of God and is also interceding for us.” And then in Verse 35 he asks the rhetorical question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

Marc Roby: And the obvious answer being that no one can separate us from his love.

Dr. Spencer: That’s true. And after asking that rhetorical question, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”, he goes on to list different things that you might think could separate us and he then draws his wonderful conclusion in Verses 38 and 39 where he wrote, “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Marc Roby: That is a wonderful passage that should provide great comfort to every believer. God, the Creator of all things, the Sovereign Lord of his creation, has purposed to save us and nothing and no one can thwart his eternal plan.

Dr. Spencer: That is great comfort and it again emphasizes the fact that this group of people for whom Christ died, is that group, and that group only, whom God has chosen and whom God will save eternally.

And now I want to look at Murray’s second biblical argument in support of the Reformed doctrine that Christ came to die only for the elect.

Marc Roby: Alright, please proceed.

Dr. Spencer: Murray’s second argument can be summarized by first saying that there is clear biblical teaching that all of those for whom Christ died will live a new life, meaning that they will put their sins to death and walk in obedience to God’s commands. They will not do that perfectly of course, but the change will be evident. And then secondly, we simply note the obvious, which is that not everyone lives such a life and therefore, Christ did not die for everyone.

Marc Roby: That second point is so obvious that it doesn’t need any support. There are many people who do not even pretend to *want* to follow God’s law, let alone have any success in doing it. In fact, I think it’s patently obvious that *most* people reject the Bible as having any authority to direct their lives. Therefore, it seems you really only need to make a biblical case for your first statement, namely, that there is clear biblical teaching that all of those for whom Christ died will live a new life. What biblical support do you want to present for that statement?

Dr. Spencer: Let’s do that in stages. First, in 2 Corinthians 5:14 we read that “Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.” We don’t need to spend any time figuring out who is referred to by the word “all” in this verse because it says explicitly that one, meaning Christ Jesus, died for all, and therefore all died. So, whatever group is referred to by “all”, we have established that every single person for whom Christ died, also died in some sense.

Marc Roby: And that is exactly what Paul also says in Chapter 6 of Romans. In Romans 6:2-3 we read, “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”

Dr. Spencer: Yes, that is exactly right, and those verses show that when Paul said all died with Christ in 2 Corinthians 5:14, he didn't mean literal physical death, he meant that they died to sin. In other words, they died to their *old* way of life.

And if you go on to next verse, Romans 6:4, Paul wrote that “We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Which establishes that those who died with Christ did so in order that they could live a new life.

Marc Roby: And Paul goes on in that Chapter 6 of Romans to tell us about this new life. In Romans 6:6 we are told, “For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin”, and then in Verses 12 and 13 Paul says, “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.”

Dr. Spencer: That is about as clear as it can be. And so, we have established that the Bible teaches us that those for whom Christ died also died with him. And they died in the sense of dying to sin in order that they can live a new life of obedience to God. Now, as we said earlier, it is patently obvious that not all people live such a life, so we can conclude that they have not died with Christ and, therefore, he did not die for them.

Marc Roby: That logic is quite solid. So I would that say Murray's two arguments are very strong support for the Reformed view that Christ died *only* for those whom God chose to save.

Dr. Spencer: I agree, but there is even more biblical evidence that we can adduce in support of this claim. For example, in John 10:14-15 we read that Jesus Christ said, “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.” This metaphor of Christ as a shepherd and his people as his sheep is common in the Scriptures and it never refers to *all* people as being his sheep. And yet, we are told here by Jesus himself that it is for his sheep that he laid down his life.

Marc Roby: One of the places where we learn that not everyone is one of Jesus' sheep is in Chapter 25 of the book of Matthew. Jesus tells us about the final judgment and says, in Verses 31-33 that “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.” And then Christ goes on to relate that the goats represent the wicked and will be sent to hell, while the sheep will go to heaven.

Dr. Spencer: That passage does make it quite clear that not everyone is considered one of Jesus' sheep, and therefore when Jesus said in John 10:15 that “I lay down my life for the sheep” he

was implicitly excluding other people. An even better set of verse to support the idea that Christ only died for the elect is found in Romans 5:8-10.

Marc Roby: Okay, let me read those verses. Paul says there, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”

Dr. Spencer: Those verses are again quite explicit. Paul says Christ died for “us” and then goes on to say who is meant by “us.” It is those who are justified by his blood, saved from God’s wrath, reconciled to God and saved through his life. In other words, Christ died for those who are actually saved, not all men.

Marc Roby: Do you have any last quick points to make before we run out of time for today?

Dr. Spencer: I’ll cite just one more verse. In John Chapter 17 we read what is called Christ’s high priestly prayer. This was a public prayer that he made just before being arrested and crucified. And in Verses 6 and 9 we read that he said to God the Father, “I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. ... I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.” While this is not conclusive by itself, it would be completely unreasonable to think that Christ died for people he was not even willing to pray for.

Marc Roby: I certainly see your point, and I think we have made a solid case for the Reformed position that Jesus only died for the elect, those whom God chose, from all eternity, to save. Now let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We would love to hear from you.