

## **What Do We Teach? KBC Doctrinal Statement on Redemption Pastor Chris; December 19, 2021**

**Key Question:** For whom did Christ die?

Did Christ die for every person who ever lived, atoning for their sins as their substitute?  
If Yes, then how can anyone be in hell? If No, then for whom did He die?

Did He die to make everyone redeemable or to actually redeem (purchase, atone for) some?  
Did He die for all sinners in general or for specific sins of specific sinners?  
Was His death a potential atonement or redemption with the outcome left to the sinner's free will  
or was it an actual atonement with the outcome in the hands of God?

**Short answer:** Christ fully and perfectly redeemed/purchased/ransomed/atoned for all the sins of all the elect only in His sin-bearing death upon the Cross in the place of His people across all ages, both Jews and Greeks. No one else's sins were paid for beyond the elect.

AKA Limited Atonement, AKA Particular or Definite Atonement.

Admittedly, the most difficult, so much so that my favorite theology professor at TMS, Dr. George Zemek, called himself a 4.95 Calvinist. Many 4.0 Calvinists.

On the one hand, Catholics, Assemblies of God, most charismatics, Methodists, Wesleyans, Nazarenes, Church of Christ, other Arminians and Universalists are appalled at the thought of particular atonement. But for me, not only true, it's the Crown Jewel of the Doctrines of Grace!

**REDEMPTION:** We teach that redemption of the elect was fully and effectively accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ in His atoning death. Christ purchased for God, with His blood, sinners from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Revelation 5:9), obtaining for them forgiveness of sins and the gift of perfect righteousness (Romans 5:18-19; I Corinthians 15:3; I Peter 3:18; cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21). In His atoning death, Christ bore in the believer's place the due punishment for their sin (Isaiah 53:4-6; Galatians 3:13; I Peter 2:24), fully satisfying the demands of divine justice and fully propitiating the wrath of God against them (Romans 3:21-26; 5:9; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 4:10).

### **Closer look at Revelation 5:9**

“Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with your blood men (or people) from (ek, from or out of) every tribe and tongue and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”

purchased for God – transaction, ransom price was paid  
with your blood = with your life!  
from or out of ... Every ethnicity, language, culture and nation

NOT, “You purchased for God with Your blood every tribe ...”

v.10 shows that all who were purchased actually become a kingdom of priests who will reign with Christ in His earthly kingdom. If purchased or redeemed, you believe and reign.

v.10 eliminates the idea that He purchased everyone and then some respond

**Other support:**

**Isaiah 53:4-6**, the believing prophet speaks for the believing remnant of Israel, not for unbelievers or the whole world, reminding us that the Passover was not for the Egyptians.

**Gal. 3:13** Christ **redeemed us** from the curse of the Law, having become a curse **for us** ...

Paul is even more specific and particular and personal in **Gal. 2:20** ...

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross” **I Peter 2:24**

**SEE Romans 5:8-9**

Did He make propitiation for the sins of every single person who has ever lived?  
Not according to **Hebrews 2:17 and I John 4:10**

At stake is the **intent and accomplishment** of the Cross.

What did God plan and what actually happened? Was His plan fulfilled or frustrated?

We teach that the sacrificial death of Christ was designed by God the Father to atone for the sins of the elect only. Christ’s death was not a potential atonement on behalf of all sinners in general, but rather a definite atonement on behalf of those particular persons whom the Father chose in eternity past and had given to the Son (Ephesians 1:4; John 6:37, 39; 10:29; 17:6, 9, 19-21). Thus, the Lord Jesus Christ laid down His life for His sheep (John 10:14-15, 26-30), for His friends (John 15:13); purchasing the Church of God with His own blood (Acts 20:28); giving Himself up for the Church, His bride (Ephesians 5:25). None for whom Christ died will ever incur the wrath of God for their sins (Romans 8:1).

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep ... I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me ... and I lay down My life for the sheep.”

**John 10:11, 14**

“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” **John 15:13**

Elders are to shepherd the “church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” **Acts 20:28**

“Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her” **Eph 5:25**

**Some verses we left out!**

- **Mark 10:45** “the Son of Man came ... to give his life as a ransom for many”
- **John 11:52** Jesus died “to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad.”
- **Acts 18:9-10** And the Lord said to Paul in the night by a vision, “Do not be afraid but go on speaking and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no man will attack you in order to harm you, for I have many people in this city.” Already bought w/ His blood but not yet believers.

We teach that all three Persons of the Trinity are entirely unified, involved and essential in the work of salvation, with redemption of all the elect decreed by the Father in eternity past, accomplished by the Son in the fullness of time, and applied to the elect by the Holy Spirit (John 10:14-15; 27-30).

Unified, harmonious plan of each member of the Trinity working together to save the elect.

Does this truth kill evangelism and missions or actually guarantee their success?

We teach that Christ's definite atonement in no way undermines the responsibility of believers to make a genuine offer of the gospel to all persons possible. The death of Christ rather establishes the Church's duty to proclaim the gospel to all people, seeking to make disciples of all nations, and confidently proclaiming that whoever repents and believes will be saved (Matthew 28:18-20; John 3:16; 6:37; Romans 10:1-21; Revelation 22:17).

**But what about ...**

- **John 1:29**  
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 3:16**  
For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
- **John 12:32**  
"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself."
- **I John 2:2**  
"... and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." But later, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 4:10
- **Romans 5:18**  
So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men.
- **II Cor. 5:14-15**  
For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.
- **SEE I Tim. 2:1-7 (cf. I Tim. 4:10 and Titus 2:11)**
- **Hebrews 2:9** must be read in context of Hebrews 2:9-18
- **2 Peter 2:1** ... even denying the Master who bought them ...

**Closing illustration:**

“For the Calvinist, it is like a narrow bridge that goes all the way across the stream; for the Arminian, it is like a great wide bridge that goes only half-way across.” Lorraine Boettner

**Questions to consider:**

1. Can you have “penal substitutionary atonement” without definite atonement?
2. Do you want a view of the atonement that has the possibility of complete failure and waste of Jesus’ life and death?
3. If you believe that only those who believe are atoned for at the cross, isn’t this very close to definite or particular atonement?
4. What difference does this make?

## **10 Things You Should Know about Definite Atonement**

**By Jonathan Gibson (edited by Chris McKnight)**

### **1. Definite atonement is a way of speaking about the intent and nature of Christ's death.**

Jesus will be true to his name: he will save his people from their sins. In this regard, the adjective 'definite' does double duty: Christ's death was definite in its intent—he died to save a particular people; and it was definite in its nature—his death really does atone for sin.

### **2. Definite atonement has courted controversy in the Christian church.**

For some, definite atonement is a 'grim doctrine' (Karl Barth), containing 'horrible blasphemies' (John Wesley); for others, it is a 'textless doctrine' (Broughton Knox), arrived at by logic rather than by a straightforward reading of the Scriptures (RT Kendall). Pastorally, definite atonement is viewed as the Achilles' heel of the Reformed faith, quenching a zeal for evangelism and inviting despair rather than assurance for the believer.

### **3. The Bible itself asks the question of the intent and nature of Christ's death.**

As you read the Bible, you see that it speaks of Christ's death being for many, for all, for the world; and yet it also speaks of Christ's death being for me, for us (believers), for a people, for his church. So whether we like it or not, the Bible forces us to think about the intent and nature of Christ's death, by presenting us with an apparent tension. It is our task to work out how to handle that tension as we interpret these different texts.

### **4. No one Bible verse answers the question of the intent and nature of Christ's death.**

Justification by faith alone, Trinity, two natures of Christ ... are arrived at by holding together a range of biblical texts, while at the same time synthesizing internally related doctrines that relate to the doctrine in view. In the case of definite atonement, this includes doctrines such as union with Christ and the Trinity. For example, when we consider the atonement in light of our union with Christ, then locating the particularity of the atonement at the moment when Christ died begins to make sense; or when we consider that the work of each person of the Trinity is always performed in harmony with the other persons of the Trinity, we realize that when Christ died there could not be 'cross' purposes (pun intended) in the Godhead.

### **5. Definite atonement provides us with personal assurance.**

Martin Luther said that the sweetness of the gospel is found in the personal pronouns: "the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). Definite atonement helps to personalize Christ's death and deepens our appreciation of his love for us. Precisely because he died as Someone for some people, when he died on the cross, we were on his mind (cf. John 17). But more than that, because Christ's death propitiated God's wrath for all of our sins, it means that we cannot experience God's wrath on the future day of judgment. The price has been paid, the penalty borne, the law satisfied, and condemnation removed.

### **6. Definite atonement motivates us for evangelism and mission.**

The gospel we proclaim is one in which Christ has propitiated God's wrath against sinners—not potentially or hypothetically—but actually. And since he has definitely done this for all kinds of people, we should preach the gospel indiscriminately to all, knowing that Christ will save those for whom he died.

### **7. Definite atonement does not exhaust the meaning of the cross.**

Definite atonement says something essential about Christ's death, but it does not say everything there is to say. There are many aspects of the atonement which need to be affirmed alongside its definite intent and nature: the sufficiency of Christ's death for all; the free and indiscriminate proclamation of the gospel to all; God's love for the non-elect and his salvific stance toward a fallen world; the atonement's implications for the entire cosmos and not simply the church.

### **8. The doctrine of definite (or indefinite) atonement will not save us.**

Christians who belong to the Reformed tradition love their doctrines, not least the 'doctrines of grace', of which definite atonement is one. But there is always the danger that we slip into thinking that doctrine—especially, pure doctrine—is what saves us. But we can be a card-carrying biblical inerrantist, and still end up in hell. Just look at the Pharisees. We can be a member of Christ's church, covenantally signed and sealed, and still end up in hell. Just look at Judas. And the same goes for '5-point Calvinists'. The danger is that we end up loving the Scripture, or the sign, or the doctrine more than the Savior. When our faith is in something other than Christ, then there is no salvation. Definite atonement does not save us, just as faith does not save us. Jesus Christ, who provided a definite atonement, saves us through faith. "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15)—not a definite (or indefinite) atonement.

### **9. Definite atonement is wonderfully displayed in the sacrament ... of the Lord's Supper.**

"This is my body, which is given for you. This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:19–20).

### **10. Definite atonement is a beautiful doctrine because it spotlights the unity of Christ's person and work.**

Definite atonement displays the person of Christ performing his work in union with his people for the glory of his Father by the help of his Spirit. Definite atonement tells the story of the Warrior-Son who comes to earth to slay his enemy and rescue his Father's people. Christ is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, a loving Bridegroom who gives himself for his bride, and a victorious King who lavishes the spoils of his conquest on the citizens of his realm. He is the Head who sacrifices himself for the body, the Master who dies for his friends, the Firstborn who gives himself for his brothers and sisters, the Last Adam who falls into a deep sleep and from his riven side, as with the first Adam, comes his bride.

Why would you not want to believe the doctrine of definite atonement?

Jonathan Gibson (PhD, University of Cambridge) is an ordained minister in the International Presbyterian Church, United Kingdom, and associate professor of Old Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. He is a coeditor of and contributor to *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her* as well as the author of a number of other books. Jonny and his wife, Jackie, have four children.