

THE DOCTRINES OF GRACE **(LESSON TWENTY-THREE)**

THE ATONEMENT **(PART SIX)**

The doctrine of the Atonement describes how lost, unregenerate human beings can be reconciled to God through the sacrificial suffering, and death of Jesus Christ. The Atonement may be defined as **“the work accomplished by the Lord Jesus Christ in His life, death and resurrection, in order to save lost, unregenerate human beings.”**

In our last Lesson, we argued that while the most common view of the extent of the Atonement is that the Lord Jesus Christ died for the sins of every human being who has ever lived, such a view was not in harmony with Scripture. We observed that the original purpose of God in sending His Son into the world was not merely to make salvation **possible** for every human being, without actually **guaranteeing** the salvation of any one of them. We stated that God, from all eternity, had a plan of salvation by which, according to the riches of His grace and His eternal election, He designed the Atonement **to ensure** the salvation of all His people. In other words, it was God’s original intention that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ should make **certain** the salvation of those who had been given to Him by the Father. We contended that the Lord Jesus Christ died for His sheep and laid down His life for those the Father had given to Him and that the Atonement provided by God was therefore, a **definite** and **specific** Atonement.

In this Lesson, we will examine some passages of Scripture which appear to contradict the doctrine of **definite** or **specific** Atonement. In doing so, it is critical that we understand and appreciate the fact that Christian doctrine is not arrived at by reading a few proof texts here or there. Christian doctrine is arrived at by holding together a range of biblical texts, while at the same time, harmonizing other related doctrines. We are aware that it is always difficult for persons to change the thinking habits of many years. The passages which we will look at have been understood for so long, by so many persons, to mean that God’s original purpose was to save every human being that has ever lived and that He therefore, provided an Atonement for every single human being, that it will not be easy to change their view, even in light of the contrary scriptural evidence we considered in our last Lesson. Nevertheless, we are persuaded of the accuracy of Paul’s words in **2 Corinthians 13:8**, *“For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth,”* or as the **Message** translates it, *“We’re rooting for the truth to win out in you.”*

Of course, it will not be possible for us to consider every such passage of Scripture. We will, however, examine a few of the most significant ones, which are seemingly both explicit and all-inclusive and also because a proper interpretation of these passages will make it easier for us to understand other similar passages.

We will start with **1 Timothy 2:1-6**.

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-6

1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;

2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

- 3** For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;
4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.
5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;
6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

In verse 1, Paul exhorts that “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for **all men**.” And yet **John 17:9** informs us that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself deliberately refrained from praying for **all men**: “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.” It is very likely, therefore, that the phrase “for all men” in **1 Timothy 2:1** was intended by Paul to mean “for **all sorts of men**.” Such a translation is perfectly consistent with the original Greek, for the word “all” frequently has the meaning of “all kinds of,” or “all manner of.” The same Greek word translated “all” in **1 Timothy 2:1** is translated as “all manner of” in the following places:

- Matthew 4:23** - “all manner of disease”
Matthew 5:11 - “all manner of evil”
Matthew 10:1 - “all manner of sickness”
Luke 11:42 - “all manner of herbs”
Acts 10:12 - “all manner of four-footed beasts”
Romans 7:8 - “all manner of concupiscence”
1 Peter 1:15 - “all manner of conversation”
Revelation 21:19 - “all manner of precious stone”

To further illustrate the point, let us compare **Mark 3:28** with **Matthew 12:31**, which has reference to the same occasion:

MARK 3:28

*“Verily I say unto you, **all sins** shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme.”*

MATTHEW 12:31

*“Wherefore I say unto you, **all manner of sin and blasphemy** shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.”*

It will be observed that the “all” of **Mark 3:28** appears in **Matthew 12:31** as “all manner of,” even though in both instances, the very same Greek word is used. Either “all” or “all manner of” is therefore, a perfectly legitimate translation.

The truth is that in a number of verses it would greatly enhance our understanding if the simple “all” were converted to “all manner of” or some such alternative. For example, **Mark 11:32** tells us that “all men counted that John was a prophet” but obviously only those persons who were aware of what was going on could have been intended. In **John 8:2**, we are told that “all people came to Him” but we know the Pharisees did not do so. In both cases, it would be more appropriate to say “all manner of” people.

In **Romans 5:18** Paul wrote: “Therefore, as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.”

As it stands, we might be forced to conclude that every man without exception is condemned in Adam (which would be a correct conclusion) but every man without exception is justified in Christ (which would be an incorrect conclusion). Since we know that only some men come *“unto justification of life”* we are led to conclude that what Paul intended by his words was not that all men are both condemned and justified but rather that, while **all** men have suffered the penalty of Adam’s disobedience, **all kinds** of men have benefited from the rewards of Christ’s obedience.

Romans 14:2 tells us that one man *“believes that he may eat **all things**”* whereas another eats only herbs. The use of the word *“all”* here is not intended to convey the understanding that such an individual would eat absolutely anything. The obvious meaning of the verse is that the conscience of some men allows them the liberty to eat meat as well as vegetables whereas, the conscience of others does not allow them such liberty.

In **Titus 2:11** Paul writes, *“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to **all men.**”* It is important to remember that when Paul wrote this letter there were still many Jews who were of the opinion that the Gentiles were not objects of God’s grace. It must also be remembered that slaves had no status whatever. They were not even counted as persons. It is almost certain that Paul’s use of the word *“all”* here would more appropriately be rendered **“all manner of men.”** Paul simply means that there is no nation, race, or class of persons that is excluded from salvation.

In **1 Timothy 6:10**, Paul writes, *“For the love of money is the root of **all evil.**”* Clearly, Paul is not contending that the love of money is the root of every evil thought word or action. He is not saying, for example, that it is the love of money that is the root cause of blindness, or cancer or any other disease. Paul is wanting for Timothy to understand that the love of money is the root of **all sorts of** evil.

In light of the above, we may quite safely translate **1 Timothy 2:1** as an exhortation not to pray for all men indiscriminately, but rather that we should remember to pray for all sorts of people, not discriminating against any person because of their race, station in life or any other distinguishing mark. In verse **2**, Paul reinforces this alternative by saying that we should include in our prayers, kings and all who are in authority over us.

This understanding that the Greek word translated *“all”* may also be translated as *“all manner of”* will assist us in interpreting verse **4** of **1 Timothy 2** correctly. Paul informs us in this verse that God *“will have **all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.**”* Paul is saying here that it is the will of God to save all classes of persons and to bring them to the knowledge of the truth. The Body of Christ is to be made up in a truly representative way.

As though to reinforce this, Paul is inspired to write in verse **5** that there is only *“one mediator between God and men.”* Not one mediator for the Jew and another for the Gentile; not one mediator for the slave and another for the governor. Persons of all sorts stand equal in the sight of God and a single mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, can make any one of them acceptable before God. Why is this so? It is so because as verse **6** indicates, the same Lord Jesus *“gave Himself a ransom for all,”* meaning *“all manner of”* persons comprising the elect, no matter what class of society they come from.

Let us now consider **John 1:29**.

JOHN 1:29

“The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”

In examining this verse, it is important that we note the exact wording of this sentence. John did not identify Jesus as, “The Lamb of God which taketh away the **sins** of the world,” but as “The Lamb of God which taketh away the **sin** of the world.” The word “*sin*” as it is used here, is referring to the guilt or penalty of sin.

But what did John mean to convey by saying that, as the Lamb of God, Jesus came to take away “*the sin of **the world?***” Does this mean that our Lord took away the guilt or penalty of the whole human race? If it does, then the whole human race will most certainly be saved, since the guilt and penalty of sin as it relates to the whole human race has been taken away. But we know that the whole human race will not be saved for the Holy Scriptures testify in numerous places that many will be lost. But if the word “world” does not refer to the whole human race, what does it refer to? The word “world” here is used as a general expression to indicate that Jesus Christ was not merely the Saviour of the nation of Israel but the Saviour of men and women from the Gentile nations as well. The word “world” here takes in believing sinners from the Gentiles, as well as believing Jews.

John uses the word “world” as a general and indefinite expression, rather than as a synonym for the whole human race. This is clear from its meaning in other passages in John’s Gospel. For example, in **John 7:1-4**, we read the following: “*After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews’ feast of tabernacles was at hand. His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If thou do these things, shew thyself to **the world.***” When the brothers of Jesus urged Him to show Himself to “*the world*” they obviously did not mean the whole human race! They were saying that He should openly present Himself to the Jewish nation as was their Messiah.

Again, in **John 12:19**, we read that “*The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing? behold, **the world** is gone after him.*” Did they mean, the whole human race had gone after Him? Of course not. They did not even mean that every single person in the Jewish nation had gone after Him! What they meant to convey was that His influence had become very great in Jerusalem.

In **John 12:47** Jesus said, “*And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge **the world**, but to save **the world.***” Did our Lord mean that He had come to save the whole human race? How could He, when multitudes of human beings were even then, already in hell!

The Greek word for “*world*” in all these passages is **kosmos**, and in its application to humankind in the New Testament, we find that it has a reference to two “worlds.” There is a world of believers and a world of unbelievers.

In **2 Peter 2:4-5** we read, *“For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon **the world of the ungodly.**”* This clearly indicates that there is a “world of the ungodly.” Now if there is a “world of the ungodly,” there must be a world of the godly. This is the meaning of **John 1:29**. It was the sin of the world of believers, both Jewish and Gentile, that the Lamb of God took away.

We now turn to perhaps the most well-known verse in the entire Bible, **John 3:16**.

JOHN 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Much of what we commented on when we considered **John 1:29** is applicable here. The word “world” here means all people without distinction. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was not only for Jews but also for Gentiles. The love of God is not confined to national boundaries but extends to all nations, tribes, cultures, tongues, and peoples. It is likely that John intended for the word “world” to have an even more specific reference to the elect. Throughout His gospel, John has Jesus emphasizing the particularity of His grace. As the passages outlined hereunder indicate:

JOHN 5:21

“For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.”

JOHN 6:37-39

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.”

JOHN 10:14-16

“I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.”

JOHN 10:24-28

“Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.”

JOHN 15:16, 19

“Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you...”

If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”

JOHN 17:6-9

“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.”

The point is that God’s people are chosen from an unbelieving world.

But there is a sense in which the word “world” as it is used here by John, refers also to the quality of God’s love. The noted theologian Benjamin Warfield in his sermon **“God’s Immeasurable Love,”** noted that the word “world” in **John 3:16** *“is not here a term of extension so much as a term of intensity. Its primary connotation is ethical, and the point of its employment is not to suggest that the world is so big that it takes a great deal of love to embrace it all, but that the world is so bad that it takes a great kind of love to love it at all, and much more to love it as God has loved it when he gave his Son for it.”*

In other words, **John 3:16** is not so much a reference to the magnitude of the world that God loved but rather to the magnitude of God’s love for a sinful world.

The final passage we will examine in this Lesson is **2 Peter 3:9**.

2 PETER 3:9

“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

In order to properly understand the thrust of Peter’s argument in this verse it is necessary to consider the context. We will, therefore, look at the first nine verses of the chapter.

1 This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance:

2 That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour:

3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts,

4 And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

5 For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

6 Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

7 But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

One of the things that we notice is that the subject of the passage is not salvation but the second coming of Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter is explaining the reason for the delay in Christ's second coming.

Another thing to notice is the clear identity of the people he is addressing. He refers to the "scoffers" using the pronouns "their" and "they" (verses 3 and 5), but he refers to his readers as "you," "ye" and "beloved" (verses 1, 2 and 8). This is very important because the assumption that is usually made is that the "us", the "any" and the "all" of verse 9 refers to everyone on the planet.

The context of **2 Peter 3:9** indicates that when Peter makes reference to "us" and "any" and "all", he is referring to a specific group, the saints, and not to all of mankind. In verse 1 he writes, *"This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you."* Peter is writing to persons who are saved, therefore the "us," the "any" and the "all" of verse 9, must be limited to the same group he is writing to. The longsuffering of the Lord is directed to His elect. He is not willing that any of the elect should perish, but that all of them come to repentance. This, of course, is in harmony with the declaration of our Lord in **John 6:39**, *"And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day,"* and **John 10:27-28**, *"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."*

Another interesting point to note is that in verse 9, Peter states that it is God's will that "all" should come to repentance. But repentance is a gift from God (**Acts 5:30-31**, **Acts 11:18**, **Romans 2:4**, **2 Timothy 2:24-25**). If God does not grant repentance to a person, that person cannot repent. If it is the purpose of God to save every individual who has ever lived, why is not repentance guaranteed to every individual, since no one can be saved without being granted repentance?

Brothers and sisters, the doctrine of **definite** or **specific** Atonement does not mean that the Atonement is limited in power. The noted Bible teacher Arthur Pink said, "The only limitation in the Atonement arises from pure sovereignty; it is a limitation not of value and virtue, but of design and application."

When we say that Jesus Christ died to save His elect, we do not mean to suggest that there is any insufficiency in His atoning blood. Because He was God manifest in the flesh, His blood provides infinite satisfaction for the justice of God. If God had determined to save the whole human race, no more of Christ's blood would have been required. If He had died for one person only, He would have had to suffer no less, since all sin is against an infinite God and demands infinite payment from the Mediator.

But though the blood of Jesus is **sufficient** for all, it is effective only for the elect. The Atonement accomplishes the purpose for which it was provided. Every person whom Jesus Christ died to save will be saved. **Isaiah 53:7** clearly indicates that this is so: *“He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”*

In our next Lesson, we shall look at a few more passages which appear to contradict the doctrine of definite or specific Atonement.