

## *Atonement Unlimited*

The last portion of Romans 5:6 speaks volumes regarding the scope of Jesus' atonement:

*"...Christ died for the ungodly."*

The term "*ungodly*" points to every descendant of Adam, for all persons are born "*...a child of wrath...*" according to Ephesians 2:3. Thus, all people are born "*ungodly*." Hence, Jesus "*died*" for all mankind.

Romans 5:6 alone, without assistance from the wealth of additional passages that could be cited, negates limited atonement—the "L" of the TULIP. Because Jesus "*died for the ungodly*" (Romans 5:6), should atonement be limited, only the elect (those who believe) would be born "*ungodly*." Such a scenario would mean that those who reject Christ are godly—a total impossibility according to passages such as Romans 3:9 and Ephesians 2:3. Most proponents of limited atonement avoid Romans 5:6. In the few cases where they offer commentary, contradiction abounds. (Our *God's Heart* series covers this subject in greater detail.)

Unlimited atonement is validated by an abundance of passages, some of which are listed and discussed below:

*"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)*

*...and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world. (1John 2:2)*

*And we have beheld and bear witness that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. (1John 4:14)*

Those who perceive Jesus' atonement as limited view the word "*world*" in John 3:16, 1John 2:2, and 1John 4:14 as pointing to the "*world*" of the elect. The context of these verses never suggests such a notion.

*...who gave Himself as a ransom for all, ... (1Timothy 2:6)*

The supporters of limited atonement teach that the term "*all*" points to "*all*" of the elect—the elect alone. This conclusion is ill founded, for Paul taught two verses earlier in First Timothy that Jesus died for "*all*" mankind, desiring that "*all men...be saved and...come to the knowledge of the truth*" (1Timothy 2:4).

Among the proponents of limited atonement, the phrase, "*He might taste death for everyone*" (Hebrews 2:9), is perceived as pointing to "*everyone*" who believes—the elect alone.

*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.* (Hebrews 2:9)

Jesus' goal was to die, "...*that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone*" (Hebrews 2:9). Also, the fact that Jesus tasted "*death*" means that He literally died. He tasted "*death for everyone*," confirming that all sin for all time was placed on the innocent Messiah. Therefore, He didn't just die for those who would receive Him as Savior. He took on all the pain and agony of believers and unbelievers alike.

*For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.*  
(1Timothy 4:10)

The words, "*the Savior of all men, especially of believers*" (1Timothy 4:10), which clearly communicate that Jesus died for all mankind, are viewed by some theologians as validating limited atonement—that Jesus died only for the elect. Yet, to avoid the devastating impact of this passage on their contradictory ideology, they teach that Jesus' death provided temporal benefits for the non-elect while securing eternal benefits for the elect. No way!

Adherents of universal salvation also cite 1Timothy 4:10 in an attempt to prove that not one person will be lost, yet 1Corinthians 6:9-10 and 2Thessalonians 1:1-10 clearly teach otherwise.

*But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.* (2Peter 2:1—emphasis added)

Proponents of limited atonement view Peter's words as follows: (1) The false teachers viewed themselves as believers (2) Peter mocks them by verifying their certain destruction.

This interpretation is flawed, for Peter communicates that Jesus died for the "*false teachers*" who were lost, verifying unlimited atonement.

*"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.* (John 3:14-15)

Because the context of Jesus' words to Nicodemus is crucial, let's first examine Numbers 21:4-9 to determine the backdrop of this account:

*Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. And the people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this miserable food." And the LORD sent*

*fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. So the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us." And Moses interceded for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he shall live." And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.*  
(Numbers 21:4-9)

Israel rebelled by speaking "...against God and Moses..." (vv.4-5). As a result, "...the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people...", they were bitten, and "...many people of Israel died" (v.6). Once the people repented, "Moses interceded" (v.7), and God presented the remedy. Moses was to "...Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard..." (v.8) so everyone who was "bitten" might "live" (v.8). They could "live" through only one means—gazing at the "serpent." So "...Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived" (v.9).

The context reveals the meaning of Jesus' words to Nicodemus in John 3:14-15. When Israel sinned in Numbers 21, anyone "bitten" was automatically healed "when he looked to the bronze serpent." The choice was left to the "bitten" ones—not God. Therefore, the correlation is simple. All mankind has been "bitten" by sin, being descendants of Adam. The "bronze serpent," (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14) points to Jesus, who was "lifted up" (John 3:14) on a cross so "that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life" (John 3:15). Just as a "bronze serpent" was raised by Moses as the remedy to the poison injected by the "serpents," Jesus became "sin" (2Corinthians 5:21) while on the cross, taking on the misdeeds of all mankind to eradicate the poison of sin in all who choose (while depraved) to repent and believe. The Jews in Numbers 21, through choosing to believe God's Word by gazing upon His provision, made the choice to obey. The fact that the choice was made before they were healed illustrates that the depraved can choose Christ before being born again. After all, not all who made that choice were believers in Jehovah when the rebellion of Numbers 21:4-5 broke out.

Why must those who support limited atonement go to such lengths while attempting to validate their position? In their opinion, should Jesus' atonement be unlimited, a portion of His blood would be wasted since all are not saved. What they fail to consider is this: All of His blood was required to save just me—or you—or whomever.

Take a moment to consider Romans 5:7-8:

*For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:7-8)

As I ponder these passages, I can't help but ask myself if I would be willing to die for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Until we are placed in a situation requiring such a

decision, I doubt if any of us can know how we would respond. Christ not only “...*died for us*,” but He did so “...*while we were yet sinners....*” What love! He actually demonstrated His love through the cross by dying “...*for the ungodly*” (Romans 5:6), an act sanctioned by His Father. We can demonstrate this same love as we walk by God’s Spirit and lose our lives for others (Matthew 10:39; John 15:12-13; 2Corinthians 4:11-12).

Romans 5:8 is used by the adherents of limited atonement in an attempt to validate their position. They argue that the “*us*” in the passage proves that Jesus died for believers only:

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

Jesus died for “*us*”—for believers. However, passages of this sort do not negate the fact that He died for all—for believers and unbelievers alike (reference notes on Romans 5:6). Nowhere in the verse, nor anywhere else in God’s Word, do we find that Jesus died for the elect alone. To isolate verses for the purpose of establishing a faulty doctrine is an affront against the authority of God’s Word. Context is everything in all areas of Biblical interpretation. Avoiding the context of “*us*” in Romans 5:8 would also allow for an argument that Jesus died only for Paul and the believers at Rome. Similarly, by sidestepping context, one could contend that Paul alone was “*crucified with Christ*” (read Galatians 2:20). It could be said as well that Paul was capable of saving the lost (read Romans 11:14)—heresy indeed.

Many advocates of limited atonement also use Romans 5:8 in an effort to prove that God loves only believers. The phrase, “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us....*,” is cited as proof for their position. They then suppose that the phrase, “*For God so loved the world...*” (John 3:16), points to the world of the elect alone. They then conclude that God loves the saved and hates the lost, a direct violation of Ezekiel 18:32 and Ezekiel 33:11. (Our *God’s Heart* series covers this subject in much greater depth.)

### ***Saved from God’s Wrath through Christ’s Death***

Paul continues by saying:

*Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.* (Romans 5:9)

Jesus’ “*blood*,” once applied to our lives, allows the Father to justify us (make us not guilty before Him)—since the shedding of “*blood*” is a symbol of the fact that a death has occurred, “*the life of the flesh*” being “*in the blood*” (Leviticus 17:11). At that point, everything we have studied concerning justification applies to us. As a result of being righteous, holy, blameless, complete, and all the rest, we will escape God’s “*wrath*.” We will not stand before the “*great white throne*” judgment of Revelation 20:11-15. Only unbelievers will experience that horrible ordeal. We will face “*the judgment seat of Christ*” (2Corinthians 5:10)—a judgment for rewards, not condemnation (Romans 8:1).

Paul repeats himself quite often, for he realizes the necessity of a deep and abiding understanding of the cross. After all, “...*the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*” (1Corinthians 1:18).