

Doctrine of the Atonement

by John G. Reisinger

Sound of Grace

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The central theme and message of both the OT Scriptures and the NT Scriptures is the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ. His atoning, or sacrificial, death on the cross is the watershed of all history (cf. Luke 24:25-27; Acts 8:32-35; 1 Corinthians 2:2). It is no accident that even the secular world divides up history as it relates to the birth of Christ. All men and events are recorded as being either "BC" or "AD." Christ is not only the center of the Bible, He is also the center of history and all creation. The central concern and singular purpose of the mission of the Son of God was the work of Atonement (cf. Matthew 1:21; Luke 2:11; 19:10; Matt 20:28; 1 Timothy 1:15; 1 John 4:14). It is safe to say that we will understand the Word of God only to the degree that we understand the person and work of Christ. To be ignorant about the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be ignorant about salvation by grace.

The following principles should be carefully remembered and put into practice in all of our thinking and discussion of this vital subject. First of all, the doctrine of the atonement is a subject known only by special revelation. We do not learn about this truth any place except in the Bible. We are not looking to philosophy, psychology, science, sentiment, etc., to teach us the meaning of the death of Christ. We are looking to the Scriptures alone. No human mind could dream up the doctrine of atonement by the blood of Christ. This great truth is 'foolishness' to the carnal mind.

Secondly, a right understanding and application by faith of the glorious truth of the atonement will make you see, (1) the nature and depth of the sin out of which you have been redeemed, and (2) the amazing love and power of God that accomplished your salvation. As we look at the sufferings of Christ on the cross and understand what he really accomplished on that horrible instrument of shame, we will be led to adoring worship and praise.

Thirdly, I want it clearly understood that sincere Christians disagree about the biblical meaning of the nature and purpose of the atonement. Some godly believers think Christ died and 'redeemed' all men without exception. In their view, Christ died for Judas in exactly the same way that he died for Peter. Judas did not perish because his sins were not paid for but only because he was unwilling to claim by faith the redemption Christ had provided for him and all other men. We had a special speaker in my first pastorate who declared, "The worst drunk and immoral person in the gutter tonight is just as redeemed as you and I. He need only be willing to claim his redemption and he will be saved. Whether he believes or does not, he is still redeemed by the atonement of Christ." This view is called universal or unlimited atonement.

Other Christians, and I am in this second group, believe that Christ died for the sheep (cf. John 10:11), that is, those given to him by the Father (cf. 17:2, 6, 9), in a way that he did not die for the goats. We believe that Christ died and paid Peter's debt in a way that he did not die and pay the debt of Judas. We believe that Judas, and every other lost sinner will suffer in hell for their sins. If Christ died for Judas in the same sense that he died for Peter, then Judas would also have been saved.

We keep repeating that the heart of the issue is this: Did Christ on the cross actually redeem and make certain the salvation of some sinners, or did his death merely make it possible for all men without exception to be saved if they would contribute faith with their free wills as their essential part in salvation? Is the only real and vital difference between Peter and Judas the 'willingness' of Peter and the 'unwillingness' of Judas? Is the hymn correct, or incorrect, when it says:

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood

Shall never lose its power,

Till all the ransomed Church of God

Be saved to sin no more.

The hymn writer clearly saw 'being saved,' or coming to faith in Christ, as a sure and certain result of 'being redeemed,' or having Christ die in your place. He saw the power of the blood of Christ as truly a redeeming power. The blood did not make all men redeemable, but that precious blood actually made salvation sure, not for all men, but for "the ransomed Church of God." The writer of that hymn could not conceive that some of those who had been ransomed (redeemed) by the blood of Christ could ever perish because of their unwillingness to claim the redemption supposedly 'provided' for them and all others. All of the ransomed people of God will be brought to believe and saved.

Fourthly, let's be absolutely certain we understand what we are, and are not, saying. In no sense whatever are we even remotely implying that there are some poor sinners who sincerely want to be saved but God refuses to save them because Christ did not die for them. Every sinner in the whole wide world who comes to Christ will be received and accepted. Revelation 22:17 means exactly what it says:

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

The problem is not with "whosoever will," the problem is that all men, without exception, are "whosoever will-nots." None are willing to come until God opens their hearts and brings them. We believe and fervently preach the words of our blessed Lord in John 6:37:

...him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out."

Can anything be more true and certain than these words guaranteeing that every sinner without exception who comes to Christ will be saved? We preach that. However, we do not do what most preachers do and begin in the middle of the verse. We also preach the first half of the verse. The first part tells precisely why the second part is true. All who come to Christ will be received because they, and they alone, are the elect for whom Christ died:

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, AND [it is just as true] him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

The "coming ones" and the "given ones" are one and the same people. All who come will be saved, and all who have been given by the Father and redeemed by the Son will come.

We should add that it is a wicked lie that even suggests we believe that some sinners go into heaven kicking and screaming. They do not want to go but since they are elect and Christ died for them, God throws them into heaven against their will. This is utter nonsense. We covered this when we covered the doctrine of election. We insist that the most willingly thing any sinner ever did was to freely repent and believe the gospel. The question is never, "Must we repent and believe," but rather, "Why do some sinners repent and believe and other sinners refuse to do so," and the only correct answer is not "Because of their free will," but the biblical answer is because of the sovereign purpose of God in the death of Christ.

I. The NECESSITY of the atonement-Why Did Christ Have To Die?

Once God decided to save sinners, there was but one way of bringing about this purpose which would be in harmony with God's own character, the law of God, the nature of sin, and the needs of man; and this one way was the substitutionary blood atonement of the Incarnate Son of God. The unregenerate man cannot believe the gospel simply because he cannot see the real need of an atonement. He does not believe that he is a helpless depraved sinner that cannot save himself. The primary reason for this blindness and ignorance lies in the sinner's wrong view of the character of God and his holy and righteous demands revealed in his Law. As long as God is viewed as nothing but love, we will miss seeing his absolute holiness, perfect righteousness, and unflinching justice. The necessity of these attributes being satisfied by an atoning sacrifice will be ridiculed as pagan and inhumane.

II. The NATURE of the atonement-Exactly What Did Christ Accomplish By His Atoning Death On The Cross?

The Necessity of the atonement answers the question, "Why?" The Nature of the atonement answers the question, "What?" It is over the what that Christians disagree.

The chart on page 12 contrasts the theological views of the two main groups and the Scripture verses that each group uses. It is easy to see how differently both groups view the nature of the atonement. One group sees real atonement, or an actual payment that

forever removes sin, as only a possibility until the sinner does his part with his free will and makes the atonement effective. In this view the sinner's faith is 'his part' in salvation. The other group sees the atonement of Christ as a real atonement that, in and of itself, removes forever the sin of all those for whom the atonement was made. This view sees the death of Christ as not merely making salvation possible for all men but actually guaranteeing that all those for whom Christ died will be saved. It is also clear that the two views are miles apart. It might be well to review the central differences between the two. Remember that both groups believe that the atonement was absolutely essential and that it is only through the atonement of Christ that any sinner can be saved.

Study the chart on page 12 carefully and see the radical difference in the (1) intention of God in the atonement, (2) the actual success of the atonement, (3) the power of God and man to make the plan of salvation work, and (4) the real character, or nature of the atonement.

The first thing we must remember is that salvation is the work of a triune God. When we say, "The Lord saved me," we do not mean the Lord Jesus Christ saved us. We mean that the Lord God the Father saved us in electing grace; the Lord God the Son saved us by his atoning death; and the Lord God the Holy Spirit saved us by regenerating us and enabling us to savingly believe. We owe just as much to the Father and the Holy Spirit as we do to the blessed Lord Jesus, and our worship and praise should reflect our debt and gratitude to the Father and to the Holy Spirit for their work.

Not only is it true that each Person in the trinity has a distinct and necessary part to play in our salvation, it is just as true that the work of each Person will be successful. Success is guaranteed because all three persons in the Godhead work together toward the same goal. All those chosen by the Father were redeemed by the Son, and all those redeemed are brought by the Holy Spirit to believe the gospel. This is why the whole plan of salvation will succeed and accomplish everything God intended in executing that plan. Neither he who planned and brought about the death of Christ, nor they for whom that atoning death was intended, will ever be disappointed.

The Real Question: It is essential that we clearly understand the real point of difference, as it concerns the atonement, between those who believe in free grace and those who believe in free will. The question is NOT, "For how many people did Christ die?" No, the real question is, "Did the death of Christ, in and of itself, secure, for certain, the salvation of some people, or did his death merely make it possible for all men to be saved by an act of their 'free will?' In other words, we are not discussing "how many" people Christ died for, but rather "What did Christ accomplish" by his death on the cross! What inevitably had to follow because of Christ's atoning sacrificial death? Put another way, the question is, "What is the one single ingredient that makes God's plan of salvation by grace through faith to work in one person, who believes in Christ and is saved, and not another, who rejects Christ and is lost?"

There is one sense in which it is impossible to limit the death of the Son of God. Our Lord suffered as the infinite Son of God. That is why he could suffer an eternal hell in a

moment of time. It is also the reason that his death can avail for many poor sinners. Christ's death is not limited in its power in any way at all. If God had purposed to save all men without exception, Christ would not have suffered one more ounce of wrath. If only one person had been chosen to be saved our Lord would not have suffered any less. The whole point involves the purpose of the Father in putting his Son on the cross. Exactly what did the Father hope to accomplish? Was it merely to give sinners a 'second chance' to succeed where Adam failed, or was the atonement a carefully planned method of saving his elect? Here is the answer of free will religion to this vital question.

Answer of Free Will Theology - Christ died and paid the penalty for every man's sins, thereby providing, or making possible, salvation in the same way, and to the same degree, for every man without exception. Jesus died and paid for the sins of Judas in the identical same sense that he paid for Peter's sins. All men are equally redeemed but they must personally be willing to accept their redemption before it is effectual. An individual's redemption depends solely on his willingness to accept or reject the atonement. Either way every man is redeemed (meaning potentially redeemed) because Christ died and paid for all the sins of all men. Peter was actually saved only because he was willing to accept the atonement that Christ had 'provided' for all men. Judas was just as redeemed as Peter but the only reason Judas was not saved was that he was not willing to accept the redemption that Christ had provided. The one and only difference between Peter and Judas was Peter's willingness to accept what Christ had done.

The gospel according to this view of free will is, "Christ died for you. Your sins have already been paid for by the Son of God. It is no longer the 'sin' question since that was settled at the cross. It is now the 'Son' question. All your sins are paid for and the only sin that will send you to hell is rejecting the redemption Christ provided for you."

In this view, all men are 'redeemed' by the death of Christ. The individual need only 'claim by faith' his redemption. You need only be willing to 'let Christ save you.' It is Christ's intention and desire to save all men but none-the-less many will still perish. Christ can only save those who cooperate with their free will. The gospel of free will must always go back to man and his so-called free will as the ultimate cause of the success or failure of God's plan of salvation. It must make the assurance that Christ died for 'me personally' to be the foundation of assurance. This is totally different than the gospel message in the Scriptures.

It is obvious that this view has no real redemption but merely a potential, or hypothetical, redemption. Man, by his willingness, not the power of Christ's sufferings, is the one determining factor in every conversion. Let us note the different answer that the religion of free grace gives to the question, "Did the death of Christ, in and of itself, secure, for certain, the salvation of some people, or did his death merely make it possible for all men to be saved by an act of their free will?" Did the atoning death of Christ actually redeem us or did it merely make us redeemable if we would do our part and be willing to cooperate.

Answer of Free Grace Theology: Although the death of Christ is of infinite value, and could save ten thousand worlds of sinners, God's intention, or purpose, in putting his Son on the cross must be measured by its accomplishments. The redemption of Christ in and of itself actually redeems and assures the salvation of specific people, or all those given to Christ by the Father (cf. John 10:11, 14-16; 6:37). It does not make all men potentially redeemable IF they will do their part by being willing to be saved. Christ's death is not just provisional in its nature but rather it actually secures salvation for all of its objects.

The gospel, according to this view, is 'Christ died for sinners.' (See J.I. Packer's article on page 7.) He saves every sinner that comes to him and every sinner that the Father has given to Christ will come him. That promise of salvation includes sinners as bad as you and me.

In this view, Christ actually bought a people for himself out of every tribe and tongue. Christ's desire 'to seek,' and his success 'to save,' are fully realized because his intention and accomplishments involve the same people. He saves all without exception that he seeks. He does not seek all and save some.

III. The problem with terminology. Limited atonement sounds very narrow as compared to unlimited atonement. It leads to misconception and meaningless controversy. We insist that all Christians believe in limited atonement. The fact there is a hell proves that statement. Everyone believes that the ultimate benefits of the atonement are limited to those who believe in Christ. The lost man does not share in the benefits of the death of Christ. The real question is NOT "Is the atonement limited," as I just said, the fact that people are in hell answers that question, but rather the question is, "WHO does the limiting, God or man?" Does God's sovereign grace and purpose dictate the ultimate success or failure of the redemptive work of Christ or does the 'sovereign' and fickle will of man decide whether God's intentions and purposes will be realized?

I repeat, all Christians limit the death of Christ! The question is does God's grace or man's will do the limiting. Those who teach free will believe that man's will limits the success of God's great plan of redemption. God then has an unlimited purpose-to redeem all men, but a limited power-He can only truly redeem those who make themselves willing. We who believe free or sovereign grace hold the exact opposite. We are convinced that God has a limited purpose-to redeem his people, and an unlimited power-to secure their consent and make them willing "in the day of his power" Psalm 110:3.

It is not the limited aspect, but the particular aspect that the Bible emphasizes. Christ died for specific people and actually secured a complete salvation for each one of those for whom he died. He did not die for an undefined group, that is, for everyone in general but no one in particular, and then hope that some of that general group would be willing to give him a chance. Isaiah says, "He shall see His seed." As our Lord died on the cross, he knew for whom he was dying and also knew they would be saved. It is not 'how many' but 'what is the nature of His sufferings?'

The terms limited versus unlimited sounds like one view is narrow and the other, unlimited, is magnanimous. We must remember that the so called "Five Points of Calvinism" have a negative slant only because they were negations (by the Synod of Dort) against the negations (by the followers of James Arminias) against the established truth of the Reformation. (See J. I. Packer's excellent introduction to *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* on page 7.)

We could just as easily say effectual atonement versus ineffectual atonement or efficient atonement versus inefficient atonement. These opposite terms are far closer to the truth than limited and unlimited. Let the free will universalist honestly admit that he preaches an ineffectual and inefficient atonement simply because his whole atonement is only hypothetical. The atonement of free will religion can only be effective and actually atone for sin when man's free will allows it to do so. This makes salvation ultimately depend entirely on man for its success. In reality, this view is teaching that man's free will faith is the real redeeming factor in conversion. The mighty atonement of Christ is unable to accomplish God's earnest desire or purpose until the even mightier free will of man consents to allowing it to happen.

The choice is NOT simply between universal and particular atonement. The choice is between an atonement that actually atones and an atonement that is purely hypothetical and not a real atonement. If we are consistent and honest, the real difference is between particular atonement and universal salvation. Why are some men in hell paying the penalty of their sins if Christ has already paid the penalty for all of the sins of all men? What about those who were already in hell when Christ died? Surely the Father did not punish Christ for men like Ahab who were, at that very moment, in hell enduring the punishment for their sin.

We are not discussing the extent of the atonement in terms of 'how many.' We are discussing the nature of the atonement. It is not, "How many people did Christ die for?" The question is, "What did Christ actually accomplish in his death?" If people insist on talking about the extent of the atonement, then we must keep asking, "The extent in relationship to what?" If we mean the extent of atonement in relationship to God's sovereign purpose, then we will measure God's purpose in the atonement by what it actually accomplishes. The atonement of Christ will secure every thing that God intended it to accomplish. If you start at the other end and ask, "For whom was the atonement made," we will ask you, "Who will ultimately be saved?" In both cases the answer must be identical. If Christ died for all then all will be saved, and if only some sinners are saved it is because it was for them alone that Christ died.

We must see that the disagreement is over salvation as merely a possibility (in which case the atonement is only hypothetical) and salvation as a certainty (because the atonement is a real atonement). That is the heart of the difference.

C.H. Spurgeon was often accused of preaching a very 'narrow' atonement. His opponents said their atonement, or bridge to heaven, was as wide as the whole world and his was not. Spurgeon responded by saying, "I grant that my atonement, or bridge to heaven, is

more narrow than yours. However, yours only goes half way across the chasm and mine goes all the way. In your scheme, the sinner's will must furnish the other half."

IV. Particular atonement is the historic doctrine of the church. Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Knox, and the great Confessions of Faith all teach limited atonement. Universal atonement is the new and novel doctrine when you look at all of church history. I am aware that neither creeds nor great leaders prove what the church must believe, but only what she has believed. However, creeds are like guard rails along the side of a highway. They must never be looked at as the road itself. The Bible alone is the road but the guard rails are a great asset in keeping you on the road. When anyone sees something that no one in the history of the church has ever seen, he better have a lot of very clear biblical proof. Nothing is true just because it is old or because it is found in a creed. However, we do have a right to be concerned with any 'new' truth that all of the great saints of God missed for nearly 2,000 years.

V. What does the Word of God itself say about the death of Christ? Here are some preliminary biblical facts:

ONE: Christ's death was voluntary therefore he has every right to totally control its results. In no sense whatever was God obligated to send Christ to die for sinners.

... I lay down my life... no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself... John 10:17, 18

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son... John 3:16

Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God... Acts 2:23

Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; He hath put him to grief; when Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin... Isaiah 53:10

God was the master of ceremonies at Calvary. This was the most carefully planned and executed event that ever took place. God was not compelled in any way to give his Son, nor was Christ under any constraint to come and die. If it was completely a voluntary act on the part of God, should he not be permitted, and expected, to (1) dispense its benefits as he sovereignly chooses, and (2) assure its success by the exercise of his power?

TWO: Christ's death was also vicarious therefore it must actually secure a real salvation for all for whom he died. Christ acted as a real and true substitute for his people. He actually collected the wages (death) which they earned, and all for whom he died will, yea must, collect the wages (righteousness) that he earned.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 6:23.

In part two we will look at four words, ransom, substitute, reconciliation, and propitiation which all are a different shade of meaning to atonement. We will also see that the death of Christ is not only voluntary and vicarious, but also victorious.

The Doctrine of Atonement Pt. 2

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In our first article we showed the difference between a belief in a universal and a particular atonement. A universal atonement is really only a 'hypothetical' atonement that does not actually atone or redeem anyone. We then started to give three essential facts about the atoning work of Christ on the cross. The cross work of Christ was (1) *Voluntary*, (2) *Vicarious*, and (3) *Victorious*. We covered the voluntary aspect of Christ's death and concluded that since the work of Christ was totally voluntary then God had every right to do as He chooses with the benefits of that work. In this second article we will look at the second 'V' and see that the atonement of Christ was *vicarious*.

TWO: Christ's death was also *vicarious*. The word vicarious means "acting on behalf of or as representing another," or "something performed or suffered by one person with the results accruing to the benefit or advantage of another." The key idea is representation in such a way that one party literally stands in the place of another and is actually treated as if they were the other person. The classic text is 2 Corinthians 5:21:

For He [The Father] made [treated Him as if He were a sinner] Him [the Son] who knew no sin to be sin [treated Him as our substitute] for us [guilty sinners], that we might become the righteousness of God [be treated as if we are as righteous as Christ] in Him.

If Christ actually stood in my place and bore my sin then I can never be punished for that sin. If Christ literally stands as a substitute in the place of any particular individual then that individual must be brought to salvation and be eternally saved. Substitutionary, or vicarious, atonement must actually secure a real salvation for all for whom Christ died or else it is not truly vicarious. If Christ acted as a real and true substitute for His people, then all of His people will be saved. If He actually collected the wages (death) which they earned, by their sin, the all for whom He died will, yea *must*, collect the wages (righteousness) that He earned in His obedient life and death.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom. 6:23).

To say that Christ died a vicarious death in the place of all sinners but not all of those sinners will be saved is a contradiction in terms.

There are four primary words used in the NT Scriptures that show the true vicarious nature of the sufferings of Christ. When these four shades of meaning are put together, we see clearly that Christ's atonement was totally effectual in the salvation of all for whom that atonement was made. The biblical meaning of these four words, *ransom*, *substitute*, *reconciliation*, and *propitiation* must be bled of their true meaning before it is possible to believe in universal atonement. Let us examine these four words.

The first word is *ransom* or *redeem*. The Greek word is *Lutron* (loo-tron) and means "something to loose with." This word describes a person who is all "tied up in debt" and needs cash to get "free." The cash is the ransom price that sets him free. It redeems him from the bondage of debt. Once the cash is paid the debtor is set free. The same idea is set forth in our spiritual redemption. We were in the market place of sin because we had "sold ourselves under sin." Christ shed His blood as the ransom price to "set us free." The key truth in the word *redeem* is that freedom *must* follow the price being paid or there is no real ransom. When our Lord went into the market place of sin and paid the ransom price in His own blood to buy the freedom of sinners, He did not come out of the market place with His basket half-empty. He did not leave behind any for whom He had paid the ransom price. Christ did not pay the price and purchase sinners and then leave some of those sinners still in the market place of sin. "*the Son of man came... to give his life a ransom for many*" (Matt 20:28). The "many" that our Lord gave His life as a ransom for are the elect. All that He redeemed will be saved. "...*ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold,...but with the precious blood of Christ*" (1 Pet 1:18, 19). The blood of Christ did not make us merely redeemable but it actually redeemed us.

Once again we see how clearly universal atonement teaches that Christ's death merely made it *possible* for us to be redeemed, but *our faith* is the decisive factor that enables God to actually redeem us. In the end that means we redeem ourselves by our faith.

One of the key ideas in the word *redeem* is the idea of setting someone, or something, "free by buying it back with a redemption price." It is like a pawnshop where you buy back something you lost or pawned. In Scripture, we are bought out of the market place of sin by the redemption price of Christ's blood. There are four different Greek words that, when put together, give us a good picture of redemption. All four Greek words are translated "redeem" or "redemption" in our English Bibles. However, they are also sometimes translated with other English words.

1. The first word is found in Romans 3:24. It is *apolutwsis* (*apolutron*) and means "delivering." The same Greek word, given in italics, is used in the following verses: "In whom we have *redemption* through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace..." (Eph. 1:7). Hebrews 11:35 translates the same word differently. "Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting *deliverance*..." These women could have been "redeemed," or delivered, but they were not willing to pay the redemption price which was to deny their faith in Christ. They choose death over redemption.

The root from which this word comes is *lutron* (Lutron) and is used as follows: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a *ransom* for many" (Matt. 20:28). "But we trusted that it had been he which should have *redeemed* Israel..." (Luke 24:21). "Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not *redeemed* with corruptible things, as silver and gold...But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:..." (1 Pet. 1:18,19). This word means we are delivered from the wrath of God because we have been loosed from our sins and the punishment those sins deserve. The blood of Christ is always the ransom price that is paid to deliver, or redeem us. This is why the child of God can never "come into judgment." (See John 5:24).

2. The second Greek word is *agorazw* (*agoradzo*) and it means to "go to market" or "buy." Here are some texts that use this word. "Send them away, that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and *buy* themselves bread" (Mark 6:36). "For ye are *bought* with a price: therefore glorify God in your body..." (1 Cor. 6:20). "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast *redeemed* us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Rev. 5:9).

It is easy to see that the particular emphasis is going to the market and buying something by paying a price. When applied to the gospel it means that Christ went into the market place of sin, where we were slaves of sin, and He purchased our freedom with His own precious blood.

In Paul's day over fifty percent of the population of Rome was slaves. The largest markets by far were the slave markets. Men and women were stripped and examined the way horses and cows are examined at an auction and then sold and purchased by the highest bidder. Paul's readers would have clearly understood his meaning and use of this word. They would have realized that our Lord did not leave the market with His basket half full. He did not leave behind, still in their shackles, some for whom He had paid the ransom price.

The word redemption is one of the first words changed in any translation or paraphrase of the Scriptures. The *Good News for Modern Man* totally eliminates the words redeem and redemption from the New Testament. They also eliminate, as much as is possible, the word *blood*. They change *redeem* to "set free" and change *blood* to "His death." When Peter says we were "redeemed by His blood," it comes out "set free by His death."

Now I'm sure some are thinking, "But John, isn't that exactly what you have been telling us that the word means." It is true that redeem means to set free and to shed blood is to take life. However, there is one important ingredient missing in the meaning of each word when redemption becomes only "set free" and blood becomes only "His death." If I went down to the local jail and put sleeping powder into the jailer's coffee, I could, after he fell asleep, steal his keys and "set every prisoner free," but I surely have not "redeemed" them. This word means more than just to set free. It is setting free by paying a necessary ransom price. It is the blood offered to God as proof that a life had been laid in sacrifice

on the altar that the liberal hates so vehemently. It is not just 'His death' that is vital, it is the *kind of death* that He died. Christ died under the just wrath of God as a substitute for guilty sinners. It was a vicarious death offered to God as a necessary price to appease His just wrath. This is Paul's whole argument in Galatians 3:13, 14.

We saw in our last article that the meaning of this word is also changed by evangelists. They speak of Christ "redeeming sinners" when they really mean that Christ made it possible for us to redeem ourselves through faith. If they were honest they would say, "Christ has made your redemption a possibility but not a certainty. Only you can finish the job with your faith." We covered this in our last issue.

3. The third Greek word is a very interesting word. It is *periousios* (per ee os see os) and means "to acquire, by purchase, something that is very special and valuable to you." The idea is to both buy and preserve something you dearly love. The word is translated in our English Bibles with the word *peculiar*.

We are losing the meanings of words in our society. I personally refuse to use the word *gay* to describe a homosexual. I have counseled many homosexuals in my ministry and have never yet met one that was 'gay' or truly happy. There is no group of people who need the love and affection and attempts by Christians to give them the gospel as much as the homosexual community. They hate themselves, they hate God, and they hate everyone else. They desperately need the gospel of sovereign love and grace.

Today the word *peculiar* means "odd" but originally it meant something entirely different. When I am teaching about this word I will often say to a lady, "Suppose your husband publicly said, 'My wife is the most peculiar women I have ever met.' How would you feel?" The lady usually says, "I would bop him on the head." I then add confusion by saying, "This word peculiar originally meant 'cows.'" Now the lady is ready to bop me on the head.

The word peculiar comes from the word *pecus* and literally means "cows." You have this word in the deed to your house. Your deed says you bought the house for the "pecuniary value of \$150,000.00." The word "pecuniary" (*pecus*) means the *real* value as measured in dollars. Originally the pecuniary value of things was measured in terms of cows. The more cows, the more *pecus* value. If the husband who said his wife was the most peculiar women in the world was using the word in the biblical sense then he was saying, "My wife is the most precious possession that I have."

Christians are indeed the most peculiar things in all of the universe. They have been purchased at the greatest price possible. God Himself has purchased them to be His own personal possession. We can now see the true meaning of Titus 2:14: "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a *peculiar* people, zealous of good works."

4. The fourth word is the same as the second word except it has an *ek* in front of it. The word *ek* means "out of" or exit. The word is used in the following passages: "Christ hath

redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree..." (Gal. 3:13). "To *redeem* them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:5).

This word does not just mean purchased *at* the market, but purchased *out of* the market. When you sell a house you put it on the market. If it does not sell in a given period you take it off the market for a while and then you may later put it back on the market. That little word *ek* means that we have been purchased in such a way that we can never again go back into the market place of sin. We are purchased out of the market *forever*. The two texts in Galatians mentioned above means that believers are forever out from under the law and its just curse. The law cannot condemn us. We have been purchased and forever put out of its reach.

I remember reading that a Van Gogh painting had been put up for auction and the highest bid was nine million dollars. The owner refused to sell since he had paid over eleven million for the painting. He waited a year and then put it back on the market. Sometimes a painting is either purchased by, or given to, the National Museum of Art. When this is done that particular painting can never again be put up for auction and sold. It is the 'peculiar possession' of our national museum to be enjoyed by the entire populace. Believers have been purchased by God and placed in His museum of grace. We can never again be put on the auction block in the market place of sin. The Church will reveal the power and beauty of His grace throughout all eternity. Paul says that believers are "His workmanship." We are living testimonies to the power of His love and grace.

Just as an artist takes a piece of blank canvas and uses various colors of paint to produce a masterpiece or 'work of art,' so God has taken pieces of useless junk that were ruined by sin and creates a spiritual work of art that will shine throughout eternity.

Often we read a verse and never stop to really look at what it is saying. For many years I read Romans 8:18 without seeing what it was really saying. Paul is not talking about the amazing glory that shall be revealed *to* us in eternity. That of course is true but is not his point in this text. *Believers themselves are the glory of God!* The text says "the glory that shall be revealed *in* us" not *to* us. Just as men and women walk through an art gallery and admire the amazing work of great artists, so the whole universe will admire the wisdom and power of God's grace as it is displayed in His people. What a tremendous thought! We should be living epistles now even as we shall be revealers of His glory in eternity.

A classic illustration of the truth of redemption is found in Hosea 3:1-3.

(1) Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine. (2) So I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer of barley, and an half homer of barley: (3) And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee.

Hosea's wife, Gomer, was unfaithful to him. It is quite possible that his two sons were not really his own sons but had been fathered by a different man. Gomer leaves Hosea and openly practices prostitution. She is finally reduced to slavery and is on the auction block to be sold to the highest bidder. God tells Hosea to buy back his own former betrothed wife. Hosea is to love her, "as I have loved Israel." She is a picture of Israel's (and our) nakedness, sin, and unfaithfulness.

Gomer does not come back to Hosea as a slave, as she actually deserved, but as a wife who is dearly beloved. She does not come back to be hated and punished but to be "loved as I have loved Israel." That is grace.

I once heard of a preacher whose wife had become an alcoholic. She was a real embarrassment to him. One Sunday morning after his sermon the preacher was shaking hands with his congregation at the door. A taxicab pulled up and a drunken woman got out and lurched across the pavement. Just as she reached the place where the preacher was standing, she started to fall and the preacher reached out and caught her in his arms. Everyone waited to see what the preacher would do or say. While everyone was watching, he drew his wife to his chest and kissed her on her lips. She was his wife and he loved her.

That is exactly what God has done many times with every one of us. We have played the harlot and given our affections to false gods. We have been drunk with the allurements of the world. How many times could God have justly divorced us and said, "I am sick of your sin and rebellion? I am tired of your halfhearted love. I am done with you forever." Do not our hearts cry out, "Many times, times many." But our God will never divorce His people that He choose in Christ and bought with the blood of His Son. He graciously brings us back to Himself and opens the well springs of our hearts and we weep in confession of our sin and with faith believe in the sure hope of His grace.

Bible translation is a very difficult job. Especially in a culture that has no written language and a very limited vocabulary. I remember reading about a missionary in Africa trying to translate the word redemption into a particular tribal language. No one could understand what he was trying to teach.. He tried every way possible to explain the concept but got nowhere. Finally the oldest man in the tribe said, "You mean that Jesus died to take our necks out." The missionary asked what the man meant. The old man remembered the days of slave trading when men were literally caught and shackled with a steel ring around their necks and then tied with a chain to other men likewise shackled. As these helpless captives were being marched off to the ship to be taken to England and America to be sold as slaves, a village chief might see one of his people in the line. If he chose to do so, he could trade with the slave trader and give him some ivory for the slave's release. The slave trader would then unlock the chain ring around the poor man's neck and set him free. He would "take his neck out of the ring."

That is exactly what our Lord did for us. He took our necks out of the chain of sin. However, the chains that held us were stronger than any steel and could not be broken with any human means. It took nothing less than the blood atonement of the Lamb of

God to break the shackles that held us. The Bible in that particular tribe stills says "Jesus died to take our necks out," and everyone knows what it means. I am sure no one could imagine the village chief paying the price for a slave and watching that slave nonetheless go on in his chains into slavery.

In the next issue we will look at the other three words—*substitute*, *reconciliation*, and *propitiation*—that round out the biblical view of the atoning work of Christ.