Limited Atonement / Particular Redemption

Limited atonement, also known as particular redemption, is the third of the five points of Calvinism. The five points are described using the acrostic TULIP: T- Total inability/depravity; U- Unconditional election; L- Limited atonement/particular redemption; I- Irresistible grace/efficacious call of the Spirit; and P- Perseverance of the saints. Below is a definition of limited atonement and, beside it, a description of the Arminian counterpoint known as universal redemption or general atonement:*

Calvinism

Limited Atonement / Particular Redemption

Christ's redeeming work was intended to save the elect only and actually secured salvation for them. His death was substitutionary endurance of the penalty of sin in the place of certain specified sinners. In addition to putting away the sins of His people, Christ's redemption secured everything necessary for their salvation, including faith which unites them to Him. The gift of faith is infallibly applied by the Spirit to all for whom Christ died, therefore guaranteeing their salvation.

Arminianism

Universal Redemption / General Atonement

Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.

Key similarities:

- Both views limit the atonement in some way. Calvinists say the atonement is limited in *purpose*; that is, Christ's death was *intended* to secure the salvation only of the elect. Arminians say the atonement is limited in *effect*; that is, Christ's death paid the sin debt for all people but is *effective* only for those who believe.
- Only the elect are actually saved. Neither Calvinists nor Arminians believe in universalism (the false teaching that God ultimately will save all people and bring them into His kingdom).
- Christ's death was sacrificial and substitutionary; that is, His death "cancelled the debt of our sin, appeased His holy wrath against us and won for us all the benefits of salvation" (John Piper, *Limited Atonement*).
- Because of the death of Christ, a genuine invitation can be made to any person to believe in Him for salvation.

From *The Five Points of CALVINISM - Defined, Defended, Documented* by David N. Steele and Curtis Thomas.

(Over)

Key differences:

- Calvinism teaches that the gifts of faith and repentance were purchased at the cross and are given irresistibly to the elect. Arminians do not believe God purchased faith and repentance at Calvary; rather, they are the sinner's gifts to God in exchange for eternal life.
- Calvinism teaches that Christ's death on the cross intentionally and definitely secured the salvation only of the elect, bypassing all others. Arminianism teaches that Jesus' work at Calvary paid the sin debt for all mankind, including those who would reject Him and, as a consequence, spend eternity apart from Him.
- Calvinism stresses that the Holy Spirit applies the gift of faith to all for whom Christ died (the elect), guaranteeing their salvation; that is, Christ purchased the gift of faith with His blood and the Spirit delivers that gift irresistibly to the elect only. Arminians counter that all people have the ability to respond in belief and repentance to God, not just the elect.

What is atonement?

The English word "atonement" does not appear in modern translations of the New Testament and is used only once in the King James Version – in Rom. 5:11, where a better rendering is "reconciliation." But "atonement" is used frequently throughout the Old Testament and means "to cover," "placate," "appease," or "effect reconciliation." As applied to the priestly work of offering sacrifices, atonement was a temporary satisfaction of God's justice and the temporary appeasement of His wrath; that's the reason priests had to offer sacrifices regularly for the sins of the people (see, for example, Heb. 9:25). Every spotless animal on the altar, and every drop of blood, pointed to the future and to the cross where the Lamb of God would shed His blood in full satisfaction of God's justice, resulting in the extension of God's grace and mercy to sinners. In this regard, Jesus did not "atone" for our sins; He "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. 9:26 NASB).

Even so, the word "atonement" is used today in a theological sense to describe the finished work of Christ in reconciling lost sinners to God. Paul wrote that "in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). God is the Initiator of the atonement; His Son is the Author and Finisher of our faith, who joyfully laid down His life for us (Heb. 12:2). Christ's death was *substitutionary* in that He died in our place (2 Cor. 5:21), and *satisfactory* in that He paid the penalty for our sins, making peace between God and sinners.

But did Christ die only for certain people, or for all? If only for the elect, then what hope is there for the non-elect? And if for all, was His blood not wasted on many who will die in their sins? These are key questions we will explore later in this study.

Next Week: T-U-L-I-P – Irresistible Grace / Efficacious Call of the Spirit

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