

***Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas***  
***Fredericksburg Bible Church***

*107 East Austin*

*Fredericksburg, Texas 78624*

*830-997-8834    [jthomas@fbgbible.org](mailto:jthomas@fbgbible.org)*

**B1051 – December 19, 2010**  
**The Extent Of The Atonement**

We're going to continue with the Death of the King but let me alert you that we're going to have a little appendix on the limited versus unlimited atonement debate that has gone on since the time of the Protestant Reformation. So just as with the Birth of the King we added an appendix on the Trinity so with the Death of the King we will add an appendix on the Extent of the Atonement. When we get there it won't be easy but I think it's helpful to spend a few lessons thinking through this question and hopefully you'll at least come away with a little more respect for the people on both sides of the fence.

Just to warm up to the subject, we are looking at the event of the Death of the King. And I hope we're getting the point over, that you cannot... you *cannot* talk about any piece of Scripture without relating it to the whole of Scripture. So when we're talking about something like the Death of the King, we have to envelop it with all prior Scripture. John Whitcomb said it this way; to understand any verse properly you have to understand every other verse prior to that verse. We can't go through every verse but the point remains, we are trying to keep the Death of the King in the larger frame of reference.

We've seen different views down through church history. We've seen what we call the Satisfaction view; we've seen the Human Influence view, and we've seen the Governmental view. These views are attempts by men to understand what's going on at the cross. The satisfaction view says that whatever happened on the cross was directed toward satisfying God. The satisfaction view says God's just character was offended and therefore had to be satisfied. This is a God-view; this relates the cross to something in the nature of God. The human influence view says that Jesus Christ's death on the cross is a

witness of His dedication to His mission, etc. So the human influence view is man-centered, and has come down in church history to be characteristic of liberal churches. Liberal theology, usually 99% of the time, explains the cross of Christ as basically an example to follow. Then kind of a half-way house between the views was the governmental view that Jesus Christ died to show that God took sin seriously. Of course, the government view is directed toward man too, it's a witness to man.

We want to spend a few minutes going through an article today. I want to see if you can detect which view of the cross the author of the article is promoting. We have to train ourselves to be attuned to these things because an author can write a very emotional story that draws us in, subconsciously, into a view of the cross that doesn't even touch the central issue of the cross and then we go around thinking, wow, isn't that inspiring. Hopefully by going through this you'll see what I mean about how subtle Satan is. When Satan puts forth a deception it doesn't say on the side in bold letters, DECEPTION. Satan is an angel of light and so when he puts forth a lie it always contains elements of truth. Satan can't mislead unless he has truth. He has to have pieces of truth or his counterfeit doesn't look like the truth. So there will be elements of truth which divert our attention, and there are elements of truth in all three of these views but we have to watch out lest the central element be left out. What did we say was the central element of the cross? What is at the core of the cross upon which the other two views rest? The satisfaction view. That God has been satisfied. The problem with the other two approaches to the cross is that salvation becomes something rather trivial, because all we do is repent of our sin and God says oh goodie, that's what I was looking for, or they just don't treat sin seriously at all. These two views are very weak in that respect. So let's look at the article. A very well-meaning Christian sent this to me earlier this year. They said I might want to use this in some future teaching. We'll use it but probably not in the way they expected. I warn you, this is a very emotional story. If you think this through it is horrible what went on in Rwanda. We're not downplaying any of that. We're looking at it for its view of the cross. What really happened on the cross according to this author?

“In four horrific months in 1994, at the urging of the Rwandan government, the poorer Hutu majority took up bayonets and machetes and committed

genocide against the wealthier Tutsi minority. In the wake of this unspeakable tragedy, nearly a million people had been murdered.

In August of 2003, driven by overcrowded prisons and backlogged court systems, 50,000 genocide criminals, people who had already confessed to killing their neighbors, were released again into society. Murderers were sent back to their homes, back to neighborhoods literally destroyed at their own hands, to live beside the few surviving relatives of the very men, women, and children they killed.” [We already have a problem in that society don’t we. What’s the problem? Where is justice? It’s not even on the radar. They release murderers. What’s the biblical stance on murder? It’s a capital crime. Why? Because of vengeance? No. Because the murderer has murdered the image of God not just a piece of biological machinery. And you can’t put a monetary value on the image of God. So already this society has no concept of biblical justice.] With eyes still bloodshot at visions of a genocide it failed to see, the world now watches Rwanda, looking with a sense of foreboding, wondering what happens when a killer comes home; what happens when victims, widows, orphans, and murderers look each other in the eyes again; what happens when the neighbor who killed your family asks to be forgiven.” [watch because now we get into the religious words. Don’t be taken in by religious sounding words, it’s the content of the words that matters, not just words.] “For the people of Rwanda, the description of the Hebrew prophet is a reality with which they live: "And if anyone asks them, 'What are these wounds on your chest?' the answer will be, 'The wounds I received in the house of my friends'" (Zechariah 13:6). How does a culture bear the wounds of genocide?” [so right away what’s the author’s agenda? Is the issue individual salvation or is it cultural healing? Cultural healing. Society being cured of all this mess. What’s he doing? He’s setting the stage and he’s doing it by a question. Don’t be taken in by a question. Remember what we’ve said over and over again. Be careful with question. Questions are pre-loaded with agendas and we have to slow down and say, wait a minute, is that a right question? Or am I being led down a primrose path? Don’t rush ahead just because someone asks a question lest you answer the question and end up like the questioner, in folly. And you wonder how did I ever get way over here?]

“For Steven Gahigi, that question is answered in a valley of dry bones which cannot be forgotten. An Anglican clergyman who lost 142 members of his

family in the Rwandan genocide, he thought he had lost the ability to forgive. Though his inability plagued him, he had no idea how to navigate through a forgiveness so costly. "I prayed until one night I saw an image of Jesus Christ on the cross...I thought of how he forgave, and I knew that I and others could also do it." Inspired by this vision," [alright, let's pause here. What view of the cross is coming? Anyone see it yet? What is central to Gahigi's view of the cross? Jesus was an example of forgiveness. Which view? Satisfaction, Human Influence or Governmental? It's influence. Jesus is a good example of forgiving your enemies. Did Christ forgive His enemies on the cross? Yes, He did. We're not throwing out the merit of that view. We're just asking, what's the essence of the cross in Gahigi's article? Let's go on.] "Inspired by this vision, Gahigi somehow found the words to begin preaching forgiveness. He first did this in the prisons where Hutu perpetrators sat awaiting trial, and today he continues in neighborhoods where the victims of genocide live beside its perpetrators." [Question: is Gahigi going around preaching the gospel? What is he preaching? Forgive your enemies. Why? Because Jesus forgave His enemies. That's all it is. Is there anything about the cross and God's justice? No, not a thing at all, it's all horizontal, man forgiving fellow man, cultural healing, social salvation.] "For Gahigi, wounds received in the house of friends can only be soothed with truth-telling, restitution, interdependence, and reconciliation, all of which he finds accessible because of Christ." [We might ask why is it accessible because of Christ? Because He's an example. See the verbiage? See how carefully it's cloaked in religious words; truth, restitution, reconciliation. But it's all defined down here on the human plane. It never rises into the Godhead. There's no vertical dimension. There's no justice of God.]

In fact, the work of reconciliation that is taking place in Rwanda in lives on every side of the genocide may be difficult to describe apart from the cross of Christ. While it is true that forgiveness can be explained in therapeutic terms, that the act of forgiving is beneficial to the forgiver, and forgiveness releases the victim from the one who has wronged them, from chains of the past, and a cell of resentment; what Rwandans are facing today undoubtedly reaches beyond this. While forgiveness is certainly a form of healing in lives changed forever by genocide, it is also very much a form of suffering." [Now we're going to re-define terms, so watch; now he really re-defines the cross. Men do not want to come face to face with the cross so what they do is they take the fact of the cross and re-interpret it. Here it comes. Watch it. How has

he just redefined the cross? What's the cross all about? Is it about the wrath of a holy God being poured out on Jesus Christ for us? No, it's about suffering.]

Miroslav Volf, himself familiar with horrendous violence in Croatia and Serbia, describes forgiveness as the exchange of one form of suffering for another, modeled to the world by the crucified Christ." [What did he just say? Jesus Christ did what? He modeled for us what forgiveness is. What is forgiveness? Suffering. And that's true. He did do that. But if that's all then you haven't even touched the truth. Jesus Christ is just a model for us to follow, a model of suffering the pain of forgiving others. See how quickly this resorts to salvation by works. Now salvation is redefined to be forgiving others. Volf... "writes, "[I]n a world of irreversible deeds and partisan judgments redemption from the passive suffering of victimization cannot happen without the active suffering of forgiveness." For Rwandans, this is a reality well understood.

And for Christ, who extends to the world the possibility of reconciliation by embodying it, this suffering, this willingness to be broken by the very people with whom he is trying to reconcile, is the very road to healing and wholeness." [So how are we saved? What's the plan of salvation in this article? Societies are saved by being willing to be broken by our enemies. And how do we do that? Forgive them. If we forgive others then we'll save society.] "More than just the passive suffering of an innocent person," writes Volf, "the passion of Christ is the agony of a tortured soul and a wrecked body offered as a prayer for the forgiveness of the torturers." [a radical re-interpretation of the cross. Jesus on the cross is just a prayer, just words. Has sin been dealt with on the cross? According to Volf? Not at all? Was God's justice satisfied on the cross? Not even close. It's just an example to influence us to forgive others. Let's drop down to the middle of the next paragraph] "There is no clearer picture of Zechariah's depiction of wounds received at the house of friends than in a crucifixion ordered by an angry crowd that lauded Christ as king only hours before. And yet, it is this house of both murderous and weeping friends for which Jesus prays on the cross: Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Far from the suggestion of a moralistic god watching a world of suffering and brokenness from a distance, the costly ministry of reconciliation comes to a

world of violence and victims through arms that first bore the weight of the cross. For Steven Gahigi, who facilitates the difficult dialogs now taking place in Rwanda, who helps perpetrators of genocide to build homes for their victims' families, forgiveness is indeed an active form of suffering, but one through which Christ has paved the hopeful, surprising way of redemption. [again, a very clear statement that I believe in the human influence theory of the cross of Christ. It motivates me to live a better life.]

Today, wherever forgiveness is a form of suffering, Christ accompanies the broken, leading both the guilty and the victimized through valleys of dry bones and signs of a coming resurrection.” [we might ask what is meant by resurrection but I think you get the point. A lot of it sounds very good and there are some kernels of truth but if you read the article carefully you never see anything about the cross satisfying the justice of God, there’s nothing God-ward to any of it, it’s all Jesus on the cross undergoing the suffering of forgiveness, he’s a great example to follow and if we’ll follow his example then society will be saved. Is that the gospel? Is there anything about faith in Christ? No, it’s all the human works of forgiving others. A false gospel.]

I hope that helps you see how subtle these things can be. What you might do for an exercise is to re-write the article from a biblical frame of reference. Think through how you would have handled the Rwandan situation. What would your ministry have been like if you held to the Satisfaction view of the cross and what would have been your message as you went into the prisons and the villages? Then re-write the article from a biblical standpoint and I think you’ll come up with a very different article and if you put the two articles side by side, you’re article and this article you’ll see how far off this article really is.

Central to it all, underneath it all you have to have the satisfaction view. It’s the satisfaction view that’s at the core and the others are there but they’re not there without the satisfaction core. So we’re not ditching these, we’re just peripheralizing them so we can see what’s really central to the cross.

One other thing to illustrate: what did we pull out of the OT framework that we spent years developing? What two great events can you go back to give your mind a picture? Lots of times when you catch yourself in these situations, even in your own soliloquies with yourself, it’s useful to slow

down, back up and say wait a minute, let me go back and think through a Biblical story. There are two great Biblical stories from the OT to think through to help appreciate this cross work of Christ.

One of those is the Flood and the other one is the Exodus. Why do those two events help? Because both of them are events when God judged and when God saved, and both of them have judgment/salvation back to back. There's no such thing in Scripture of salvation without a corresponding judgment. Every time God delivers it's delivering from something, and He only delivers some people from that "something." The rest of the people get clobbered. The Flood is an example of that. He saved only eight people, and everybody else on this planet was destroyed. There was judgment upon the unsaved and there was salvation for the saved. And it was done through water and the ark. In that situation was there a genuine saving, or was it just a human influence? People weren't too impressed with Noah's ark building, probably thought it was one of the worst capital investments. For a hundred and some odd years the guy and his family sat on the front lawn and built this thing. But why did it influence those eight people enough to build and go into the ark? Because it was a real event coming, the people that were influenced by it believed in a real judgment to come.

The Exodus was also an example of that. Who was it that was influenced to put blood on their doors? The people who trusted that God was going to judge. I'd better put blood on my door or the death angel is coming in my house. So these two events give you the background for the cross. The cross is a similar thing. The cross of Christ does influence people, it does show God is serious about sin, but like the Flood and like the Exodus, the blessings of what that work is all about don't come unless we enter by faith. That is the entry. They had to enter the ark by faith. They had to put blood on the door in the Exodus by faith and if you didn't, too bad. The issue between the saved and the unsaved in both cases wasn't race, it wasn't whether they were male or female; gender had nothing to do with it. Educational level had nothing to do with it. There was only one thing it had to do with. Did they believe enough to do it or didn't they? Nothing else mattered, only that.

When we deal with these things we are face to face with God telling us, basically, trust Me. That's what He basically says; that's the answer, trust Me. So we have to sit back and say to ourselves, with the kind of Creator we

have, we have every reason to trust Him because He has thought it through completely. There's a complete reason for our suffering. He hasn't chosen to reveal that reason or reasons to me, but because of who He is, I am willing to stand back and say I can't touch the reason here, but this tragedy that has happened in my life has rationality to it, it's not an irrational accident. That is comforting.

We've worked with the nature of the atonement and we want to move to the extent of the atonement. We're going to look at two verse chains. There are two sets of verses and I want to spend a few moments going through these verses. Matt 1:21, in the first few verses we're going to go through the verses that are cited by folks who believe in what they call the limited atonement. And by "limited atonement" they mean that Jesus Christ died only for the elect. That's the statement, that is classical Calvinism, some of you know it as TULIP, Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints, a five letter acrostic.

Keep in mind that Calvinism is a second and third generation development of Calvin. It's somewhat embarrassing to see the fact that Calvin never addressed some of the things that the Calvinists addressed. In at least one area, a shocking area actually, is Calvin's definition of what faith is. A lot of people are frustrated because we have so much sin and confusion in Christian circles and they want to straighten out the church, so they say you really don't believe unless you totally dedicate your life to the Lord, and this and that, and the emphasis is all on what you do, you're going to dedicate your life, you're going to promise you'll never do it again, this and that and all the rest. It actually comes out of the second and third generation Calvinism. The Puritans in New England did this. If you studied church history you know that the Puritans would write 500-600 page books to find out whether they were of the elect or not. How were they supposed to tell whether they were the elect or not? Whether they lived the Christian life well enough. They were morbidly introspective, trying to figure out whether they were the elect or not. They were trying to have faith in faith is the problem. Did I have the right kind of faith?

When you read Calvin that's not what he said. Calvin's definition of faith is assurance. So if I'm assured of my salvation I'm not going to be looking to see whether I'm in the elect or not, because by definition if I believe I have

assurance and if I don't have assurance, then I don't believe. So whatever happens when we trust the Lord..., see it's a miracle. That's why it's so hard; it's just that people like to fight about this, it's really hard stuff. When the Holy Spirit brings us to Jesus Christ there is a miracle that goes on in our soul and we can't dissect all of what happened. We can't even dissect what He does in the natural realm. How does life start? We don't know, every decade we learn more and more things about the cell. 100 years ago the cell was a black box, just a bubble of protoplasm, now that have advanced instruments we find out there are little chemicals that build tiny train tracks called microtubules for little railroad cars to transport things all over the cell, then the chemicals deconstruct those train tracks and build another one going somewhere else. We've got the nucleus and at the gate of the nucleus there are guardians that regulate what goes in and what goes out. I mean, gee, this thing is advanced, you wonder how can one little cell that I can't even see with my naked eye be so complicated. We're struggling to understand that and now we come to the atonement and we're trying to understand how God miraculously works in our heart in an instant of time to take us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. And the NT says in 2 Cor 4 Satan is trying to block all this, he's trying to disrupt whatever this work is that God does, and when you see someone trust the Lord are you telling me you're going to understand the miraculous work He did in that person's soul? No one can do this. All we have is what light is cast on it by the Scriptures.

The Scriptures we're going to look at are going to be all verses that talk about Jesus dying for those who have believed. In Matt 1:21, the angel speaking, "And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save" who? The world? No, it says "who will save His people from their sins." The object of the verb, and we can analyze it grammatically to get a little more precision to it, what we're doing is we're saying here's the verb, to "save." What is the object of that verb? Save who? It says "save His people," it doesn't say Gentiles, it doesn't say all men; it says "His people."

There are lots of verses but I'm just trying to show you the approach. In Eph 2:15-17, it's talking about something that was accomplished in the atonement, and it says, "by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, thus establishing peace, <sup>16</sup>and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to

death the enmity. <sup>17</sup>And He came and preached peace to you who were far away, and peace to those who were near,” speaking of Jews and Gentiles. In verse 16 who is in the one body, believers or unbelievers? Believers. Jew or Gentile? Both Jew and Gentile. So again Jesus Christ dies to do all this work, and all the work is being done for believers.

Eph 5:25, again typical of the church, what we face here as Paul goes through the marriage analogy, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.” So there’s a peculiar series of verses throughout the Bible that repeatedly refer to the fact that Christ died in a very special way for those who believe. Titus 2:14, “who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” He “gave Himself,” there’s the atonement, verse 14, so there’s His saving work. Who “gave Himself for” whom? “for us.” Not all men. I think you get the idea, there are verses that talk about Jesus Christ dying for those who believe.

Now we’re going to look at some verses that say He died for the world. 2 Cor 5:15, it says, “and He died for all, that they who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf. <sup>16</sup>Therefore from now on we recognize no man according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.” In verse 18, “Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, <sup>19</sup>namely that God was in Christ reconciling” who to Himself, believers only? No, it says “reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.” So now we’ve got one of the words of salvation, reconciliation, and what’s the object of the reconciliation? The world. These are not the only verses but we’d be here all day if we went through every single one.

1 Tim 2:6, “who gave Himself as a ransom for” who? “for all, the testimony borne at the proper time.” Now the object is all, the object is all men. 1 Tim 4:10, “For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of” only believers? No, “the Savior of all men, especially of believers.” Notice the special distinction, of all, yes, but especially of believers. What does Titus 2:11 say; it says, “For the grace of

God has appeared, bringing salvation to” who? “all men.” So here again, not some men, not believers, not the church, but “all men.”

One other verse, 1 John 2:2. When I first came here I taught 1 John right from this pulpit and we spent four weeks on this verse. 1 John is one of the most misunderstood books in all Protestantism. And I’m convinced it’s not known what John is saying because John speaks with very basic vocabulary; John is not going to teach you many new vocabulary words. But what that does is it lulls you into a false sense of security, oh, I know what John is saying, I can read John, light, dark, abide, not abide, John is easy and what happens is you get lulled into thinking, well, since the vocabulary is easy the theology must be easy. It’s not easy. John has a way of talking that if you’re not careful you can botch it pretty bad. And that’s what a large portion of Protestantism has done to John’s writing. They’ve botched it. As far as John’s first epistle goes there are probably not 1 out of 10 theologians that know what John is talking about. Notice 2:2, right after the well-known 1 John 1:9 we have a key verse, 1 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.” What are you going to say this is talking about, propitiation for our sins, that’s believer’s sins, “and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.” All kinds of believers in the world? Obviously that’s not what John is saying. All these verses say the atonement extends in some way beyond the world of believers. Somehow it goes out to the world of unbelievers.

Why this has triggered debate, and it’s not just one of these little theological things, how many angels can stand on the head of a pin or something, there are some serious repercussions that come out of this if you get on the wrong track. Let’s look at the limited side of the controversy for a moment. Let’s look at some of the good things that are being said here. If Jesus Christ died to save the elect, and by the elect I’m using that word synonymously with believer, I’m not meaning to get into all kinds of predestination arguments, etc., just as a title for believers. If Christ dies for the elect is He successful? Well by definition, yes. If He dies only for believers, then is His death wasted on unbelievers? Or said another way, if Jesus Christ dies for this person, this person, this person, they’re all believers, has His work been frustrated or limited somehow by man? No, because He didn’t intend to save all in the first place. Keep in mind these are the Reformed people, and what are they big on? Sovereignty. It’s very important to second and third

generation Reform people that they defend the sovereignty of God to the third decimal place.

If God is truly sovereign His work can't be frustrated, so reasoning backwards if only believers are saved and there are lots of other people that wind up in hell, without the benefits of the atonement, then God must have intended it to be that way in the first place. So Christ died only for the elect. See the line of reasoning? Their passion and interest is trying to protect that God didn't intend to do something that man frustrated and so God sits in eternity saying well, I got 35%, that's not a bad batting average. That's what they're trying to avoid, winding up with a God of history who's sitting there, hmmm, is so and so going to believe or not. That's what they're trying to protect against. And it's a legitimate concern.

The other side believes in unlimited atonement, that Christ died for elect and non-elect alike. They say how in the world can you people believe that Christ only died for the elect, how can you be missionaries with that belief? That's your motive for evangelizing, if in your heart you say to yourself well, He only died for the elect so only the elect are going to believe, it's up to God, so why bother to preach the gospel? After all, if you knew who the elect and the non-elect were you wouldn't even bother with them, because they're not going to believe anyway. So the unlimited people are concerned with evangelism. The limited people are concerned with God's sovereignty, we'll call it the plan of God, who writes the plan here. I want to show you these two things don't contradict and we have to get into some heavy stuff to do this.

Some of you would like to understand this and others of you, if you'll just put up with the rest of us we'll go on. But I'm going to try to show this by four points. We'll go into more detail in the coming weeks, but I'm going to state four things about the atonement. I'm introducing them to you this way because I want you to realize that I'm trying to be very careful in what I'm saying. I'm trying to give due respect to all the Scriptures that we've seen. The Scriptures have these two themes in them. We know enough of our God to know that we don't have a contradiction in Scripture. So as always we're dealing with sovereignty and responsibility again.

What was the thing we dealt with in the last event of Christ's life where you saw this happen earlier? In the life of Christ we dealt with impeccability, we

had two phrases. Which of these two sentences describe the Lord Jesus Christ during His lifetime? Was He *able not to sin*? Everybody says yes, He was *able not to sin*. Was He also *not able to sin*? Well, I don't know about that one, if He was not able to sin how could He have been tempted? We went through that and gave two examples of two godly men, Hodge and Shedd facing off on that issue, but each one of them had a different point they were trying to protect.

This is what I want to warn you about, when you get into stuff like this, don't jump on one side or the other prematurely; understand that nine times out of ten when you dig around deeply enough, you find out that we've got a lot of this going on, people on one side of the fence are concerned with one thing, people on the other side of the fence are concerned with another thing, and they're both legitimate concerns. And since God is incomprehensible, meaning He's infinitely complicated, it might just give us pause to the fact that maybe there's truth on both sides of this thing, and we'd better be a little cautious about jumping on one side or the other. Obviously God doesn't have a problem; we're the ones that have the problem. How do we understand what He has done in the work of Christ?

We're going to start with the first point and all we'll have time for is the introduction to this. But I give you all that background because I want you to see that this is tough stuff. Most of you have slugged it out over the last two or three years in this class and you're aware there's a progress of revelation, and as time goes on in history God reveals more and more. You've seen these debates before, you saw the impeccability issue. With the Call of Abraham you had the election issue. So you've seen things like this before, so don't freak out, we'll just take it a step at a time.

The first thing we want to say is that no matter what side of the fence you are on here, you have to agree on one thing, that Jesus Christ work on the cross is the sole legal basis of all grace that can ever come to believer and unbeliever alike. Here's the deal. God has a character, He is sovereign, He is righteous, He is just, meaning He is holy, and He has the other attributes, He is omnipotent, etc. That's His character. One part of His character is He's immutable and He's not going to change His character. So that means that this quality about our God is never ever going to be compromised. He also has another quality, His love. We want to talk about that because one of the

things in this debate is where's the place of the love of God in all this? Does God love the world? Yeah, but even there we've got a problem, whose Gospel said "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son?" John. Whose epistle said "love not the world? John. Now wait a minute, what do you mean John, God can love the world and we can't, is that what it means? There's a finesse to Scripture, and this is why people throw it in your face and say oh well, you can read anything into the Bible. Sure, idiots can always do that. But to read the Bible in the spirit in which it was written demands maturity, it demands patience. That's what Peter said of Paul, this guy is hard to understand. Yeah, the Scriptures are hard to understand. It's not a five minute ball game and you've got it knocked out.

The first thing we want to get into is that if God loves the world, this love of God cannot be poured out unless at the same time His holiness is protected. So when God loves He's got to love in a holy way. You can't separate holiness from love and split God into pieces. It doesn't work that way. So if God initiates and God is love, what did we say grace was? Grace is God's initiative. God initiates. What's a good picture of grace, the easy picture a child can understand it? The first dramatic revelation of grace in the Bible was in Genesis, when Adam and Eve were hiding in the bushes. Who initiated the conversation, Adam, Eve, or God? It was God. Forever let this etch in our minds. It was God who initiated the conversation; they were hiding in the bushes, they were terrified, they saw the holiness of God and they said, hey, what are we going to do now? Let's hide. They knew God's righteousness, but God, in His love and in His grace opened a conversation that led to their salvation. God was the first soul-winner. He won them; that was an evangelistic encounter right in the Garden, and it was God's love and His compassion for those people that were sinful.

Does God love? You bet He does. Are we undercutting His love? In no way! What we're doing, however, is saying that His love is not promiscuous; it doesn't go in all directions. It goes in accordance with His character. By the way, that's a great model for us, because we live in a generation that defines love as you do it my way and if you don't do it my way you don't love me. There's a whole generation of people raised this way, you don't love me because you don't let me do what I want to do. No, love, real love has character to it, it has shape and this is the great model of what real love looks like. God, in the cross, did set up the cross, He set it up to save, He set it up

to bless all men, but He's going to do it such that His holiness is never compromised.

That's why this leads to the most obnoxious, most repulsive thing about our Christian gospel that just infuriates our non-Christian neighbors. How can you Christians have the gall to say that your religion is the only way? Very simple! Because there's no way to approach God except on God's basis. We don't create the door in the wall, He creates the door, and He only made one door in the wall. So guess what, there's only one way to God, dictated by His character and His nature. God is not rubber that can be stretched around to accommodate to our sin. God is holy and He will not compromise His holiness, He is just and He is the justifier of them who believe, not in whatever they want to, but He is just and justifier only of those who accept His ark, His door, which is the cross of Jesus Christ. There is no other way. If there was another way, He would tell us about it, and He wouldn't have sent His own Son dying on the cross if there were some other way.

Conclusion: the atonement is the sole legal basis of all grace. To abandon that is to split God into half, love on one side and holiness on another, and you can't do that. Alright, next time we'll go onto the other three points of the atonement and we'll go further into the extent of the atonement. And I hope you see that it has all kinds of repercussions and God the Holy Spirit has taught other people of the church, and they thought seriously about these issues. We'll raise some of the issues they thought about and hopefully you'll have some of your questions answered, things that may have crept up in your thinking at one time or another, maybe we can get some answers in the coming weeks.

[Back To The Top](#)

Copyright (c) Fredericksburg Bible Church 2010