

November 20  
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Unlimited Limited Atonement

1 John 2:2 He [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Thus far in our study of the atonement we have examined how God has saved us from separation from Himself and eternal death (penal substitution); Satan, demons, sin, and the world (Christus Victor); slavery to the curse of the law and sin (redemption); painful eternal suffering (new covenant sacrifice); unrighteousness (imputed righteousness); condemnation, religion, and morality (justification); and the wrath of God (propitiation). With such tremendous benefits given through Jesus' death on the cross at stake, the question of whom Jesus died for has been hotly debated throughout church history.

	<b>Heresy of Universalism</b>	<b>Heresy of Pelagianism</b>	<b>Arminianism</b>	<b>Calvinism</b>	<b>Modified Calvinism</b>
<b>Sin</b>	We are born sinless like Adam	We are born sinless like Adam	We are born sinners but not guilty in Adam	We are born sinners guilty in Adam	We are born sinners guilty in Adam
<b>Who Jesus Died For</b>	If Jesus died for sinners it covers all people & religions	If Jesus died for sinners it covers all people & religions	Jesus died for all people	Jesus died for the elect only	Jesus died for all, but only in a saving way for the elect
<b>Heaven &amp; Hell</b>	Everyone is saved & is going to heaven; no one goes to hell	Everyone who chooses to can be saved and go to heaven	Everyone who does not reject God is saved; everyone else goes to hell	God does not need to save anyone from hell, but chooses to save some	God does not need to save anyone from hell, but chooses to save some

Universalism contradicts the clear teachings of Scripture on human sinfulness (e.g., Ps. 51:5; 58:3; Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8) and hell (e.g., Dan. 12:2; Matt. 5:29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:23; 25:46). False Pelagianism also denies human sinfulness.

Pelagianism is named after the ascetic monk Pelagius who lived in the fifth century and taught that people begin their life morally good, like Adam, and through the decision of their own will could live a holy life that would obligate God to take them to heaven upon death. Pelagius was condemned as a heretic at the Council of Carthage in 418, thanks in part to his opponent Augustine, who taught the doctrines of human sinfulness and salvation by grace alone.

This leaves three remaining options for Christians regarding the question of whom Jesus died for. Before examining them and stating the position of the elders at Mars Hill, it deserves mentioning that we do welcome faithful Christians of differing opinions on this matter; we accept it as a point of distinction but do not want it to become a point of division.

First, some Christians (e.g., Nazarene, Assemblies of God, Foursquare, Calvary Chapel, Methodist, Christian Church) believe that Jesus died for the sins of all people. This position is commonly referred to as Arminianism, after James Arminius, Wesleyanism, named after John Wesley, or Unlimited Atonement. They appeal to those Scriptures which speak of Jesus dying for all people (2 Cor. 5:14-15; 1 Tim. 2:1-6; 4:10;

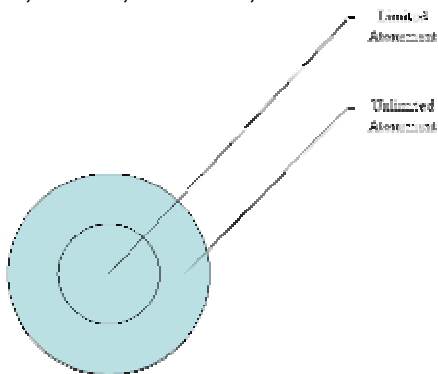
Titus 2:11), the whole world (John 1:29; 3:16-17; 1 John 2:2; 4:14; Rev. 5:9), everyone (Isa. 53:6; Heb. 2:9), and not wanting anyone to perish (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Arminians then teach that to be saved, all someone needs to do is simply choose Jesus. But, critics point out that if Jesus died to forgive everyone, then everyone would be saved, which is the heresy of universalism. Additionally, they state that no one will ever choose Jesus because sinners are spiritually dead (1 Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:1), hostile to God (Rom. 8:7), never seek God (Rom. 3:11), cannot find God (Luke 19:10), do not choose God, and are only saved when God chooses them (John 15:16) and draws them (John 6:44, 65).

Second, some Christians (e.g., Presbyterians, Reformed Baptists, some Independent Bible churches) believe that Jesus dies only for the sins of the elect. This position is commonly referred to as Calvinism, named after John Calvin, Reformed Theology, or Limited Atonement. They commonly appeal to those Scriptures which speak of Jesus dying only for some people but not all people (Matt. 1:21; 20:28; 26:28; Rom. 5:12-19), His sheep (John 10:11, 15, 26-27), His church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25), the elect (Rom. 8:32-35), His people (Matt. 1:21), His friends (John 15:3), and all Christians (2 Cor. 5:15; Titus 2:14).

At first glance, Unlimited and Limited Atonement are in opposition. But, that dilemma is resolved by noting two things. First, the two categories are not mutually exclusive; since Jesus died for the sins of everyone that means that He also died for the sins of the elect. Second, Jesus' death for all people does not accomplish the same thing as His death for the elect. This point is complicated, but is in fact taught in Scripture (1 Tim. 4:10; 2 Peter 2:1).

Simply, by dying for everyone, Jesus purchased everyone as His possession and He then applies His forgiveness to the elect by grace and applies His wrath to the non-elect. Objectively, Jesus' death was sufficient to save anyone, and, subjectively, only efficient to save those who repent of their sin and trust in Him. This position is called Unlimited Limited Atonement or Modified Calvinism.

Therefore, Modified Calvinists like the Mars Hill elders do not believe anything different than Arminians; we simply believe what they believe and more. Lastly, perhaps the Old Testament sacrificial system provides the best illustration of this both/and position. The High Priest would offer a sacrifice for the sins of the whole nation on the Day of Atonement; this is, in effect, unlimited atonement. Then, each worshipper would repent of their own sins as demonstrated by the giving of their own sacrifices for their sins; this is, in effect, limited atonement.



**For further reading:** Young, nitpicking, theologically geeky, Calvinist crazy-makers who are like a rock in my shoe would benefit from reading *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to Consensus* by G. Michael Thomas.

