

THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP
or, THE DOCTRINE OF LIMITED (DEFINITE) ATONEMENT

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In teaching the doctrines of grace, or as we have also called them, the doctrines of salvation, I have sought in the past weeks to lay a foundation; and then, from Scripture, to build upon that foundation. The foundation for understanding salvation is the very character of God Himself. That is the reason that for some six weeks I spoke on the attributes of God. I did not say nearly all that needs to be said, or could be said, about that most wonderful of all subjects. I was only able to touch on the fringes of that remarkable revelation that is given all through Scripture having to do with our God.

We saw that God is a God of grace, that He is a sovereign God, that He is absolutely righteous and holy in all that He does, that He is a God of love, a God of mercy, a God of compassion, and that He is a God Who is infinitely wise. He has never made a mistake, and never will make a mistake. There is not anything that God does not know. He never has to learn anything because His wisdom is perfect. And to all of this we can add the fact that God is unchanging in His character. All that He is now He always has been, and all that He is now He always will be. We can say not only concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, but concerning God the Father, and concerning the Holy Spirit, that They are the same yesterday, and today, and forever. Of all the truths in Scripture this, obviously, has to be the greatest. As I have said many, many times, "the Bible is not only a revelation from God, but it is a revelation of God." And these are truths that you and I need to pay attention to every day that we live. Someway, somehow, today, all of us are going to be falling back upon some of these great characteristics of our wonderful God.

Now this is important because it is only in the light of what God is that we can really understand the sinfulness of man. When Isaiah saw the Lord, you remember that his immediate response was, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Isa. 6:5a). So some understanding of the perfections of God, and some understanding of the sinfulness of man, are necessary for us to understand what salvation has to be. It is only when we begin to comprehend the nature of God and the nature of man that we can see that salvation is an absolute necessity. So, from the Word of God, I have sought to lay a foundation, and now we are building upon that foundation.

Now this morning I come to the third doctrine of grace, the doctrine which has been

known by several names. Some refer to it as limited atonement. Some call it definite atonement. Sometimes it is called particular redemption. In recent years, in the church in America, there has been so little doctrinal preaching that people in our churches have trouble accepting any of the doctrines of grace. You do not have to go very far in our churches to find people who will tell you that they do not believe in man's total depravity. They do not believe that man has been hopelessly and entirely ruined by sin. They may talk about man being dead in trespasses and sins, but they also believe that, if you approach any man at the right time and in the right way, you will be able to persuade him to receive Christ. So, in spite of all that the Word has to say about man's bondage to sin and to Satan, the great majority of people in our churches who still think about these things at all believe that man's will is free and that it is man's will which is really the hope that he will be saved. So our emphasis upon evangelism has shifted from what God is going to do to what man is able to do to bring about his own salvation.

But if people in our churches reject the doctrine of total depravity, there are even more who are going to reject the doctrine of election--the Biblical doctrine that God has, from all eternity, appointed certain people to salvation and that the rest of the human race has been left to suffer the eternal consequences of sin. The doctrine of election is rejected by many because they say that it does not seem fair that God would do this. Consequently, they will do everything that they can to explain away the clear teaching of the Word of God. They cannot really be classed with historic Arminianism because the Arminians believed in election. It is an election based upon God's foreknowledge of what each man would do about the Gospel, but they did believe in election. Today many of our well-known Bible teachers say that election has nothing to do with salvation; that is, that it has nothing to do with those who are going to be saved. They say it has to do with service, or that it has to do with what we are going to become after we are saved, but that it does not have to do with salvation. It is distressing to see how people will go to such great lengths to get around the clear teaching of the Word of God.

Yesterday I heard a couple of men on the radio--two well-known Christian leaders-- who were talking about family devotions. One of the men had prepared some materials for family devotions. In discussing these materials he said that he did not try to emphasize knowledge; he sought to establish values. Now what this means is that he did not emphasize doctrine. How can you teach values without teaching doctrine? Can you teach a child what is right and wrong without explaining to him why certain things are right and why other things are wrong? To say that you do not teach knowledge is to really say that you are not teaching. It is impossible for anyone to teach without teaching doctrine. One of these men also said that these materials had been so written that they would not offend any person in any denomination. I wonder why it is that we are so afraid that we are going to offend people if in offending people we can bring to them the knowledge of the truth. We, of course, do not deliberately intend to offend, or antagonize people, but the truth does offend. One of the reasons people hated the Lord Jesus Christ was because He spoke the truth. You can see many examples of that in the Gospel records. Even the Apostle Paul, when seeking to correct the Galatian churches from the error into which they had fallen, said this, "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" Paul's charge to Timothy, which most of you

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remember, was that he was to preach the Word. And that charge was given, as Paul went on to say in 2 Timothy 4, in the light of the fact that the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine but would turn away their ears from the truth, and be turned unto fables. So to deny these great doctrines is to turn to fables, to turn to something that is not true. To deny the doctrine of the total ruin and depravity of man is to turn to a fable. To deny the sovereign election of God of certain sinners for salvation is to turn to a fable. These are doctrines of Scripture, and they must be taught or we are being unfaithful to God.

Just recently I ran across two quotations from some old-timers. I thought I might mention these in

this connection because we are living in a day when it seems that when some men deal with certain passages of Scripture which have to do with some of these key issues, things that are so important in dealing with the doctrine of salvation, that they either explain them away in one way or another, or just simply jump over them and begin to deal with that which is beyond them. But Augustine once said this: "He who for fear of any power hides the truth provokes the wrath of God to come to him, for he fears men more than God." And Chrysostom, one of the early leaders in the church, said: "He is not only a traitor to the truth who openly for the truth reads a lie; but he also who does not freely pronounce and show the truth that he knoweth." It is a solemn thing for us to handle the Word of God. We need to accept these truths. And though they may run across the grain as far as we are concerned--and God obviously does things in a far different way from what we would do--we are commissioned to proclaim these truths of salvation as we find them in the Word of God. Many have never learned them because they have never been taught the Scriptures. Others have seen them, but they prefer not to deal with them. I trust that if what we are seeing in our present day is truly a work of God, which I believe it is, I trust that from our younger men God is going to raise up a generation of preachers who will stand faithfully for the Word of God and who will be uncompromising in proclaiming these great doctrines of Scripture.

Let me point out another fact that we seem to have lost sight of in the twentieth- century church. Perhaps I could present it in the form of a question. How do we learn the truth of God's Word? Now, again, our attachment to methods shows that we are neglecting the very life-line of Biblical instruction. No man can learn anything about the Word unless he is taught by the Holy Spirit. Along this line let me give you a couple of significant statements that Paul made in 1 Corinthians chapter 2. These are things that we need to keep in mind when we think about depravity, about what sin has done to man. It has rendered him incapable of understanding the truth. Paul brought this out in the 14th verse of 1 Corinthians 2 when he said this: "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God. . ." And the things of the Spirit of God are found in the Word of God because the Holy Scriptures are given to us by the Holy Spirit. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Now that is one of the things that sin has done to the heart of man--it has rendered him incapable, absolutely incapable, of understanding the truth of the Word. Now anybody can read the Bible, can understand the stories, can get the history of it. But if the truth of the Word of God, the spiritual significance of the Word of God, is going to penetrate any heart it is always by the Spirit of God. There are no exceptions to that. And so Paul said in that same chapter, in the twelfth verse: "Now we (believers) have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God." Why? "That we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." Page 4
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This is the one thing that the Lord Jesus Christ spent more time on than anything else when He was with His disciples for the last time in the Upper Room. He told them that the Comforter was coming to guide them into all truth. So God has not only given us a Bible with these great doctrines which are far beyond our ability to comprehend, but He has given us the Holy Spirit that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God, the things we read about in the Scriptures. These statements apply to all the Word of God. As I have said, we can pick up the facts of Scripture, the stories of Scripture, and learn something about the doctrines of Scripture, but a person will not be able to understand the spiritual significance of the Word unless the Spirit of God is really teaching him.

So, as we come to the doctrines of grace, I am seeking to be as simple and as clear and as thorough as I can in the time that we have, but it will take more than my teaching to lead anyone to an understanding of these great truths. It takes the Holy Spirit. Unless the Holy Spirit is pleased to bless what we see in the Word of God, unless He is pleased to bless what I might give to you by way of explanation, our hearts are going to remain in darkness concerning these great truths. This knowledge of the Word of God is beyond us. So if God does not make the truth of His Word known

to us, we are going to remain in our ignorance. So, let me ask you, as I come to this crucial theme of the atonement, that you seek from the Spirit of God your understanding of God's Word. I may not get through all that I would like to say about the atonement this morning. And if I do not, I am going to extend this a Sunday or two. But I want your trust and your hope to be in the Holy Spirit. These can be times of tremendous blessing for us. And I am sure that those who have come to understand these doctrines will say that there is really nothing that has ever brought greater delight to their hearts.

I. THE WORD, ATONEMENT

Now having said all of that, I want to say just a word about the atonement. When we talk about limited atonement, or about definite atonement, or about particular redemption, the peculiar nature of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, we overlook this word atonement. This is an important word for us to understand because that is what we are talking about. We are talking about salvation. The manner in which God brings about this atonement is secondary to the fact of the atonement itself. In the course of these messages (and I trust that those of you who have been here faithfully every week will forgive me if I do a little bit of repeating) I want you to understand that God would have been perfectly righteous if He had done several things, even if He had done something different from what He actually decided to do.

First of all, we have to recognize that God would have been righteous if He had decided not to save anyone. Now I don't know of anybody who has studied the Scriptures at all who would disagree with that. God does not owe us anything. God is no man's debtor. If He had decided to leave the whole human race in its sin, He would have been perfectly righteous in doing so. In other words, if He had let everybody go to hell, God would still be righteous.

Secondly, He would have been righteous if He had decided to save all men. Now He did not decide to do that because all men are not being saved. But, if He had decided that every person who ever lived on the face of the earth was going to be saved, that would have been within God's right to do so.

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Thirdly, we need to recognize that He is righteous in doing what He actually has done: He decided to save some, but not save all.

Now, there is another thing that we need to recognize in this connection. That is, that it was up to God, and to God alone, to determine how sinners would be saved. So, in accordance with His righteousness, He determined that salvation would be by atonement and that it would be for those of His choosing.

What is an atonement; what does the word "atonement" mean? Well, if you were to consult your dictionary, you would find that atonement means "the satisfactory settlement of an offence which has been committed."

Many of you, in reading through the Old Testament, have been reading through the books of the Law. If you are on schedule, you should be finishing the book of Deuteronomy. I love the book of Deuteronomy. I never get tired of reading it. I am always sorry when I am through with it, and wish I could go back and start reading it all over again. It has some very, very wonderful truths. You may remember that there are various ways in which, in connection with the Law, if a person did a certain thing then he was to make compensation. Now, I am not talking about things that required the death penalty, although that, in a sense, in a very real sense, was an atonement, too. But, if a person saw his neighbor's animal leave and did not do anything about it, then he was responsible for making an atonement in one way or another. The nature of the atonement was determined by what it would take

to make things right with the offended party. You see, God is the One Who has been offended by our sin. If sinners are to be forgiven, then a proper atonement, a proper satisfaction, has to be made to God Himself. This is what we are talking about when we speak of an atonement.

But what does it take to satisfy God? What does it take in order for Him, in righteousness, to be able to forgive sinners? Some might feel, "Well, if I just come to the Lord and confess my sin, then that would be all that is required." But a person who says that overlooks what the Word of God has to say. God made it clear in the very beginning when He created Adam and Eve and spoke to them about not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that the penalty for disobedience would be death! In other words, the only way that atonement could be made for Adam and Eve when they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was by death. The Word of God makes it very clear that physical death is a part of the penalty of sin. Spiritual death was also a part of that penalty. And so is eternal death! We read in the New Testament, Romans chapter 6, verse 23, that "the wages of sin is death." And Ezekiel said twice in the eighteenth chapter of his prophecy, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." So it is clear from the Scriptures that the satisfactory settlement for sin, i.e., the atonement, is death. The only way that God can be satisfied regarding my sin or your sin is either for us to die for our own sins, or for a substitute to be found to take our place. One man cannot die for another--that is, I could not die for your sins, nor could you die for my sins because all of us are under the same condemnation. If one could be found who is without sin, then he can be a proper substitute for guilty sinners to provide a satisfactory settlement for this offence which stands between the heart of every man and God. There was no such person ever born until Jesus Christ came to the earth, born of the virgin Mary, born without sin, born to provide an atonement for sinners. That is the reason that, when people can glibly talk about Jesus Christ and say things to indicate that they believe that He was just a human Page 6 Doctrines of Grace -- #9

being, if what they say is true, then we have no saviour. We have no redeemer.

In addition to what I have just said, let me show you some verses which will give you even more evidence of that which is required for an atonement. Isaiah 53:6 says this: "All we like sheep have gone astray." This speaks of our depravity. This speaks of our offence against God. This speaks of the judgment that is upon us because we are sinners. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him"--and he was speaking there of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ--"the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." You see, salvation is through the substitution of the One upon Whom the Lord has placed our sin.

Second Corinthians 5:21 says this, "For he hath made him," Christ--God has made Christ "to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." You see, the atonement is through the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was actually made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.

Galatians 3:13 says, "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." You see, again there is the idea of substitution.

Romans 5:8 says, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Christ died as a substitute for sinners. That is the only right interpretation of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. So salvation, or atonement, the satisfaction for our sins, the settlement, was accomplished by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He did something for those for whom He was dying. Atonement is by substitution; and that Substitute is the Lord Jesus Christ. So when we talk about the atonement, we are talking about what Jesus Christ did, what He accomplished, fully accomplished, when He died on the cross. His work is the only work that God will accept. Jesus Christ is the only One Who has been able to satisfy God concerning the sins of

men. And, therefore, He is the only One Who can be our Saviour and deliver us from death. Peter said in Acts 4:12, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." So this is what an atonement is--Christ satisfying God, absolutely settling this question of salvation, for all for whom He died.

II. FOR WHOM DID CHRIST DIE?

For whom did Christ die? This is the big issue as far as the Scriptures are concerned. For whom did He make an atonement? I use that word atonement wanting you to remember that it means that Christ actually satisfied God concerning the sins of those for whom He died. The teaching in the church today is that Christ died for all men everywhere without exception, that there is not a single sinner who has ever lived for whom the Lord did not provide atonement. This is called universal redemption. Before we come to the Scriptures, let me ask you some important questions just to get you thinking about this important matter.

If Christ died for all people without exception, then this means that Christ died for many people who were already in hell. Do you believe that this could be possible? If Christ died for all, if He satisfied God--now remember that is the Doctrines of Grace -- #9 Page 7

meaning of the atonement--if He satisfied God concerning the sins of all men, then will you explain to me why all men are not saved? The answer is usually given: Because they have not believed. But, I respond by saying that man's faith would, in such cases, then determine the purpose of God in the death of Christ. But it is not man's faith that determines what God's purpose is. The purpose of God in the death of Christ was determined by God before the foundation of the world. There is much more sense in saying that, if Christ died for all, then eventually all are going to be saved, than to say that He died for all but only some are going to be saved.

And think about this: If Christ died for all men and some do not believe, then is God righteous in demanding a second payment for their sins? If Christ paid once for their sins, is it right that then they have to pay eternally for their sins again? I think that you can see that God would be unrighteous in demanding that a sinner pay for his sins the second time. They have already been paid for if Christ died for all. But some say here, "sinners are not to be punished for their sins, but for their unbelief, that Christ by His death put away the sins of all men and so the issue now is not sin, but the issue is unbelief." What do the Scriptures teach? That will settle the issue. Of course, we know that nobody can be saved apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but are sinners who do not receive Christ judged only for their unbelief?

Recently we were studying the book of Ephesians. You may remember that as Paul was dealing with sin in Ephesians chapter 5 he mentioned some sins specifically. And when he got down to the sixth verse of Ephesians chapter 5 he said this: "Let no man deceive you with vain words." Now listen. "For because of these things," that is, because of these sins, "cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience." Unbelievers will be judged for their sins. So do not let anybody ever tell you that the unbeliever, or the non-Christian, is going to be judged just because of his unbelief. Some of them have never even heard the Gospel. But when God judges the wicked, He is going to judge them because of their sins. This does not sound at all as though those sins had been atoned for.

Let me ask you a final question. If Christ died for all men everywhere, and God is omnipotent (we learned that, didn't we, in our discussion of the attributes of God?), then why are all men not saved? One of the problems with universal redemption is that it presents God as being helpless and really at the mercy of man as far as salvation is concerned. Many would say that Christ died for all men and God would save all men if they would let Him save them. But, you see, God seems to be stopped by the will of man. It seems that God has run up against a barrier that He cannot get over. Yet the Word of God speaks of God as being omnipotent. Now if Christ died for all men, and God

is omnipotent, then is God not cruel not to make it possible for everyone to hear the Gospel? And yet we have to admit that in every generation there have been people who have never heard of Christ, never heard the Gospel. Why is it that God is not making sure that all men in every generation hear the Gospel if it is His purpose that every one should be saved? I want you to think about these questions. They are not original with me. But I am sure that one reason that people will discount limited atonement, discount definite atonement, discount particular redemption (call it whatever you may), is because they have never considered the alternatives, they have never seen what is really involved in saying that Christ died for all men without exception. One thing I love about the doctrines of grace is that they exalt and honor the character of God Page 8

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Himself and show Him to be the omnipotent God that He is, fully able to accomplish the work that He determined to be done in the hearts of men from eternity past. Do

not think for a moment that anything but the purposes of God are going to be accomplished. He is going to accomplish them fully.

III. THE TESTIMONY OF SCRIPTURE

Now, I want to show you in our discussion of this that, when Christ died on the cross He died definitely, particularly, for those whom the Father had chosen for salvation from eternity past. I am just going to read some Scriptures to you in the few moments that remain so that you can see this. Now will you turn to the text. Please do not tell anybody that it took me all my time to get to the text, will you?

John chapter 10, verse 11. Notice those for whom the Good Shepherd gives His life. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." In verses 14-16 of the same chapter we read, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." Now, you see, when the Lord was talking about the sheep, He was talking about the elect, He was talking about those who are going to be saved. And He said, "And they shall hear my voice." When the Gospel is being preached, there are many who reject the Gospel; but there are those who hear the Gospel. Those who hear the Gospel are the sheep. One of our men was speaking to me just before the service this morning about verse 26. Notice what the Lord says about those who believe not in that verse: "But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10:26-28).

Turn to Matthew chapter 1. Every year at Christmas we hear a verse over and over again, but I am afraid that we do not always recognize that it teaches particular redemption--that, when Christ died on the cross, He died as an atonement for particular people, His elect, His chosen ones. The twenty-first verse of Matthew chapter 1: "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." This was the announcement that was made in connection with the birth of the Lord Jesus.

Turn to the book of Acts, the twentieth chapter, the twenty-eighth verse--that great message that the Apostle Paul preached to the Ephesian elders. He said to them in the twenty-eighth verse, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." You see, when He died on the cross, He purchased the church with His own blood.

Turn to Ephesians chapter 5. In Ephesians chapter 5, we read these words in verses 25, 26: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he

might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word."

I will just give you these last verses quickly. In 1 Corinthians 15:3, "Christ Doctrines of Grace --
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died for our sins according to the Scriptures." Romans 5:8, which I quoted a little while ago, "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Galatians 2:20 ends, ". . . who loved me, and gave himself for me." So that, when you look at all these passages of Scripture, you see that these are definite statements to the fact that the Lord had a specific purpose regarding a specific group of people when He went to the cross to provide an atonement for salvation.

Next Sunday, or the following Sunday, I am going to take up some of the problem passages which seem to speak of a universal redemption.

But I want to say this as I bring my message to a close this morning: I want you to remember that there is no doctrine in Scripture but what there are passages of Scripture which seem to contradict that doctrine--for example, the doctrine of the eternal nature of our salvation--that God saves us forever. There are passages of Scripture that seem to teach that He does not save us forever, that we are only saved as long as we behave ourselves properly. There are passages of Scripture which seem to throw some doubt upon the Deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. God evidently has given us the Word in this way so that it seems that there are contradictions in Scripture, when actually there are not, in order that we will probe more deeply into the Word of God and realize how much we need to depend upon the Holy Spirit for enlightenment.

But I want you to remember from this morning that Christ did atone for sins. He completely satisfied God. He paid the penalty in full for all of the sinners for whom He died. He did not attempt an atonement. There is really no such thing. Either something is an atonement, or it is not an atonement. He accomplished an atonement. And therefore we see taking place in time the outworking of God's redemptive plan just as He intended that it should be. He did not waste the work of His Son. He did not ask His Son to do more than He intended to accomplish. As we deal with this wonderful subject of the atonement, I trust that God, in His wonderful grace, will open our understanding to the greatness and the glory of God, and that, as a result of this, we may worship Him and adore Him even more that He has included us in this work of redemption.