

Week 9 - Limited Atonement

Sufficient for All, Efficient for Believers

Learning Objectives

- Gain a high view of Jesus' atonement for sins, and explore how it impacts our day-to-day living
- Better understand the limits of Jesus' atonement, recognize that we all need Jesus, and better understand our role in spreading the gospel.

Pray for your time together as a group.

Leader's Note: This is a tough topic. Our aim is not to answer the question of "Who are the elect?" Our aim is to affirm God's sovereignty and our responsibility in responding to the Gospel. Ultimately, we want groups to walk away with a greater reverence of God's grace. We hope that you feel free to move your groups away from a debate on the validity of Limited Atonement and towards a more affirming discussion that leads to praise. You may also find archived Hope sermons on this topic on the Resource page, if you're looking for answers to more questions.

Part One: Counting Sheep

Read Out Loud: John 10: 14-30 (NIV)

¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."

¹⁹ The Jews who heard these words were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, "He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?"

²¹ But others said, "These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

²² Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, ²³ and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. ²⁴ The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

²⁵ Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, ²⁶ but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. ²⁷ My sheep listen to my voice;

What is Limited Atonement?

Limited Atonement is one of the most controversial aspects of Tulip. Stated simply, it supposes that Jesus Christ's death was sufficient for all people, but is only effectual for believers. In other words, Jesus only bore the sins of those who were chosen for salvation by God; He did not bear the sins of every individual who has ever lived. This is also sometimes referred to as "Particular Atonement" or "Particular Redemption."

I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one."

? Why do you think people reject Jesus even though He told them who He was?

Possible Answers: Unbelief, they are not among His sheep, hardening their hearts toward Him, wanting their own glory, desire to live their own life.

? According to Jesus, what are the characteristics of people who are among His sheep?

Possible Answers: They listen to Jesus and are known by Jesus. Followers of Jesus listen to his voice and continue to pursue a lifestyle that pleases him

? What does it mean to listen to Jesus' voice today? How can we better hear him?

Possible Answers: To allow God's word to change your life, to "be still and know He is God," Incline your ear to Christ before you listen to the world. By reading God's word and spending time in meditation we grow closer to Him and allow the Holy Spirit to speak into our lives. Sometimes we have to find quiet in our lives in order to hear God.

? How can we have confidence that we are among Jesus' sheep?

Possible Answers: You trust Jesus with your life and gave him your heart and soul, to follow him for the rest of your life. We let His word impact our lives. We listen to His voice before the voice of the world. You see a renewed spirit in your life and feel a renewed peace. These are all signs, but ultimately the only people who can truly know are you and God. Reference: Romans 10:9, Ephesians 2:8.

Part Two: Our Role In The Gospel

Read Out Loud: John 3:16-18 (NIV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

? When dealing with weighty subjects like Limited Atonement it's useful to hold tightly to clear Biblical truths. What are some of the truths we see in John?

Possible Answers: God loves the world, He gives His son, whoever believers should not perish but have eternal life. Jesus didn't come to condemn, but save. Whoever doesn't believe is condemned already.

? Why does it matter whether or not people trust in Christ?

Possible Answers: If they do not, they are condemned. Those who trust in Christ are not condemned. Not believing in Jesus is ultimately “trampling under His blood” and essentially saying, “You’re not worthy of my worship.”

Read Out Loud: 1 Timothy 2:1-6 (NIV)

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

? Verse four says that God wants all people to be saved and come to a “knowledge of the truth.” How do we sometimes act like we don’t believe this is the case? How are you tempted to believe that some people will never accept God’s truth?

Possible Answers: When we shun people or act hatefully or hurtfully when people sin against us. It’s easy to respond to sin by seeking justice, but the people who sin against us need Jesus as much as we do. How might we act differently if we saw them the way God sees them?

? Why should we offer the Gospel to all people despite the fact that some may not accept it?

Possible Answers: It is a command to go into the nations and teach them to obey all Jesus commands. Ultimately, God’s grace is expansive and we do not know who will believe and who won’t.

? Does the idea of a particular atonement make you feel hesitant to be evangelistic? Why might it be important to spread the Gospel message?

Possible Answers: Answers may vary. Scripture teaches us evangelism is a command, God knows who His sheep are, that Christ saves all who come to Him. God doesn’t NEED us to spread the Gospel, but He wants to use us. We should be excited to be a part of that process.

For Discussion and Accountability

? How do I sometimes live like Jesus never died for my sins? What do I need to change about my daily habits to keep Christ first in my life?

? How do I sometimes act like God doesn't want to see all people come to him? Who have I pushed away from the gospel because of hurt or pain? How can I seek reconciliation in that relationship?

Additional Resources:

If there are people still struggling with this doctrine, feel free to point them toward John Piper's Does God Desire All To Be Saved? and D.A. Carson's The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God. Both books deal with the topics of election and particular atonement and both are available in PDF form with a quick Google search.