

DEFINITE ATONEMENT

And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given Me, but raise it up on the last day.

— John 6:39

Definite atonement means that Christ saved all of those for whom He died. The Father gave certain people to Christ, and when Christ died, He died to save each and every one of them. He lost none of all His Father entrusted to Him (John 6:39). Thus, each and every person for whom Christ died will be saved, and no one for whom He died will fail to be saved. Christ was successful in doing His Father's will.

All of this seems obvious. Christ is a great Redeemer! He did not fail in the mission on which His Father sent Him. His mission was a success. He did not lose any the Father gave Him: not a single one slipped through His fingers. So what is at stake? Why would anyone take issue with definite atonement?

Logically, if Christ saved all of those for whom He died, and some are not saved, it follows that Christ did not die for everyone. Since not all are saved, Christ must have died for some, but not all. Many Christians today take the position, however, that Christ died for all people, and it is up to each person to receive or reject His gift of forgiveness. But all Christians recognize that not everyone will be saved, which raises several difficult questions. Did Christ die for those who are not saved? Did He lose some that the Father gave Him? Did Christ's death only make salvation *possible* (since some are not saved)? And if Christ only made salvation possible, what actually saves people? If what makes the ultimate difference in whether a person is saved or not is each person's decision to accept or reject Christ's gift of salvation, then are we not, in effect, our own saviors? The logic doesn't hold.

Imagine a large room full of chairs. Each chair represents someone for whom Christ died. In your mind, is every chair filled or are some chairs empty? Definite atonement pictures every chair filled. There is a perfect one-to-one correlation between those Christ to save and those who are saved. On the view that Christ died for everyone, some chairs are empty. Some, it appears, slipped through His fingers.

Another reason people reject definite atonement is because of common misunderstanding that it teaches that Christ's death had limited value. The reason only some are saved is because His sacrifice only had enough value to save so many, not all. Sadly, this misunderstanding has been perpetuated by the term "limited atonement" (the "L" word that is often used to fit the TULIP acronym). But it is a misunderstanding. Definite atonement teaches that Christ's sacrifice had infinite value. The term "limited" refers to the number of people Christ saved (some, not all), not to the value of Christ's sacrifice.

Christ did not fail in the mission His Father gave Him. His sacrifice has infinite value to cover all the sins of all those the Father gave them. The comfort of definite atonement is knowing that we are in Christ's hands. By His doing, you are in Christ Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:30). And Christ will not let you slip through His fingers!

Other Objections

Another common objection to definite atonement is that it seems to hinder evangelism. If Christ died for all people, Christians can tell all people that Christ died for them and invite them to put their faith in Christ. But if Christ only died for some people, then they cannot tell all people that Christ died for them. Maybe He did, maybe He did not. But definite atonement, far from discouraging evangelism, should actually encourage it. For one, the effectiveness of our evangelism does not depend on us but on Christ: all for whom He died will respond to the gospel message. We can share the gospel with complete confidence in Christ. We do not know which people Christ died for, but we do know that all for whom He died will respond positively, even to our feeble attempts. God calls all people to repent and believe in Christ, and all who answer that call will be saved. He calls us to spread the good news to all people everywhere. Instead of saying Christ died for all people, we can assure everyone that Christ died for sinners like us, and that whoever trusts in Christ will be saved.

Still another objection is our choice no longer seems to matter. Christ only died for some people, and only those people will be saved. But definite atonement does not deny that we make a choice; rather, it explains why we make the choice we do. It is not as though Christ died for some who reject Him, while not dying for others who embrace Him. He does not drag some people kicking and screaming into heaven while preventing others who actually want to come. Instead, definite atonement explains why those who trust in Christ chose to put their faith in Him. They trust in Christ because the Father loved them and Christ died for them, even while they were weak, helpless sinners and enemies (Romans 5:8f).

Conclusion

What great assurance to now that *all* those entrusted by the Father to Christ will be saved. Christ died for them, and His blood truly atones for all their sins. How do you know if you are one of those for whom Christ died? In John 6 Jesus goes on to say, "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." Here, those given to Christ by the Father and everyone who believes in Him refer to the same group of people. So, you know that the Father has entrusted you to Christ, that Christ should not lose you but die in your place, if you look to the Son and believe in Him. If you trust Christ, you are assured of eternal life and know Christ will raise you on the last day, because Christ died and he did not die in vain!