

# Why a genuine universal gospel call requires an atonement that paid for the sins of all people

*Gary L. Shultz Jr.*

*Dr Shultz is a graduate of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who currently serves as an Adjunct Professor of Theology at Campbellsville University in Campbellsville, KY.*

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## Introduction

The universal gospel call can be defined as ‘the invitation or summons to salvation conveyed through cognitive encounter with the Gospel message’, and it includes a presentation of the plan of salvation, an invitation to come to Christ in faith and repentance, and the promise of forgiveness and salvation.<sup>1</sup> It is based upon the universal invitation to come to God issued in both the Old and the New Testaments. The prophets in the Old Testament continually called both the children of Israel and the nations of the world to come to God. Psalm 22:27, for example, states, ‘All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will worship before You.’<sup>2</sup> Isaiah 45:22 is another example, ‘Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; For I am God, and there is no other’ (cf. Isa. 55:1; 65:2). This verse makes it clear that ‘If the Lord is the sole God of the whole world and if he is a savior (v. 21), then he must be the savior of the whole world as well.’<sup>3</sup>

In the New Testament John the Baptist continued the practice of the Old Testament by calling all people to come to God for salvation (Matt. 3:1-12; Mark 1:3-8; Luke 3:2-20; John 1:6-8; 19-34).<sup>4</sup> Jesus Christ did the same thing, inviting all

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1 B. Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 218.

2 All biblical quotations are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise stated.

3 J. N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 223.

4 Speaking of the description of John the Baptist’s ministry in John 1:6-8, F. F. Bruce states, ‘The purpose... of John’s witness is “that all might believe”; it is the purpose for which the Gospel itself was written (20:31)’ (F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 35). The universality of John’s witness is also evident in his statement that Jesus, as the Lamb of God, is ‘the one who takes away the sins of the world’ (John 1:29). ‘The “world” embraces all without distinction of race, religion, or culture (cf. John 12:32)’ (Ibid., 53).

people to enter the kingdom of God through repentance and faith (Matt. 11:28; 22:1-14; Luke 5:32; 14:16-24; John 7:37-38). He then commanded his disciples to preach his name throughout the ends of the earth in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8). Acts records the early Christian evangelists offering the gospel indiscriminately to all people (e.g., Acts 2:38-39; 4:12; 8:22; 17:30). However, this call did not always end with its hearers accepting salvation, but was often resisted and rejected (Luke 13:34; Acts 7:51; 13:46; 17:32), demonstrating that the gospel call goes out to the nonelect just as it does to the elect.<sup>5</sup> As Jesus stated, 'For many are called, but few are chosen' (Matt. 22:14). That the universal gospel call can be rejected illustrates the difference between this call and the Holy Spirit's particular, effectual calling.<sup>6</sup> Both the Old and the New Testaments plainly teach that the gospel call, the offer of the good news of salvation, is meant to go out to all people, or that its intention is universal.<sup>7</sup>

All supporters of unlimited atonement, the view that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for the sins of every person who has lived and ever will live, agree that the gospel call is universal in that it is meant for all people.<sup>8</sup> They also typi-

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- 5 'A large number of passages show clearly that not all who are exposed to the call of the gospel will in fact be among the redeemed. Many passages assert specifically that 'some who are "called" – that is, are invited in terms of the gospel message – will harden their hearts and refuse the entreaty of the gospel of grace.... Since, then, the gospel call was addressed to some who did not respond positively, it is plain that the extent of the call is greater than that of the appropriate acceptance' (R. Nicole, 'Covenant, Universal Call, and Definite Atonement', *JETS* 38 [1995], 406).
  - 6 Effectual calling is 'the Spirit's call to sinners to hear and to believe the gospel, rendered effectual by his supernatural enlivening work, or as the Spirit's provision of grace resulting in saving faith, rendered irresistible against all blindness, hardness, and unbelief' (B. A. Ware, 'Effectual Calling and Grace', in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace*, ed. T. R. Schreiner and B. A. Ware [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000], 204). The effectual call is always issued through the proclamation of the gospel (2 Thess. 2:14), but it is distinct from the general invitation of the gospel (e.g., Isa. 45:22; Matt. 11:28), which goes out to all people, because it always results in salvation. See also Demarest, *Cross and Salvation*, 218-29; and M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 942-44.
  - 7 The universal gospel call is for all people because it is meant to go out to all people, not because every single person will eventually hear it (Matt. 28:18-20). See J. Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 171-81.
  - 8 There are some advocates of unlimited atonement who believe that one of the implications of an unlimited atonement is that all people have an opportunity to accept or reject God's salvation, whether they have heard the gospel or not. For example, 'The gracious love that intends salvation for all of humanity also at the same time confronts every person with a genuine choice regarding the meaning of one's present existence and the nature of the ultimate future' (F. Guy, 'The Universality of God's Love', in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. C. H. Pinnock [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989], 45). Another way that this belief is stated is with the idea that God knows who would accept him if they would have heard the gospel, so those people end up being saved, even though they never actually heard the gospel. As Donald Lake states, 'A valid offer of grace has been made to mankind, but its application is limited

cally understand the universal gospel call as one of the strongest proofs for the truth of unlimited atonement.<sup>9</sup> Supporters of particular redemption, the view that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for the sins of only those who will be saved, also typically believe in the universal gospel call (with some notable exceptions),<sup>10</sup> although they deny that the universal gospel call necessarily results in an unlimited extent of the atonement.<sup>11</sup> As this article will demonstrate, how-

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by God's response rather than God's arbitrary selection. God knows who would, under ideal circumstances, believe the gospel, and on the basis of his foreknowledge, applies that gospel even if the person never hears the gospel during his lifetime' (D. Lake, 'He Died for All: The Universal Dimensions of the Atonement', in *Grace Unlimited*, ed. C. H. Pinnock [Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1975], 43). The problem with this idea is that Scripture consistently presents the proclamation, hearing, and acceptance of the gospel as absolutely necessary for the Holy Spirit's work of salvation to take place. The Spirit, as the Spirit of the Father (Matt. 10:20; Luke 11:13; 1 John 4:2) and the Spirit of the Son (Rom. 8:9; Gal. 4:6; Phil. 1:19; 1 Pet. 1:11), only saves people by explicitly applying the atonement of Jesus Christ through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The atonement's payment for all sin did not procure an opportunity for anyone to be saved apart from hearing the gospel, which is part of the reason the gospel needs to be proclaimed to all people.

- 9 L. S. Chafer, 'For Whom Did Christ Die?', *BibSac* 137 (1980), 315-16; N. F. Douty, *The Death of Christ: Did Christ Die Only for the Elect?* (Irving, TX: William & Watrous, 1978), 45-49; Lake, 'He Died for All', 43-44; R. P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died: A Biblical Case for Unlimited Atonement*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 114-18; I. H. Marshall, 'For All, For All My Savior Died', in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honor of Clark H. Pinnock*, ed. S. P. Porter and A. R. Cross (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 345-46; T. L. Miethel, 'The Universal Power of the Atonement', in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. C. H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 83-85; and R. E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002), 115-18.
- 10 These exceptions include Joseph Hussey (1660-1726), John Gill (1697-1771), John Brine (1703-1765), Klaas Schilder (1890-1765), and Herman Hoeksema (1886-1925). See Nicole, 'Covenant, Universal Call', 407. However, these are exceptions, and most supporters of particular redemption adamantly uphold the universal gospel call. See Nicole, 'Covenant, Universal Call', 410-11; and J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1961), 26-27. The rejection of the universal gospel call is usually characterized as hyper-Calvinism. See T. J. Nettles, *By His Grace and For His Glory*, 2nd ed. (Lake Charles, LA: Cor Meum Tibi, 2002), 383-424.
- 11 Berkhof is typical when he states, 'The offer of salvation in the way of faith and repentance does not pretend to be a revelation of the secret counsel of God, more specifically, of His design in giving Christ as an atonement for sin. It is simply the promise of salvation to all those who accept Christ by faith.... The universal offer of the gospel does not consist in the declaration that Christ made atonement for every man that hears the gospel, and that God really intends to save each one. It consists in (a) an exposition of the atoning work of Christ as in itself sufficient for the redemption of all men; (b) a description of the real nature of the repentance and faith that are required in coming to Christ; and (c) a declaration that each one who comes to Christ with true repentance and faith will obtain the blessings of salvation' (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941], 397-98).

ever, the Bible makes it clear that Jesus' payment for the sins of all people, elect and nonelect, was necessary for the universal gospel call to take place. One of the primary intentions God had in sending the Son to die for the sins of all people was to render the gospel genuinely and rightly offered to all people. Even though not all people will be saved, Christ died to provide the basis by which all people could be saved if they would trust in Christ. Particular redemption, by limiting the atonement only to the elect, is unable to account for the universal gospel call. Therefore the truth of the universal gospel call offers strong support for understanding the atonement as unlimited in its extent.

The inseparable relationship between the universal gospel call and an atonement that pays for the sins of all people is seen in four ways. First, the biblical content of the gospel contains the truth that Christ died for the sins of all people. Second, the biblical motivation for the preaching of the gospel is based upon an atonement that was for the sins of all people. Third, the Holy Spirit's work in taking the gospel to all people suggests a universal payment for sin at the cross, as the Spirit's work is closely tied to the Son's. Finally, a strong theological argument can also be made that an atonement for all people is necessary for the universal gospel call to be genuine, as an offer of salvation to all would seem to imply that provision has been made for the salvation of all. Taken together, these four truths demonstrate that a genuine universal gospel call requires an atonement that paid for the sins of all people.

### The content of the gospel

Paul gives a succinct account of the gospel he preached in 1 Corinthians 15:1-5. These verses state, 'Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.' This gospel is the message that the Corinthians heard from Paul, received, and believed; and it was through their belief in this message that they were saved (vv. 1-2).<sup>12</sup> At the heart of the gospel is the atoning death of Christ on the cross and his subsequent resurrection, as verses 3-4 make clear (cf. also 1 Cor. 1:18, 21, 23, 14).<sup>13</sup> In order for a person to be saved,

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12 'The gospel is the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16), and they [the Corinthians] owe their new existence as Christians to Paul's preaching of the gospel' (David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 613).

13 L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 201; and A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1189-90.

he or she must believe that 'Christ died for our sins'.<sup>14</sup>

The importance of this explanation of the gospel for the extent of the atonement is that the heart of Paul's gospel is the phrase 'Christ died for our sins'. This phrase indicates that Christ died a substitutionary death for the sins of humanity.<sup>15</sup> It also indicates that Christ died this substitutionary death not only for the sins of the elect, but for the sins of unbelievers. The reason that this is so is because it is the gospel that was preached to unbelievers to lead them to salvation. The Corinthians were not saved at the moment the atonement occurred, but were saved when they believed in the gospel message that 'Christ died for our sins' (1 Cor. 15:2).<sup>16</sup> Paul, as he preached this message in Corinth, certainly did not preach it only to the elect, but also preached the gospel to those who would reject it and never be saved. This is certainly the way that the early church preached the gospel as well.<sup>17</sup> If the atonement were limited only to the elect, than how could Paul and the early church preach to a group of unbelievers that 'Christ died for our sins'? The word 'our' includes both the preacher and those to whom he is preaching. If the atonement was only for the elect, to preach this message to the nonelect would at best be giving them a false hope and at worst would be untrue. The content of the universal gospel call includes the fact that Christ died for all sins, and is therefore based upon an atonement that was for all sins.<sup>18</sup>

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14 'But the emphasis in the New Testament kerygma is on the Savior's atoning death for the sins of the world. Well may we echo Paul's affirmation: 'I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified' (1 Cor. 2:2)' (J. R. W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait: Some New Testament Word Studies* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961], 41). See also S. B. Ferguson, 'Preaching the Atonement', in *The Glory of the Atonement*, ed. C. E. Hill and F. A. James (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 427; and R. Letham, *The Work of Christ*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 126.

15 Thiselton, *First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1190-92.

16 This truth also indicates the necessity of subjectively appropriating the truth of the atonement in order to salvifically experience the objective nature of the atonement. See Morris, *First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 200. The gospel proclamation that 'Christ died for our sins' is true whether or not people believe it, indicating that the atonement paid for the sins of believers and unbelievers.

17 In this passage, 'The derivative nature of the gospel is stressed. Paul did not originate the message he gave them. He simply passed on what he had received.... This is the accepted language for the handing on of tradition. What follows is a very early summary of the church's traditional teaching. Paul is not giving us some views he has worked out for himself; he is passing on what had been told him. This is the *kerygma*, the proclamation, the gospel preached by the early church' (Ibid., 201).

18 This means that part of the gospel is telling an unbeliever that 'Christ died for you', contra Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 397; Nicole, 'Covenant, Universal Call', 410; J. I. Packer, 'Introductory Essay', in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* by J. Owen (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1959), 16-22; and S. Waldron, 'The Biblical Confirmation of Particular Redemption', in *A Southern Baptist Dialogue: Calvinism*, ed. E. R. Clendenen and B. J. Waggoner (Nashville: B&H, 2008), 149-50. As Lightner states, 'What brings a condemned, hopeless, helpless sinner into the family of God

## The motivation for the gospel

Paul not only states that the content of the gospel is Christ's payment for the sins of all people, but he also states that Christ's payment for all people is the motivation for preaching the gospel. He makes this clear in 2 Corinthians 5:11-18. In this passage Paul is defending his ministry to the Corinthians by explaining his motivation for the ministry.<sup>19</sup> Paul first states that his motivation for ministry is the fear of the Lord (v. 11).<sup>20</sup> A few verses later Paul states that another motivation for his ministry is the love of Christ, which is demonstrated in Christ's death for all people (v. 14).<sup>21</sup> As Paul Barnett explains, 'In the second part of the verse Paul explains that he knows of, and is controlled by, "the love of Christ", because he became "convinced" that "one died for all."' In other words, Paul's sense of ongoing compulsion to evangelize ('controls') arose from his considered judgment ('we are convinced') when he understood that '[Christ had] died for all'.<sup>22</sup> Paul's motivation for his ministry is Christ's payment for the sins of all people; it is what compels him to serve the Lord.

is trust and acceptance of Christ's finished work on the cross as payment *for his sin*, the one believing. Since this is true, the sinner needs to be told, "Christ died for you. He paid your debt. Will you accept His payment for *your* sins?" The one believing in limited atonement cannot honestly say this since he does not believe Christ died for all.... What this all means is that limited atonement runs aground when it comes to sharing the gospel of God's saving grace' (Lightner, *Death Christ Died*, 152-53, emphasis the author's). See also Demarest, *Cross and Salvation*, 194-95.

19 R. P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, WBC, vol. 40 (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 118-19.

20 'Paul is not "afraid" of the Lord, but he does have a "reverential awe" of him and recognizes that his whole life and ministry will come under God's scrutiny. It is with this awareness that he persuades men' (C. Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 119).

21 Advocates of particular redemption understand the 'all' in 2 Cor. 5:14 as referring to believers. See For example, H. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. J. Bolt, trans. J. Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 465; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 396; R. B. Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die? A Study of the Divine Design of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 29-30; Letham, *Work of Christ*, 241; J. Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 69-72; Nicole, 'Definite Atonement', 205; J. Owen, *The Death of Christ in the Death of Christ* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1959), 238-40; W. G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 2:480; and T. L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 488-89. That the word 'all' refers to all people, and not just believers, is clear from how Paul distinguishes the 'all' from 'they who live' in 2 Cor. 5:15. As Harris states, 'The very addition of the expression οἱ ζῶντες suggests that a new, distinct category is being introduced; while all persons "died" when Christ died, not all rose to new life when he rose from the dead' (M. J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 421).

22 P. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 288.

This motivation becomes even clearer in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, which states, 'Now all *these* things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.' Second Corinthians 5:18-19 are parallel statements, in that verse 19 repeats and amplifies the thoughts of verse 18.<sup>23</sup> The objective work of reconciliation appears at the beginning of each verse, in that God has reconciled 'us' (v. 18) or 'the world' (v.19) to himself.<sup>24</sup> The need for a subjective receiving of God's reconciliation is highlighted at the end of each verse, as Paul speaks of the ministry and the message of reconciliation.<sup>25</sup> Christians have the ministry of reconciliation and the word of reconciliation (subjective), and this word and ministry is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself (objective).<sup>26</sup> God wrought a universal reconciliation; therefore he issues a universal gospel call, and therefore Christians are to be ambassadors

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23 'Paul now [in v. 19] replays in essence what he asserted in v. 18. The sentence thus has the effect of reinforcing and explicating the ministry of reconciliation – both Christ's and Paul's – that was set forth there' (Barnett, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 305). See also I. H. Marshall, "The Meaning of Reconciliation", in *Unity and Diversity in New Testament Theology: Essays in Honor of George E. Ladd*, ed. R. A. Guelich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 122; and D. L. Turner, "Paul and the Ministry of Reconciliation in 2 Cor. 5:11-6:2", *CTR* 4 (1989), 84.

24 Reconciliation is primarily an objective act; it is something that God has done for humanity in the cross of Christ. It is also a subjective act, however, because human beings must themselves subjectively experience the reconciliation that God has wrought in order to have fellowship with him. As George Ladd states, 'Until God's offer of objective reconciliation has been received in an attitude of glad surrender, no person is in fact reconciled to God; she or he is still a sinner and in the last day will suffer the full and awful outpouring of the wrath of a holy God. The content of reconciliation, therefore, while first of all the objective act of God, is also the affirmative reaction of people to the proffer of reconciliation. Only then does reconciliation become effective for the sinner; only then is he or she reconciled to God' (G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., ed. D. A. Hagner [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 496).

25 The message and the ministry of reconciliation are the same. As Harris remarks, 'τὸν λόγον τῆς καταλλαγῆς is clearly parallel to διακονίαν τῆς καταλλαγῆς (v. 18). The ministry is the proclamation of the message. Whether God is said to "give the ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18) or "to entrust the message of reconciliation" (v. 19) to Paul and others, the emphasis is on the privilege and obligation of the task of proclaiming that reconciliation' (Harris, *Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 445).

26 'Because God has made Christ sin for us, because God is not reckoning to man their trespasses, therefore there is a word of reconciliation, a message of good news that can and must be proclaimed to men. Well may Paul exhort his readers to "receive not the grace of God in vain"' (L. Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], 232).

for him (2 Cor. 5:20).<sup>27</sup> Not only are the fear of God (2 Cor. 5:11) and the love of God (2 Cor. 5:14) the motivation for preaching the gospel, but also the universal reconciliation that Christ accomplished on the cross ought to drive all gospel preaching.<sup>28</sup> Christians ought to take the gospel to all people because Christ died for all people.<sup>29</sup>

### The Holy Spirit's work in the gospel call

While the Holy Spirit effectually calls the elect to salvation through the gospel,<sup>30</sup> he also works to call an innumerable amount of people in the universal gospel call. The Holy Spirit works to take the gospel to the world just as he works to take

27 'Paul's ambassadorial role was grounded (οὖν) on the divine act of reconciliation (v. 18a) and the institution of the ministry of reconciliation (vv. 18b, 19c)... "Through us" (= by our mouth/words), certainly includes Paul and his fellow apostles but probably also all proclaimers of reconciliation. Whoever declares "the message of reconciliation" (v. 19) is both a delegated representative of Christ and an actual spokesperson for God' (Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 446-47).

28 It is possible that 2 Tim. 2:10 could be used to contradict this assertion. This verse states, 'For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory.' In this verse Paul (assuming his authorship of the epistle) states that he endures hardship in his gospel ministry (2 Tim. 2:8-9) for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they may obtain salvation. Paul here describes his motive for preaching the gospel as the salvation of the elect. As this motivation only refers to believers, it is particular, as opposed to universal. See G. W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 398-400; T. D. Lea and H. P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 207-08; W. D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC, vol. 46 (Waco, TX: Word, 2000), 514-15; and P. H. Townner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 503-06. This motivation need not contradict, however, the motivation of God's love for all people in the atonement or the universal reconciliation wrought by the atonement. Paul's gospel ministry can certainly be motivated both by God's general intentions in the atonement for all people, as well as his particular, salvific intentions for the elect. This understanding assumes that God has multiple intentions in the atonement that do not contradict one another. For a defense of this view, see G. L. Shultz, Jr., 'A Biblical and Theological Defense of a Multi-Intentioned View of the Extent of the Atonement', (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008).

29 'Why is the universal gospel message incumbent upon the children of God? According to 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, it is not because of election or even because of a supposed covenant of redemption but solely because of the universal reconciliation which God has wrought in Christ at the cross' (Lightner, *Death Christ Died*, 118).

30 Graham Cole helpfully points out that there is little exegetical evidence for the Spirit's role in effectual calling (G. A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007], 215). There is a strong theological argument to be made, however, that the work of effectual calling is appropriately attributed to the Holy Spirit, as he is the one who works through all stages of salvation to apply that salvation.



it to believers. Perhaps the most significant passage of Scripture describing the Holy Spirit's work in taking the gospel to all people is John 16:7-11, which states, 'But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And he, when he comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.' In this passage, Jesus tells his disciples why it is to their advantage that he go away, because when he goes away he will send the Holy Spirit to them. The Holy Spirit, when he comes, will then convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.<sup>31</sup> These words of encouragement are in light of the disciples' responsibility to testify to the world about Christ, even though the world hated Christ and his followers (John 15:18-16:4). Their testimony amidst suffering would be with the assistance of the Holy Spirit.

Concerning the nature of the universal gospel call, this passage makes two things clear. First of all, this passage makes it clear that the Spirit convicts the *world* concerning the message of Christ. The word 'world' here refers to all unbelievers.<sup>32</sup> This can be seen from the context of the passage (John 15:18-16:6). The world is hostile toward God, opposes the purposes of God, and hates God. Elsewhere Scripture makes it clear that these characteristics are true of all unbelievers (Rom. 1:18-32; 3:9-20; Eph. 2:1-3). It is all unbelievers whom the Holy Spirit works to convict. Concerning this convicting work of the Spirit, Bruce states, 'The Spirit bears witness to the world (not least through the witness of Jesus' followers, as was affirmed in John 15:16ff.) that Jesus, rejected, condemned, and put to death by the world, has been vindicated and exalted by God. His rejection, condemnation, and execution expressed in violent clarity the world's refusal to

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31 'In John 16:8-11, Christ describes the Paraclete's ministry of convicting the world. He says that the Spirit convicts the world concerning its sinfulness, because people do not believe in him. If the world believed in Christ, it would not be guilty but rather forgiven. The Holy Spirit also convicts the world of its false righteousness which can never help it find favor with God. Clear proof that the world's righteousness is empty is seen in Christ's ascension to the Father. Jesus' righteousness was accepted by God, and therefore those who reject him are rejecting the only source of true righteousness. Finally, the Paraclete convicts the world regarding its impending judgment by God. If the prince of this world has been condemned, how can the world which follows him hope to escape similar condemnation? Satan's evident doom is a basis for convincing the world that it stands condemned apart from Christ' (J. Aloisi, 'The Paraclete's Ministry of Conviction: Another Look at John 16:8-11', *JETS* 47 [2004], 65).

32 *Ibid.*, 66-69; Bruce, *Gospel of John*, 318-20; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 534-39; Douty, *The Death of Christ*, 85-86; W. H. Harris III, 'An Out-of-this-World Experience: A Look at 'κόσμος' in the Johannine Literature' (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Washington, DC, 18 November 2006), 7-10; and Lightner, *The Death Christ Died*, 130-35.

believe in him; that unbelief is now exposed as sin.<sup>33</sup> Jesus in this passage is explaining the Holy Spirit's role in the universal gospel call.

Second, the Holy Spirit's work of convicting the world through the gospel is here explicitly connected to Christ's work on the cross. Jesus went away from his disciples through his death, resurrection, and ascension, and just as he promised in this passage it was only after those experiences that he sent the Spirit (Acts 1:8; 2:1-4, 33).<sup>34</sup> This means that all of the Spirit's work in convicting the world of the gospel is tied to Christ and occurs because of Christ's atonement. As John 16:7-11 makes clear, the Holy Spirit's work in the world is not only for the elect. Since the Holy Spirit's work of taking the gospel to all unbelievers, elect and nonelect, is based upon Christ's atonement, it seems that Christ's atonement cannot be limited to the elect.<sup>35</sup> Doing so would result in separating part of the Spirit's work in the world from the Son's work on the cross.

### The genuineness of the gospel call

In light of the urgency and importance of the universal gospel call, and the reasons for it, there seems to be a dilemma for those who hold to particular redemption. Lewis Sperry Chafer articulates this dilemma, 'A very difficult situation arises for the limited redemptionist when he confronts the Great Commission, which enjoins the preaching of the gospel to every creature. How, it may be urged, can a universal gospel be preached if there is no universal provision? To say on the one hand that Christ died only for the elect and on the other hand that His death is the ground on which salvation is offered to all men is perilously near contradiction.'<sup>36</sup> This contradiction is one that even some advocates of particular redemption recognize.<sup>37</sup>

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33 Bruce, *Gospel of John*, 319. For detailed exegesis that supports the idea of these verses as referring to the universal convicting work of the Spirit, see Aloisi, 'Paraclete's Ministry of Conviction', 56-60; and Carson, *Gospel of John*, 534-39.

34 'By his "departure," his death/exaltation, Jesus fulfills the conditions that must be met before he can send the Paraclete; and the gift of the Paraclete is so great that Jesus' "departure" must be seen as for the disciples' good (vv. 6, 7). When the Paraclete comes, he extends the ministry of Jesus in ways the disciples could not have foreseen. In particular, he convicts the world of its sin, its righteousness, and its judgment' (Ibid., 537).

35 'The Holy Spirit's work could not reach out beyond the elect if the death of Christ did not have this universal scope since the Spirit's ministry was procured in and through the cross. In other words, how could a part of the work of Christ on the cross be universal if the whole of it was not?... The problem really centers in the convicting work of the Holy Spirit since this is His principal ministry towards the unsaved. How can the Spirit be said to have a ministry toward the entire world in showing all men their need of Christ if the death of Christ did not reach out to the entire world?' (Lightner, *Death Christ Died*, 130-31).

36 Chafer, 'For Whom Did Christ Die?', 315, emphasis the author's.

37 'That there is great difficulty in the way of harmonizing the general invitations with the Gospel on the one hand with the special reference of the atonement to those who shall eventually be partakers of its benefits on the other hand – it would be altogether

Supporters of particular redemption attempt to resolve this contradiction in one of three ways. First, some hold that particular redemption, far from undermining the universal gospel call, actually supports the sincere offer of the gospel, and that authentic evangelism would be impossible without it.<sup>38</sup> Second, some maintain that the extent of the atonement has nothing to do with evangelism; whether Christ died for all or some does not concern the matter of a universal gospel call.<sup>39</sup> Sinners simply need to be told of what God has done in the atonement, not what he has done specifically for them.<sup>40</sup> Third, some assert that the Bible teaches both particular redemption and a universal gospel call, and although these may seem contradictory, they both need to be held because the Bible clearly teaches both.<sup>41</sup>

Each one of these resolutions has problems, and they are all unnecessary in light of the multi-intentioned view. First of all, the sincere offer of the gospel does not necessitate particular redemption for the simple reason that it is possible to hold that Christ died both to secure the salvation of his elect and to pay for the sins of all people. Christ did procure the offer and provision of salvation for all people on the cross, but he also procured the definite application of salvation for the elect on the cross. God's multiple intentions in the atonement alleviate the concerns of a vacuous gospel offer; there is an objective salvation that Christ accomplished that is certain for the elect and available for all.<sup>42</sup> Second, the extent of the atonement is related to evangelism and does take into consideration the

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fruitless to disguise' (T. J. Crawford, *The Doctrine of the Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954], 510). R. B. Kuiper, who holds to particular redemption, calls the universal call and particular redemption a 'paradox' (Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?*, 86).

- 38 'Far from undermining the sincere offer of the gospel, the doctrine of definite atonement undergirds the call. It provides a real rather than a hypothetical salvation as that which is offered. It does not expect the fulfillment of an unrealizable condition on the part of the sinner as a prerequisite for salvation. But it confidently looks to God who initiates the offer and can also raise sinners from death to life and thus enable them in sovereign grace to repent and to believe so that they will appropriate the benefit secured for them by the death of Christ' (Nicole, 'Covenant, Universal Call', 410). See also Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 65.
- 39 'What has to be said about the cross when preaching the gospel is simply that Christ's death is the ground on which Christ's forgiveness is given. And this is all that has to be said. The question of the designed extent of the atonement does not come into the story at all' (Packer, *Evangelism*, 68). See also Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 397-98.
- 40 Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 397; Nicole, 'Covenant, Universal Call', 410; Packer, 'Introductory Essay', 16-22; and Waldron, 'The Biblical Confirmation of Particular Redemption', 149-50.
- 41 Crawford, *Respecting the Atonement*, 510; W. E. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 597-603; Kuiper, *For Whom Did Christ Die?*, 86; Letham, *The Work of Christ*, 246; and Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 100. It should be noted that the idea of a paradox is not an illegitimate option. See A. A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 5-7.
- 42 For a defense of God's multiple intentions in the atonement and an explanation of this idea impacts the extent of the atonement, see Shultz, 'Multi-Intentioned View'.

matter of the universal gospel call, as the content of the gospel call makes clear (1 Cor. 15:3-5).<sup>43</sup> Third, if one believes that Christ died for all people on the cross, there is no need to believe that the universal gospel call and the particularity of the atonement are contradictory. Rather, the universality of the gospel call is one of God's general purposes in the atonement.

The crux of the issue is how the gospel can be genuinely offered to the non-elect if God made no payment for their sins. As Lightner states, 'If Christ died only for the elect, then why take that message to the nonelect? An even more sobering question would be, 'Why does God invite all men if Christ did not provide for all?' It is *His* invitation which is universal and man merely takes it to men.'<sup>44</sup> If Christ did not pay for the sins of the non-elect, then it is impossible to genuinely offer salvation to the non-elect, since there is no salvation available to offer them. In a sense, when offered the gospel, the non-elect would be offered something that was never there for them to receive in the first place. There must be a genuine payment for all people, who can, if they so choose, receive it.

## Conclusion

One of the primary responsibilities of the church is to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, as the Great Commission commands. In obeying the Great Commission Christians are to share the gospel with as many people as possible because God desires that all people know of his saving love towards them in the atonement (John 3:16). The universal gospel call genuinely demonstrates God's love toward all of humanity, even if it does not result in salvation for all who hear it.<sup>45</sup> God also desires for all people to experience the salvation that only the atonement brings (1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). God therefore offers the universal gospel call because he wants all people to hear the good news of the gospel, turn from their sin, and come to him through his Son. As D. A. Carson states, 'However much God stands in judgment over the world, he also presents himself as the God who invites and commands all human beings to repent.'<sup>46</sup> In calling all human beings to repent and come to him, God offers salvation that is only available to all human beings because of Jesus Christ's atonement for all human beings.

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43 In addition to this truth, it should be noted that what one believes about the nature, intent, and extent of the atonement affects the whole of the Christian life, including the proclamation of the gospel. See Demarest, *Cross and Salvation*, 166; and J. R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 23-50.

44 Lightner, *Death Christ Died*, 114, emphasis the author's.

45 'The end result of God's love is therefore the gospel message – the free offer of life and mercy to anyone who believes. In other words, the gospel – an indiscriminate offer of divine mercy to everyone without exception – manifests God's compassionate love and unfeigned lovingkindness to all humanity' (J. F. MacArthur, Jr. 'The Love of God for Humanity', MSJ 7 [1996]: 14). See also J. M. Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 420.

46 D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 17-18.

This truth, that the universal gospel call presupposes an unlimited extent of the atonement, is demonstrated in the content of the gospel call, the motivation for the gospel call, the work of the Holy Spirit in the gospel call, and the need for salvation to be available for those to whom it is offered. One of the primary truths of the gospel, as Paul articulates it in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, is that Christ died for the sins of humanity, believers and unbelievers. One of the primary motivations for preaching the gospel is Christ's love for all people, demonstrated in his dying for them (2 Cor. 5:14) and his reconciliation of them in through his death (2 Cor. 5:18-20). The Holy Spirit is the one who works to convict people of their need for the gospel, and his work of taking the gospel to humanity is a result of Christ's atonement for humanity (John 16:7-11). Finally, the need for an actual salvation to be available for all those to whom it is offered if the offer is genuine argues for an atonement that paid for the sins of all people. This biblical and theological evidence argues against particular redemption and for views that understand the atonement to be for all people, the elect and the nonelect, and therefore unlimited in extent. God's genuine offer of salvation is based upon his genuine provision of salvation, and is only possible because Christ's atonement paid for the sins of all people.

### **Abstract**

The Bible makes it clear that Jesus' payment for the sins of all people, elect and nonelect, was necessary for the universal gospel call to take place. This truth is seen in the content of the gospel call, the motivation for the gospel call, the Holy Spirit's work in the gospel call, and the need for an actual salvation to be available for all those to whom it is offered if the offer is genuine. Therefore this article demonstrates that the universal gospel call is only possible because of an atonement that pays for all sin. The relationship between the universal gospel call and the atonement offers a strong argument for understanding the atonement as unlimited in extent.

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