

**BIBLICAL SOTERIOLOGY:
An Overview and Defense of the
Reformed Doctrines of Salvation**

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Limited Atonement, part 12

**ARGUMENTS SUPPORTING THE DOCTRINE OF
LIMITED ATONEMENT**

**IV. MEANS BY WHICH ATONEMENT WAS ACCOMPLISHED: AGENTS
(cont.)**

A. God the Father (cont.)

1. Sent God the Son — God the Father sent God the Son into the world to accomplish the atonement that he purposed beforehand. (cont.)

c. The Father covenanted with the Son — God the Father entered a covenant with God the Son concerning the work of redemption. Within this covenant, the Father promised the Son success in his endeavors.

“The Lord says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet . . .’ The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek’” (Ps. 110:1,4).

The New Testament testifies that this prophecy pertains to Christ (Luke 20:41-44; Acts 2:34-36; Heb. 1-4,13; 5:5-6; 7:17-22). God swore that he would make Christ’s enemies a footstool for his feet, and that Christ would be an eternal priest. As the book of Hebrews so often emphasizes, Christ’s actions as priest included the atonement (e.g. Heb. 9:11ff.) by which he redeemed his

people (cf. Gal. 3:13-14; Heb. 9:12). In the Father's promise that he would make Christ's enemies a footstool for his feet, which enemies must include sin and death (compare Gen. 4:7; Rom.7:11; 1 Cor. 15:26; Jam. 1:15), the Father promised Christ success in his redemptive work as priest.

“But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; by His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:10-12).

Jesus explained that this prophecy found its fulfillment in him, specifically in his sacrificial death and atonement (Luke 22:37). The prophecy includes the offer that if Christ will render himself as a guilt offering, God will reward him with something that will satisfy him, something that will make the anguish of his soul worth while. Because of the atonement, the Father will also allot him a portion with the great, and grant him a share of the booty. These promises constitute a covenant between the Father and Christ. Further, the promise that Christ will be satisfied indicates that his death will successfully justify “the many” for whom he will die.

“Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you, that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me; and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who

beholds the Son, and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I myself will raise him up on the last day... But there are some of you who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, 'For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me, unless it has been granted him from the Father'" (John 6:35-40,64-65).

By actually giving them to the Son prior to the atonement, the Father promised the Son that certain people would be his. As a result, the Son was certain that these people would come to him, and that he would successfully lift them up on the last day. Since the Father would not lead the Son to be certain about anything that would not actually come to pass, the making certain of the Son constitutes a promise from the Father that this lifting up (i.e. saving) of the believers would actually occur.

By saying that some did not believe because they had not been given to him by the Father, Christ indicated that those who would be saved had already been identified and given to him, even though they may not yet have come to faith. By this same statement, he also indicated that the belief these people did or would express was the result, not the cause, of their being given to him. As this passage teaches, a person cannot believe or come to Christ unless he has previously been given to Christ by the Father, and some clearly are not so given. The covenant between the Father and the Son ensured the salvation of those whom the Father gave to the Son.

“I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd. For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

This commandment I received from My Father” (John 10:14-18).

Christ received a commandment from God to perform the atonement. Also, the Father loved Christ prior to the atonement because he knew that Christ would obey this commandment in the future. For the Father to love the Son on the basis that the atonement would be offered demonstrates that the Father and Son had agreed that the Son would necessarily obey the Father’s command to atone.

Further, Christ indicated with certainty that he had sheep which were not of the fold at hand, that these other sheep would hear him when he called them, and that these other sheep would become one flock under his shepherding. This certainty must have rested on Christ’s assurance that the Father would find the atonement acceptable and would allow Christ to save and protect these sheep. For Christ to have been certain that these sheep would be saved by his death, it must have been true that the Father had promised Christ success in his atonement and obedience.

“The Jews . . . were saying to Him, ‘How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.’ Jesus answered them, ‘I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one” (John 10:24-30).

The Father’s giving of certain people to Christ prior to the rendering of the atonement indicates that a covenant existed prior to the atonement that guaranteed that Christ would die, and that he would successfully redeem these people. This success is so certain in Christ’s mind that he says confidently that these people will never perish.

“These things Jesus spoke; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify Thy Son, that the Son may glorify Thee, even as Thou gavest Him authority over all mankind, that to all whom Thou hast given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent. I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou hast given Me to do. And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was. I manifested Thy name to the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me, and they have kept Thy word. Now they have come to know that everything Thou hast given Me is from Thee; for the words which Thou gavest Me I have given to them; and they received them, and truly understood that I came forth from Thee, and they believed that Thou didst send Me. I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine; and all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I have been glorified in them. And I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee, Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are. While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled... Sanctify them in truth... I do not ask in behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word ... Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:1-12,20,24).

The Father gave certain people to the Son, and gave the Son the authority to give eternal life to these people. The fact that they belonged to Christ prior to the atonement by which he purchased them indicates that prior to the atonement the Father and the Son had agreed that the Son would redeem them.

Prior to his death, Christ reminded the Father that Christ had kept his part of the covenant (“fulfilled the work”). He then called on the Father to respond by keeping his end of the bargain. Interestingly, Christ made this appeal on the grounds that he had already fulfilled his part, even though he had yet to offer the atonement. That the Son conducts himself as if he has already died emphasizes that the Father and Son had previously covenanted that the atonement would take place. Further, since the Father’s end of the bargain was to keep and sanctify these people, and to ensure their presence with Christ, these blessings for these people must have been included in the covenant between the Father and the Son. Thus, part of the covenant included Christ’s successful obtainment of these benefits for these people through his atonement.

“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying ‘I will proclaim Thy name to My brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise.’ And again, ‘I will put My trust in Him.’ And again, ‘Behold, I and the children whom God has given Me’” (Heb. 2:10-13).

This passage, though written after Christ’s death, quotes from Old Testament prophecies which preceded not only the crucifixion but also the incarnation. That the Father gave the children to Christ even prior to the incarnation indicates that a covenant existed prior to the atonement that guaranteed that Christ would successfully redeem the children by his death.