

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

“In the Nick of Time”

Occasional Essays
and Other Stuff
for Christian Students

Presented by the
President of

Central Baptist
Theological Seminary
of Minneapolis

American Christianity needs leaders. American Christianity needs *Christian* leaders. Christian leaders explain the Scriptures, bringing them to bear upon life's urgent questions. Christian leaders exemplify the life of faith, finding their ultimate satisfaction in God alone. They unite intellectual discipline with ordinate affection, turning their entire being toward the love of God. These essays are dedicated to the task of inviting today's Christian students to become tomorrow's Christian leaders.

—Kevin T. Bauder

“...Be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”

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February 4, 2005
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The Altar George Herbert

A broken ALTAR, Lord thy servant rears,
Made of a heart, and cemented with teares:
Whose parts are as thy hand did frame;
No workmans tool hath touch'd the same
A HEART alone
Is such a stone,
As nothing but
Thy pow'r doth cut.
Wherefore each part
Of my hard heart
Meets in this frame,
To praise thy Name:
That if I chance to hold my peace,
These stones to praise thee may not cease.
O let thy blessed SACRIFICE be mine,
And sanctifie this ALTAR to be thine. ✠

George Herbert (1593-1633) left his membership in England's Parliament for the pastorate of the village church in Bremerton, near Salisbury. There he spent his wealth in rebuilding the church house and his time in preaching and writing poetry. To the members of his flock he was known as “holy Mr. Herbert.”

The Logic of Limited Atonement

One regularly hears the argument that Limited Atonement stands or falls with the other four points of Calvinism. Both Calvinists and anti-Calvinists attempt to use this argument to demonstrate the inconsistency of holding Unconditional Election while denying Limited Atonement. The argument purports to be strictly logical. The Calvinist argues that Christ would not die for someone whom He did not intend to save. The anti-Calvinist finds it incredible that Christ would fail to elect someone for whom His blood was shed. Both sides allege that holding only four points of Calvinism is logically impossible.

This argument rests upon both a logical and a theological confusion. The theological confusion lies in the failure distinguish the provision of salvation from the application of salvation. The distinction between provision and application is crucial to biblical soteriology, even if Limited Atonement is true. Salvation is not automatically applied to anyone for whom Christ provided it. The New Testament is clear on this point. Prior to their conversion, even the elect are dead in trespasses and sins. Until they believe they remain children of wrath. Therefore, everyone for whom salvation has been provided must still believe on Christ before it will be applied. *Sola fide* remains the maxim of justification.

Everyone except the universalists recognizes that the atonement is limited in its *application*. The question is whether God intended to limit the atonement in its *provision*. One cannot answer this by appealing to evidence for limited application. Even if one recognizes (as Calvinists do) that part of God's intention through the death of Christ was to secure the application of salvation to the elect, such belief still does not reveal for whom God intended to provide salvation.

This exposes the logical confusion in the argument for Limited Atonement. That argument is that the affirmation of Unconditional Election is strictly incompatible with the rejection of Limited Atonement. Such a contradiction, however, is entirely illusory. This will become evident if the argument is reduced to clear, molecular statements. Limited Atonement includes both an affirmation and a denial. It affirms that God intended both to provide salvation for the elect and to apply it to them. It denies that God intended to provide salvation for the non-elect. This denial is what really defines Limited Atonement. Therefore, the Limited Atonement theory can be summarized in the following molecular statement.

Proposition One: *Some persons are not persons for whom Christ intended to secure the provision of salvation.*

Those who reject Limited Atonement do not object to what it affirms, namely, that Christ died to provide salvation for the elect. The question is about the status of the non-elect: did Christ intend to provide salvation for them, or did He not? At this point, those who reject Limited Atonement answer with an affirmative. Christ did indeed intend to provide salvation for all people. This theory of a General Atonement can be expressed in the following molecular statement.

Proposition Two: *All persons are persons for whom Christ intended to secure the provision of salvation.*

Proposition One and Proposition Two directly contradict each other. Exactly one statement must be true and one must be false. To affirm both at the same time is a logical impossibility. One cannot hold to Limited Atonement and General Atonement simultaneously. You may ask, But what about Unconditional Election?

Unconditional Election is the teaching that God, in eternity past, chose certain persons to be saved for reasons not grounded in any foreseen merit or action on their part. According to Unconditional Election, God always planned to apply salvation to the elect, whom He chose for reasons sufficient to Himself. The strongest form of Unconditional Election states that one purpose of Christ's work was actually to secure the application of salvation to the elect. This teaching could be expressed in logical form in the following molecular statement.

Proposition Three: *Some persons are persons for whom Christ intended to secure the application of salvation.*

Proposition Three is not incompatible with either Proposition One or Proposition Two for the simple reason that its predicate contains a different term. In the first two propositions, the predicate is about those for whom Christ intended to *provide* salvation. In the third proposition, the predicate is about those to whom Christ intended to *apply* salvation. In other words, Unconditional Election is logically compatible with either Limited Atonement or General Atonement. The vaunted argument from logical consistency turns out to be a mirage.

In fact, it is not an argument based upon logic at all. It is an argument based upon plausibility. The statement that Christ would not die for someone whom He did not intend to save is really not a statement about Christ. It is a statement about what the speaker would do if he were in Christ's place. The same is true of the statement that Christ would not fail to elect someone for whom He shed His blood. Such arguments sound reasonable and they seem persuasive. Upon examination, however, their persuasiveness is found to be psychological rather than logical. They are speculations about how God would handle Himself if He were altogether such an One as us.

Limited Atonement may or may not be true. If it is true, however, its truth cannot be established by the "Appeal to Logical Consistency." The truth of Limited Atonement (if it be true) must be founded upon the statements of Scripture. The strongest case for Limited Atonement would be made if its proponents could offer specific biblical texts that named particular individuals or groups for whom Christ did *not* die to provide salvation. Barring such evidence, the best that can be said for Limited Atonement is that it remains in doubt. ✕

This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, president of Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of Central Seminary's professors, students, or alumni necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.

Christianity as Entertainment

A. W. Tozer

Aside from a few of the grosser sins, the sins of the unregenerated world are now approved by a shocking number of professedly "born-again" Christians, and copied eagerly. Young Christians take as their models the rankest kind of worldlings and try to be as much like them as possible. Religious leaders have adopted the techniques of the advertisers; boasting, baiting and shameless exaggerating are now carried on as a normal procedure in church work. The moral climate is not that of the New Testament, but that of Hollywood and Broadway.

Most evangelicals no longer initiate; they imitate, and the world is their model. The holy faith of our fathers has in many places been made a form of entertainment, and the appalling thing is that all this has been fed down to the masses from the top.

From A. W. Tozer, *Leaning Into the Wind* (Wheaton, IL: Creation House, 1984), 23.

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