



## The Inscrutable Question: The Lapsarian Controversy: Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Limited Atonement Is an Expression of the Dark Side of Morality

- 25) We have now seen how the dark side of morality results in the forfeit of the believer's utilization of his escrow blessings. In our study we have also observed how a believer can enjoy a bright side of the Christian way of life that has eternal impact. By demonstrating loyalty to truth developed into habitual thought, decision, and action he received the conveyance of his eternal escrow, the Nike Awards presented in heaven following the evaluation throne of Christ.
- 26) In our study we also revisited one of the major issues that has developed in the history of biblical interpretation. I believe that limited atonement is a product of the dark side of morality and we will examine it along with unlimited atonement in our next paragraph.

### F. The Lapsarian Controversy

- 1- Our study of escrow blessings in the last paragraph required us to discuss the doctrines of election and atonement. It is not my intent to conduct a detailed study of either at this point. However, false views of these two doctrines have developed into theologies that contribute to the dark side of morality. The sad result is that believers are led into the production of human good and evil while believing they are producing divine good. These believers are sincere and convinced. They sincerely desire to do the Lord's will and are convinced their system of theology enables them to accomplish this objective. It will be my objective to offer a brief overview of the controversy and give some insight as to why they are wrong.
- 2- I want you to know up front that this is also a review. This subject was discussed about 18 months ago when we were studying John 3:16. However, in view of the context we have before us—The Dark Side of Morality—in which we are exposing the apparent good works of the self-righteous as having its origin in status quo carnality, its energy from the flesh, and its production classified as human good and evil, the reintroduction of limited atonement is pertinent and an excellent example of the problem. First of all let's take a look at the expanded translation of:
- John 3:16 -** God demonstrated His unconditional and undiminished love to the world in the following manner: He gave His uniquely-born Son for the purpose and with the result that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life.
- 3- The expressed purpose for the ultimate gift of divine love was so that anyone who believes would have the imputation of eternal life. The pronoun that identifies every member of the human race as a potential recipient of the results of this gift is the nominative singular of:
- πᾶς / pas / -** "everyone"
- 4- God demonstrated His love to the "world" for the purpose and with the result that "everyone" who believes might have eternal life: **κόσμος / kosmos /:** "world" plus **πᾶς / pas /:** "everyone" equals "unlimited atonement."
- 5- Verses such as this are replete throughout the New Testament, yet some denominations that developed following the Protestant Reformation came to subscribe to the false doctrine of "limited atonement."
- 6- Unfortunately, John Calvin is credited with this heresy when in fact he was himself a proponent of unlimited atonement.
- 7- In an effort to restore Calvin's reputation while documenting the biblical validity of unlimited atonement, we consult the writings of:



Dillow, Joseph C. *The Reign of the Servant Kings: A Study of Eternal Security and the Final Significance of Man*. 2d ed. (Hayesville: Schoettle Publishing Co., 1992), 250, 261-63:

### The Basis of Assurance

What is the basis of assurance according to Calvin? Christ is the source of our assurance. How? It is on the basis of His atoning work. We look for peace “solely in the anguish of Christ our Redeemer (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*). We are to look to Christ who is the “pledge” of God’s love for us (*Commentary*, John 15:9). When we look to Christ, He pledges eternal life to us (*Commentary*, John 17:17). Unless we cling steadfastly to Christ, we will “vacillate continually.” While acknowledging that the Scriptures call upon us to examine our lives, Calvin maintains that this is never to discern whether or not we are Christians:

*When we so examine ourselves, it is not to see whether our holiness, our works, or the fruit of the Spirit in our lives warrant assurance of salvation. Rather, it is to determine that such assurance rests on the proper foundation of God’s mercy in Christ. ... our feelings are an unreliable test of our standing with God. Therefore, if we are to be sure of our salvation, we must always direct our gaze to Christ, in whose face we see the love of God for us fully displayed.* [Bell, M. Charles. *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance*. (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985), 30.]

For Calvin the object of self-examination is not to see if we are saved but to be sure that we are trusting in Christ and not our works for our assurance.

However, Calvin’s successor at Geneva, Theodore Beza, departed from Calvin and grounded assurance in evidences of fruit in the life. Beza’s starting point was his doctrine of limited atonement. Calvin, according to R. T. Kendall, held to unlimited atonement.

Kendall, R. T. *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 13-18:

NOTE: Kendall cites Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and *Commentaries* on Isaiah 53:12 and Hebrews 9:28. In both places Romans 5:15 is referred to and Calvin says “many” = “all.”

**Romans 5:15** - But not as that transgression [ **Adam’s original sin producing condemnation** ], so also is that gracious gift [ **the Incarnation and substitutionary spiritual death of Christ on the cross** ]; for if by the transgression of that one [ **Adam’s original sin** ] the many [ οἱ πολλοί, *hoi polloi*: (Calvin, “all”) the human race ] died [ **spiritual death at birth** ] ...

**Romans 5:15b** - ... much more the grace of God and the gift of grace [ **the demonstration of the unconditional love of God** ] by the one Man, Jesus Christ, who has provided super-abundance [ **salvation, invisible assets, & escrow blessings** ] for the many [ (Calvin, “all”) the human race with emphasis on those who believe in Him ].

In his commentary on Mark at 14:24 Calvin says, “The word ‘many,’ does not mean a part of the world only, but the whole human race.” In *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God*, p. 148, he says, it is “incontestable that Christ came for the expiation of the sins of the whole world.” In his commentary on John 1:29 he observes, “And when he (John the Baptist) says **the sin of the world** he extends this kindness indiscriminately to the whole human race.” “For God commends to us the salvation of all men without exception, even as Christ suffered for the sins of the whole world” (*Sermons on Isaiah’s Prophecy*, p. 141).

(Returning to Dillow) If Christ died for all, Beza argued, then all would be saved.



NOTE: Beza ignores the Greek verb, **πιστεύω / pisteuo** /: “to believe,” which confirms the requirement of a positive volitional response by the person who is presented the gospel in order for the act of salvation to be accomplished by the Holy Spirit. Christ’s spiritual death successfully paid the ransom for the sin problem of the human race. It did not result in anyone’s salvation. Salvation is appropriated only following a person’s positive free-will response to the gospel expressed through faith alone in Christ alone. What is the gospel? Jesus Christ received the transfer imputation of every human sin upon Himself and was judged for every one of them. These sins were not imputed to us but to Christ. Do you believe this? If so then you are saved!

PRINCIPLE: In human history, the sovereignty of God and the free will of man must coexist by divine decree.

If Christ died for all, Beza argued, then all would be saved. He developed a system which became known as supralapsarianism. In that system the order of elective decrees is:

1. The decree to elect some to be saved and to reprobate all others.
2. The decree to create men, both elect and non-elect.
3. The decree to permit the fall.
4. The decree to provide salvation for the elect.
5. The decree to apply salvation to the elect.