

## **Two Aspects in the Design of Christ's Atonement**

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For well over three and a half centuries Christians have been divided over one aspect of Christ's atonement. This topic has served to separate believer from believer, often with great animosity. The cleavage is so great that it has divided schools, denominational institutions, mission agencies, and local churches. Ironically, it has been labeled as a "non-essential" by at least one side in the debate. Yet the implications for this topic are significant for one's approach to the church, evangelism, confidence in the sovereignty of God, and especially, Christology.

The topic I am alluding to is limited atonement, to use its more recognized label. Some have preferred the term "definite atonement" or "particular redemption" to emphasize the positive focus of the doctrine and eliminate any suspicion of the value of Christ's work. But whichever term is used the basic question remains. "Did God intend to save only the elect in the death of Christ or provide salvation for all?" Passionate defenses on each side of the issue have been offered. Frequently, tensions are so strong on this issue that one side does not hear what the other is saying. Each feels justified in her/his view and often refuses to look at the other's argument. Not a few have stated that both are true and then dismissed the subject without seeing the inconsistency of their logic. Such approaches are not good theological methodology, nor are they to be commended as intellectually credible. Those who affirm that Christ's death was intended for all essentially argue that the "all" passages take precedence over the "limited"

passages. They affirm that “all” simply means all persons and that the “limited” passages are viewed as not referring to God’s intention in the death of Christ, but to some benefit bestowed on those who receive Christ. More often than not a consistent dealing with each passage is not attempted. Many prefer to say that Christ’s death was sufficient for all but efficient only for the elect. Those who say that Christ’s death was intended only for the elect argue that the “limited” passages are clear enough and that the “all” passages are referring to the world of the elect. While those who affirm limited atonement attempt to explain the “all” passages consistently, their explanations often seem forced. However, it is possible that there may be another model for explaining this perplexing topic which brings greater consistency to each side of the discussion and at the same time does greater justice to both sets of verses. Before presenting an alternative proposal, it may be helpful to review some of the approaches of the past which address this challenging topic.

**Several Approaches to Answering the Question:  
“For Whom Did Christ Die?”**

Reformed

In defining limited atonement A. A. Hodge concisely states, “[T]he question does truly and only relate to the design of the Father and of the Son in respect to the persons for whose benefit the Atonement was made.”<sup>1</sup> He also denies that the question relates to the sufficiency of Christ’s death, the satisfaction of Christ, the application of the saving benefits of Christ’s death, the universal offer of salvation, or to the universal benefits of Christ’s death to the human race.<sup>2</sup> Others, writing from a Reformed perspective, make similar statements, albeit in the affirmative.

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<sup>1</sup>A. A. Hodge, *The Atonement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1867) 359-60.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 356-358.

For example, J. Oliver Buswell says, "There is no question . . . as to the fact that the atonement of Christ is universal in three aspects: (1) It is *sufficient* for all. . . . (2) The atonement is *applicable* to all. . . (3) The atonement is *offered* to all."<sup>3</sup> He affirms that on these three points there is no essential difference between the Evangelical Arminians and the true Calvinists. He further states that they are likewise in agreement concerning the "*ultimate results*" of Christ's atonement. But he observes that there is a sharp contrast between these two schools of thought with respect to the "*design and intention*" of the atonement. He argues that Christ's atonement is applied in a unique way to the elect and that God's decrees accomplish just what they were intended to accomplish.<sup>4</sup> Louis Berkhof is equally clear in his statement of the Reformed position: "Christ died for the purpose of actually and certainly saving the elect, and the elect only. This is equivalent to saying that He died for the purpose of saving only those to whom He actually applies the benefits of His redemptive work."<sup>5</sup> While numerous older and current writers could be cited for a definition of the Reformed position, Hodge, Buswell, and Berkhof offer a fair representation of that view.

### Arminian

According to James Arminius, "[T]he price of the death of Christ was given for all and for every one."<sup>6</sup> He challenges his readers who disagree with this statement to answer the following scriptures which clearly affirm that Christ died for all humankind: 1 John 2:2; John

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<sup>3</sup>J. O. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), Part II, 141-42.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>5</sup>L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 394. Berkhof offers similar statements about what is not being discussed in the question. Both his content and style appear to be informed by A. A. Hodge.

<sup>6</sup>J. Arminius, *The Works of James Arminius*, trans., Longman, Hurst, Orme, Brown, and Green, vol. 2, in 1828; reprint (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 9.

1:29; John 6:51; Romans 14:15; and 2 Peter 2:1, 3.<sup>7</sup> His words affirm what is commonly designated as “general redemption” or “unlimited atonement.” This view argues that Christ’s death was for all humankind, whether or not all believe. It agrees with the Reformed view concerning the sufficiency, application, and the offer extending to all, but asserts that the redemptive benefits of Christ’s atonement must be received by the believer for the redemption to be secured. John Wesley addresses the question directly in a section called “Predestination Calmly Considered.” He says that God declares three things explicitly:

1. ‘Christ died for all,’ namely, all that ‘were dead’ in sin, as the words immediately following fix the sense. Here is the fact affirmed.” “2. ‘He is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world,’ even for all those for whom he died. Here is the consequence of his dying for all. . . . 3. ‘He died for all, that they should not live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them,’ that they might be saved from their sins. Here is the design, the end, of his dying for them.”<sup>8</sup>

While Charles Finney identifies many benefits of the atonement for God, humans, and the universe itself, when it comes to the question at hand, he explicitly asserts that God intended Christ’s atonement was made for all humankind since it was offered indiscriminately to all. “If the atonement is not intended for all mankind, it is impossible for us not to regard God as insincere, in making them the offer of salvation through the atonement.”<sup>9</sup> Thomas Oden’s brief comments are consistent with his Wesleyan, Arminian heritage. “The atonement is addressed to all humanity, intended for all, sufficient for all, yet it is effectively received by those who

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 9-10. 1 John 2:2 will be considered below.

<sup>8</sup>J. Wesley, *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford, 1964), 443.

<sup>9</sup>C. Finney, *Finney’s Systematic Theology*, ed. J. H. Fairchild (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1976), 211.

respond to it in faith.”<sup>10</sup> From this sampling of Arminian authors it is clear that there is a unity of conviction that the atonement is intended for all humankind.

### Amyraldian

A school of thought which has tried to mediate the Reformed and Arminian views has been variously styled as “Calvinistic Universalism,” “hypothetical or conditional universalism,” “the school of Saumur,” and “Amyraldians” (named after Moise Amyraut, the articulate proponent of this view). With the Calvinists Amyraut held to eternal foreordination and the foreknowledge of God as well as the double decree of election and reprobation. But he charted a new course when he asserted that God has a two-part will in the matter of predestination. First, God offers a universal salvation based on the universal sacrifice of Christ and on the condition of faith. However, since humans have no ability to embrace God’s salvation because of their corruption in sin, it was necessary for God to exercise the second part of His will by creating faith in the elect. Hence, Amyraut affirmed a salvation that was theoretically universal but was particular only for the elect.<sup>11</sup> This mediating view served a political purpose in the French church and found supporters and opponents on both sides of the Atlantic for generations to come.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>T. C. Oden, *The Word of Life, Systematic Theology: Volume Two* (Harper Collins, 1989; reprint, Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998), 388.

<sup>11</sup>P. Schaff, ed. Revised by D. S. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes: Volume I The History of the Creeds* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 481.

<sup>12</sup>Supporters of the Amyraldian view include: John Cameron, John Brown, James Richard, Richard Baxter, Samuel Hopkins, A. H. Strong. Similar views were held by Nathaniel Emmons, Nathaniel William Taylor, and E. A. Park. Most Reformed theologians oppose this view including Charles Hodge, W. G. T. Shedd, B. B. Warfield. Another variation is to be found in the teaching of the “Marrow-men of Scotland.” Thomas Boston, for example, taught that Christ’s death was not for all humankind but his love is. However, his electing love is particular in its application. Others, like John Davenant and Norman Douy, said that Christ died for all, but especially the elect. And more currently, R. T. Kendall has argued that Christ died for all, but intercedes only for the elect. These attempts at defining the purpose of Christ’s death demonstrate the complexity of what is involved in answering the question, “For whom did Christ die?”

**An Alternative Proposal to Answering the Question:  
For Whom Did Christ Die?"**

## How this Proposal Differs From Other Views

Perhaps a better way of approaching the topic is to see scripture saying some definite things about the elect and some general things about the whole human race. I realize that such an approach runs the risk of disquieting each side of the issue. After all, it is uncomfortable to adjust one's views. Seldom does this kind of change take place without great *angst*. However, there may be considerable benefits in considering just such a proposal. If the so-called "problem verses" for each side can be addressed with integrity and theological consistency, perhaps some healing could take place in the Christian community where this issue has been such a divisive factor. It might also help us to think more clearly and accurately thoughts that are worthy of God.

The following is a working proposal that attempts to address both sides of the issue and deal with both sets of verses in a consistent manner, though not exhaustively. Sadly, constraints of space and time do not permit an examination of all the pertinent passages on this topic; however, several significant passages should suffice to explain and illustrate the worth of this proposal. While this proposal may need further development, I believe it does have sufficient substance and potential to warrant attention and further investigation. Let me hasten to add that what I am proposing is not intended as a mediating position between Calvinism and Arminianism, such as that attempted by the Amyraldians, but rather, it is an attempt to deal with the "universal and limited aspects" of Christ's atonement via a different model. Past and current models for the design of Christ's atonement are insufficient by themselves to explain how Christ's death could have been intended for all AND intended for the elect. Nor am I addressing the familiar universal aspects of common grace. (i.e. "The rain falls on the just and the unjust.")

Rather, what I am proposing is that Christ's atonement was limited in its design with respect to the elect and unlimited in its design with respect to the condemnation of Adam's sin. In the death of His Son God the Father intended that all humankind would be justified with respect to the condemnation resulting from Adam's sin. Indeed, all sinned in Adam. But that condemnation was removed in Christ's death. While the effects of original sin would still infect the whole human race, none would be held accountable because of Adam's sin. However, all humans who reach the age of accountability become responsible for their own sins. It is here that the "limited" aspects of Christ's atonement come into view. It was the intent of the Father that the death of His Son atone for the sins of the elect. This proposal is based on a different interpretation of Romans 5:12-19. It also serves to reconcile perplexing texts like 1 Timothy 4:10 and 1 John 2:2, and offers a more consistent theological basis for two critical pastoral and soteriological questions.

#### Exegesis of Romans 5:12-19<sup>13</sup>

The Scripture passage which I believe gives justification for using a different model in understanding these two aspects of Christ's atonement is Romans 5:12-19. For some time I have labored over the use of *all (pantas)* and *the many (hoi polloi)* in that passage. Admittedly most of my friends see these expressions as synonymous. Further, they are in good company with Joachim Jeremias in the TDNT<sup>14</sup> when he explains the differences in terms of an Hebraism. So it

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<sup>13</sup>Works on the Epistle to the Romans are immense in number and often in size. Some of the more helpful volumes are: Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933 (1968)); C. E. B. Cranfield, *The International Critical Commentary: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle To The Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975); James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 38: Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988); Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *The Anchor Bible: Romans* (New York: Doubleday, 1993); Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Robert H. Mounce, *The New American Commentary Vol. 27 Romans* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995); John Murray, *The New International Commentary: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998).

<sup>14</sup>TDNT Vol. VI, 536-545, specifically 540.

is with some *angst* that I depart from the recognized authorities to offer an alternative. I believe that Jeremias may have arrived at a different conclusion had he not worked on the assumption that Isaiah 53 is inclusive,<sup>15</sup> and that Hebrews 2:9 *everyone (pantos)* and 9:28 *the many (to pollon)* must be saying the same thing but using different words, and that 1 Timothy 2:6 *all (panton)* and Mark 10:45 *many (pollon)* must be doing likewise. Douglas Moo, in his commentary on Romans calls into question Jeremias's claim that *hoi polloi*, "the many," is always used inclusively. Bluntly he says his assertion "cannot stand."<sup>16</sup> Let me suggest that there is some intentionality on Paul's part in using *all* and *the many* as he does in Romans 5:12-19.

The clue, I believe, is that when Paul is referring to Adam's sin and its guilt, he uses *all* (inclusively) to indicate that everyone participated in Adam's sin and that *all* (inclusively) were justified by the death of Christ with respect to the guilt of Adam's transgression. It is significant that verses 12-14 clearly have Adam and his sin in view and its judgment on the whole human race. But when he gets to v. 15, there is a major contrast. Not only is he contrasting the gift and the trespass, I believe he also has the elect in view and indicates a contrast between the first group, *all (pantas)*, and the second group, *the many (hoi polloi)*. If *all* and *the many* are synonymous, why does he not use them interchangeably in v. 12 and v. 15? The reason I believe is because he has a specific purpose in mind. In vv. 12-14 he wants us to see that

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<sup>15</sup>Isaiah 53 supports my contention that *many* may be used in a narrow or limited sense. Both the context and the use of the pronouns in this chapter strengthen this understanding. Note in (v.4) *He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows*; (v.5) *But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him*; (v.6) *And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all*. (v. 11) *...My righteous servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities*. Certainly this does not mean that he will justify everyone without exception, but everyone in this context, the *many* i.e. the elect. Hence, v.12, which Jeremias references, should be understood in light of the earlier verses by interpreting *many* in a limited sense. I am indebted to Pastor Arthur Crawford who started me thinking about these distinctions and my students who challenged me to develop the argument.

<sup>16</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 336.



Adam's sin brought condemnation to everyone. But in v. 15 he has the elect in view to show how it affected them. The "much more" is uniquely bestowed on God's special people. In fact, each of the five times the expression "much more" is used in this section it refers to God's elect. Verses 16 and 17 seem to capture the distinction between these two groups without using either *all* (*pantas*) or *the many* (*hoi polloi*). Certainly v. 16 is inclusive in its results and verse 17 is limited.

Following Paul's statement in verse 12 and his extended explanation in verses 13-17, he then summarizes his conclusion in verses 18 and 19. Verse 18 says that the whole human race was condemned in Adam and the whole human race was justified in Christ. Many of my evangelical friends seem unsettled by this verse.<sup>17</sup> However, the verse clearly says that condemnation resulted because of Adam's sin and just as clearly says that justification resulted for the same group because of the death of Christ. This sounds like universalism. And, in fact, the universalists have a point here. This verse is very good news, but not in the way the universalist understands it. What the universalists do not believe and what my evangelical friends do not point out is that this verse has to do with the guilt of Adam's transgression. If my contention is not true, then it is difficult to escape the conclusion that everyone will ultimately be saved. I believe v. 19 has the elect in view and that is why Paul reverts to his use of *the many* (*hoi polloi*) as he did in v. 15. Note the difference is between "condemnation" for *all* and *the many* "were made sinners." Note also there is a difference between *all* being "justified" and *the many* being "made righteous."

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<sup>17</sup>The great preponderance of commentators squirm when they encounter this verse. Unless one is given to a belief in crass universalism, the commentator is quick to assure her/his readers that this verse does not mean what it seems to say. Yet the language is so direct that it is difficult to miss the point. The condemnation which results for the one group is parallel to the justification which results for the same group. Numerous attempts have been made to soften the clear language of verse 18. See the works listed in note 13.

Simply stated, then, v. 18 says that *all* are condemned in Adam and *all* are justified in Christ with respect to the condemnation of Adam's transgression. The result is that no one goes to hell because Adam sinned. Christ's death was efficacious for everyone with respect to Adam's sin. Verse 19, focusing on the implications of Christ's death for the elect, says *the many* must answer for their own sins as a result of being made sinners and that same group will be made righteous in Christ.

It seems that *the many* (*hoi polloi*) is used at times as a technical term for the elect. Note the following passages where *the many* is used in this way: Romans 12:5—"so we, *being many*, are one body in Christ, and individually one of another" (NKJ); 1 Cor. 10:17—"For we, *though many*, are one bread *and* one body" (NKJ); 1 Cor. 10:33—"just as I also please all *men* in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the *profit* of many, that they may be saved" (NKJ); and Hebrews 9:27-28—"And it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (NKJ). I would contend that Romans 5:12-19 is using *the many* (*hoi polloi*) as a technical term to designate the elect. Thus, a valid distinction is made between the *all* and *the many*.

#### How Some Other Passages Fit This Proposal

One of the verses which is cited frequently by the supporters of unlimited atonement is 1 Tim. 4:10: "(God) is the Savior of all men, especially (*malista*) of those who believe" (NKJ). On first reading, this appears to support the unlimited atonement view. Their contention is that God is potentially the savior of all humankind and those who believe receive His salvation. However, the supporters of limited atonement are quick to point out that while the Gospel goes out into all the world, it is only the elect, or those who believe, who benefit in the end. Or they argue that

the “all men” refers to all believers. So the challenge for the interpreter is to determine whether the second part of the statement is in apposition with the first part or whether it is referring to a different designation. It would seem that part two is included in part one but is not identical with it. Commenting on this verse, Millard Erickson observes that God has done something for everyone, but it is less than what he has done for those who believe.<sup>18</sup>

For comparative purposes please note the following uses of “especially,” (*malista*):

First Tim. 5:8, 17—“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever . . . . Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine” (NKJ); 2 Tim. 4:13—“Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments” (NKJ); Titus 1:10 “For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision” (NKJ); Gal. 6:10 (This text is especially (no pun intended) important because it follows a similar construction and most would agree that both epistles were penned by Paul)—“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”

It is unmistakable that in each of these verses the “especially” (*malista*), is set off from but contained within the whole.

Thus, when 1 Timothy 4:10 says, “[God] is the Savior of all men, especially (*malista*) of those who believe,” I contend that “those who believe” are set off from but are included within the “all men.” Clearly, then, God in some sense is the savior of all persons, and He is especially the savior of those who believe. Note the text does not say that He is potentially the savior of all humankind, but that he IS the savior of all humankind in some sense. It is understandable that those who fear the conclusions of universalism would seek some interpretation that does not emphasize the result. But is this necessary? Thomas Schreiner in his commentary on Romans 5:18 (*eis* stresses result) states that it is necessary to affirm the result.<sup>19</sup> I believe that if this dual

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<sup>18</sup>Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 851.

<sup>19</sup>Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 286. Footnote 13.

hypothesis of the intentionality of Christ's death is considered, then this verse fits quite well with my understanding of Romans 5:12-19.

I also believe there is more than a subtle hint in 1 John 2:2 that there is a dual intent in Christ's propitiation. In one sense He has "us" (i.e. believers) in mind. In another sense He has the whole world in view. "And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world" (NKJ). Supporters of unlimited atonement often present this verse as the strongest in the NT in support of their view. Proponents of limited atonement are quick to argue that this verse speaks of the sufficiency of Christ's atonement and not its intended result. However, is it not possible that Christ's death was intended for everyone with respect to the condemnation of Adam's transgression, but specifically for the elect with respect to their eternal salvation?

Other verses which use universal sounding terminology may be seen in a different light with the thesis in view that there may be two aspects to the design of Christ's atonement. However, my initial hunch is that a number of these texts may be better explained by giving attention to context than even the dual hypothesis.<sup>20</sup> While it might be a profitable study, time and space will necessitate looking at these verses on another occasion.

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<sup>20</sup>Mt. 18:14—"Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish" (NKJ); 2 Pet. 2:1; 3:, 9 "But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, *and* bring on themselves swift destruction." "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (NKJ).

1 Tim. 2:4-6—"God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth . . . who gave Himself a ransom for all" (NKJ); 2 Cor. 5:19—"that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (NKJ); 1 Cor. 15:22—"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (NKJ). This is a very interesting verse in a universal sense. The hypothetical provision explanation is unsatisfactory to me. Christ seems to be doing something for all humankind and it has some relationship to Adam. Key question: are both "all's" the same in this verse? If they are not the same, does that fit the rest of the chapter? Perhaps the dual hypothesis is a better fit over all because this verse has only one aspect of Christ's atonement in view here. Evangelicals have been very quick to retreat from this verse because of the fear of arriving at crass universalism.) Verses which seem to have only God's elect in view are: Jn. 3:16 (Interesting study on the word "world"); Jn. 6:37-40; Jn. 10:26-29; 10:10, 15-18; Jn. 11:51-52; Jn. 17:9, 20, 24; Rom. 8:28-39; Gal.1:4; Eph. 1:3-14; 2 Tim. 1:9,10; 1

### Implications for an Alternative Proposal

#### Pastoral

There is one very important pastoral implication to this model. If what I have said is true, it would provide positive biblical support for those who have just lost an infant or young child through death. I have yet to hear a Protestant clergyman say that the deceased infant is in hell rather than heaven because s/he did not accept Christ as personal savior. All desire the best for the dead child. But upon what basis is the hope placed? Most refer to David's hope of seeing his child after death. But on what basis did David have this hope? Could it be related to what I have proposed? Others have suggested that there is no condemnation until one reaches the age of responsibility (Erickson).<sup>21</sup> But how can that be in light of Romans 5:12-19? Similarly, others say that since the Bible does not specifically condemn children and because those who would be condemned need to be able "to read and hear" the message for the condemnation to be applied, how can they be lost? And it is manifestly apparent that children can do neither (Hodge).<sup>22</sup>

Both Erickson and Hodge postulate a desirable conclusion with little more than rational support. But if my thesis is correct, it could offer greater biblical and theological support for the salvation of infants, children, and those who never reach the "age of accountability."

#### Soteriological

There is also a significant soteriological implication to this model. If what I have proposed is true, it could explain how God might save many from "every tribe, tongue, people,

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Pet. 1:20; Isa. 53 (Note pronouns in all these verses. See footnote 17.) Verses which seem to have all humankind in view: Jn. 1:29, c/p 1:9; II Cor. 5:14-15; 18-20; 1 Tim. 2:1-6 (see above); Titus 2:11; c/p 2:13; Heb. 2:9,10; c/p 2 Cor. 5:14,15; 2 Pet. 2:1; 3:9 (see above); 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:14 (see above).

<sup>21</sup>Erickson, 654-655.

<sup>22</sup>Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 26. Hodge states that all who die in infancy are saved.

and nation,” (Rev. 5:9) where Christ has never been preached during any given generation. It might be that God takes His own in these cultures before they reach the age of responsibility. If that is so, then the number of the saved could be much larger than many Christians think. Could this be an explanation for “a wideness in God’s mercy”? If a conscious “adult” commitment to Jesus Christ is the only means for securing an eternal salvation, then the number of those who are finally saved will indeed be small. But if God has a family of His own and He is in the process of calling out His own elect people, whether by conscious “adult” commitment or by being taken before the age of accountability, then the redeemed of all ages will be greater in number than we ever thought possible. There will be much more over which to rejoice. Could this be included in “grace did much more abound”? Or in His ability “to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we ask or think”?