



Minutes With Messiah

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TEAM MEETING

It was 2 November, 2016. Game 7 of the World Series between the Cleveland Indians and the Chicago Cubs. The Cubs had taken an early lead, but blew it in the eighth inning. The game was tied after nine. These were the teams that had gone the longest without winning a World Series. It did not look good for the visiting Cubs. Their best relief pitcher had given up the tying runs, and now they were going into overtime. Then came one of the two most famous rain delays in Chicago Cubs history. (The other was “the night God cried;” the first game under the lights at Wrigley Field, which was rained out.) During the rain delay, Jason Heyward called a team meeting. The Cubs right fielder reminded everybody that, in spite of some miscues that game, they were there because they were the best team. Many credit his team meeting and speech for what happened next. The Cubs scored two in the tenth, and gave up only one, to win their first World Series in 108 years.

There have been other famous team meetings. Coach Rockne’s “win one for the Gipper” speech comes to mind. There was even a time that Jesus called a team meeting.

Jesus had just given a pre-game speech. He knew he would soon face death, and so prepared his disciples.

Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again. (Matt 20:18-19)

Hardly had the game gotten started, though, when the mother of two of his apostles (who happened to be his cousins) committed an error. She came up to Jesus and asked that her two sons be allowed to sit on his right and left hands in the kingdom. These would be the two most prominent positions of honor, and she may have figured that kinfolk should fill them. He told her and her sons that they didn’t know what they were asking. They were going to suffer just to enter the kingdom. Furthermore, it wasn’t his choice who would get those prime positions.

Of course, nothing happens on a team that doesn’t get out. The rest of the apostles heard about this request. Naturally, they were indignant. Possibly they were upset just that the request had been made. Certainly they were upset at the brothers for trying to get a jump on their own

requests for those honors. They were a team, but that didn’t necessarily mean they liked each other. The zealot and the tax collector probably looked down on each other. The four partners in a fishing venture argued like partners in any business. Petty jealousies were going to affect the game, so Jesus called a team meeting. “Jesus called them unto him, and said,”

Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matt 20:25-28)

As team meeting speeches go, it was definitely not one of the most moving or inspirational. It doesn’t have the ring of William Wallace’s (or at least Mel Gibson’s) “Freedom.” It doesn’t incite a crowd like Marc Antony’s (or Will Shakspeare’s) “Friends, Romans, Countrymen” oration.

On the other hand, the message was clear, even though the speech had a distinctly negative tone. Pull together, be a team. We can only win this game as a team.

Well, coach, we need your speech today. Not that today is different from any other age, but we have a lot of people wanting preeminence today. Even among those who claim to follow the biblical example of independent congregations tend toward a hierarchy. Even within individual congregations there are some who want the right or left hand. If we are to “win the world for Christ” (whatever that means) we must do it as a team.

“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.” (Rom 12:10)

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LIMITED ATONEMENT

There was at one time, in Carlsbad, New Mexico, a hydroelectric power plant next to a dam on the Pecos River. The plant provided power for the houses in and around the city. There were, however, some ranches that still used windmills to power their water pumps (and sometimes even the houses). These ranches were within the range of the power lines from the plant. Some people might say the plant provided power for the entire area, but only to those houses and businesses that got on the grid. Others might say that the power plant only provided power for those on the grid. Still others might say it was simply a matter of semantics; sometimes the words for and to meant the same thing. This is how a lot of people look at the third of Calvinism's five major points, Limited Atonement.

Limited Atonement

The term "Limited Atonement" may be misleading. Some people could take this to mean that the power of atonement is limited, that God can only forgive a certain amount of sin after which you are on your own. This is not the meaning. Others use the term "particular redemption," which is more accurate, but does not fit the

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TULIP acronym. Whatever term you use, the meaning of the doctrine is that Jesus did not die to bring forgiveness to everyone, but only to the elect.

It should also be pointed out that John Calvin did not take a clear position on this doctrine. Even within the Reformed Churches scholars disagree on whether Calvin was a particularist or a universalist. Certainly nothing in *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, his major work on which most doctrine is based, can be interpreted to clearly hold this doctrine. Dr. Roger Nicole, in an article at <http://www.apuritansmind.com/arminianism/john-calvins-view-of-limited-atonement/> analyzes many articles by Reformed writers seeming to take opposite views based on what Calvin did write. His conclusion was, "that definite atonement fits better than universal grace into the total pattern of Calvin's teaching."

Since there is no definitive quote from Calvin on this doctrine, a summary will have to suffice. The following points are taken from *The Five Points of*

Calvinism by Herman Hanko, Homer Hoeksema, and Gise J. Van Baren, Copyright 1976. Atonement makes satisfaction for sin; it pays a debt we cannot pay. It is substitutionary; Jesus died in our place. It is infinite; one man was able to make atonement for many. It is efficacious; it accomplishes what it intends to accomplish. And it is personal; Christ died for each and every member of the elect. For all of these to be true, then atonement can only be for those who are saved. If one is not of the elect, atonement is not efficacious, satisfactory, personal, or infinite. Therefore atonement is limited only to the elect.

There is atonement, and therefore removal of guilt and forgiveness of sins and righteousness and all the benefits of salvation and eternal life, for the elect only in the cross. For all the rest, for the reprobate, there is nothing positive, there is no benefit, in that cross. Christ did not die for them; He did not represent them and take their place. (Hanko, *Five Points*)

The followers of this doctrine use several scriptures to support it. Some of those, of course, are generally about the fact that Jesus made an atoning sacrifice on the cross. Others, however, are used to establish the particular atonement.

I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. ... But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. (Jn 10:14-15, 26-27)

Several verses from the prayer in John 17 are also used to support this doctrine, even though that prayer is not about atonement or redemption. Rather it is about unity among those who would follow Jesus.

"He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" (Rom 8:32) The "all" in this verse is clearly modified and restricted by "us," thus implying a particular deliverance.

The argument is that if Jesus died for all men, then all men must be saved. Universal atonement must imply universal salvation, which the scriptures clearly do not teach. Thus, any passage that uses the word "all" must necessarily not mean all men but all the elect among men.

In conjunction with this doctrine, the Reformed Church makes an assertion that Jesus did not die on the cross to bring forgiveness of sin. Rather he died to bring faith to the elect, which faith results in the forgiveness of sin.

For this was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father that the quickening

and saving efficacy of the most precious death of His Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation; that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby He confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language, all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father; that He should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, He purchased for them by His death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them, free from every spot and blemish, to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever. (*Canons of Dordrecht*, Second Head, Article 8)

The Biblical View

In presenting the biblical view of this doctrine, the first choice of most who oppose it is to quote all the passages that say that Jesus died for “all men” or other words to that effect. Calvinist theologians would simply accept all those passages and point out that since there is an unconditional election, the “all” in those passages must specifically mean “all the elect” and only the elect. The doctrine of limited atonement is made necessary by the doctrine of unconditional election. (See *Minutes With Messiah*, August 2018) If unconditional election is true, then universal atonement implies that some who are not among the elect may achieve atonement through some condition, most notably faith. Thus the doctrine is a necessary corollary to the rejection of free will.

If we cannot use the passages that say atonement or redemption is for all, then how does one present the biblical view in opposition to the doctrine? Logically, one would say that not every passage that refers to “all” must necessarily be limited, but that is unprovable. There is at least one passage, though that contradicts the idea that “all” or the “whole world” must be limited. “We trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.” (1 Tim 4:10) By saying “especially” or “mostly,” Paul does not limit God’s saving power.

First of all, it must be admitted that most (if not all) the descriptions of atonement listed above are true. It is personal, infinite, substitutionary, and efficacious. What some would argue with is the conclusion that these necessarily imply it is limited.

One example used for satisfaction and substitution is that of a bank. If someone comes in and pays off the mortgages of a thousand people, that payment is specific; the payment is not made for those others who hold mortgages at that bank. On the other hand, though, universal atonement says that a man has sufficient funds

to pay off every mortgage in that bank. He sends a letter to every mortgage holder, offering to pay off their debt. Such a payment would be satisfactory, substitutionary, infinite, personal, and efficacious. The bank, by previous arrangement, has agreed to take his money. While his offer meets all the conditions, however, he only chooses to pay off the mortgages of those who respond to his letter in the affirmative. Those who choose to believe it is a scam, or refuse the offer for any other reason, continue to owe the debt to the bank. Those who “by faith” accept the offer receive the forgiveness. This refutes the argument that universal atonement necessarily implies universal salvation.

John 10 does say that Jesus lays down his life for his sheep, and later states that they don’t believe because they are not his sheep (rather than that they are not his sheep because they don’t believe). What was not quoted, however, was verse 16: “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold.” He dies for these other sheep as well.

Romans 8:32 clearly says he was delivered for “us all,” those who are in Christ. What it does not say is that

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that deliverance is exclusive. The “us all” may be those who take advantage of the deliverance, but that does not exclude that he was delivered for those who reject him. (The deliverance here is of Jesus, not of the elect.)

Jesus did not die to bring forgiveness of sins, but to bring faith to the elect? The writer of Hebrews might disagree.

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation. (Heb 9:26-28)

In Acts 2:38, Peter commands repentance and immersion “unto the forgiveness of sins.” In Romans 6 Paul says immersion is a reenactment of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to begin a new life without sin. It certainly sounds as if both of these men believed Jesus died to bring forgiveness of sin, not merely faith that would lead to forgiveness.

Overall, this does seem to be a semantic issue. Atonement was made only for the elect. Atonement was made for everybody but is only effective for the elect. The effect is the same. The saved are saved; the lost are lost. Maybe that is why Calvin did not take a clear stand on the issue.

MYSTERIOUS DAVE

A story is told about “Mysterious Dave” Mather. He was a man-killer (what we now call a gunfighter) during the latter part of the 1800s. He served as a lawman in two of the major towns in the Old West: Dodge City, KS and Las Vegas, NM. But this story comes before that. He also claimed to be descended from Cotton Mather, the preacher in Boston at the time of the Salem Witch Trials, which may have had some bearing on his attitude during this incident. In 1878, Mysterious Dave was temporarily in Dodge City. He was probably called Mysterious because he was normally so quiet that a gargoye would sound chatty. On this occasion one of the saloons in town had given a circuit preacher permission to hold a meeting on their premises for one night. The service had been going on for a while when gunfire broke out. Deputy Sheriff Bill Tilghman rushed to the saloon to find the congregation cowering in fear and Mysterious Dave holding a smoking gun. After Tilghman convinced Dave to surrender his guns so nobody would get hurt, he led the gunfighter toward the jail. Mysterious Dave said one word on the way, “Hypocrites.” When asked what he meant he became positively loquacious. He explained that the preacher had told everyone if they confessed their sins they would go straight to heaven. Upon their response, Mysterious Dave had pulled his pistols and offered to kill anyone so that they wouldn’t risk sinning again. Nobody took him up on his offer, which made Mysterious Dave believe they were not sincere. Upon hearing this, Deputy Tilghman gave him back his guns and suggested he not remain in Dodge, which advice he took.

It seems Mysterious Dave would have called a lot of people hypocrites. We say we want to go to heaven, but

only as long as nobody is getting up a busload right now. How different this is from Paul’s attitude.

For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. ... Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (2 Cor 5:2-3, 6-8)

It may be with us, as it was with Paul, that the Lord has further work for us in this body. It is not up to us to determine the time or manner of our passing from this world into the world to come. That is God’s decision.

There is much discussion going on today about arms in the assembly. Should a preacher be armed? Should the church hire a security service to post armed guards within the building when the congregation is present? There are arguments pro and con, although few in favor of guns in the assembly support their position by clear scripture. The purpose of armed guards would be to save lives and (purportedly) to take the shooter alive so that he has further opportunity to be saved.

Whether we stay in this body or go, it would be hypocritical to say we are ready and then run from the opportunity to go home. We probably should not pray for a Mysterious Dave with an automatic rifle to enter our assemblies and offer to expedite matters. But if it does happen, the less hypocritical response may be to welcome the man in.

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