

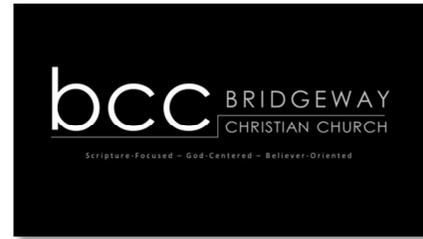
Pastor's Papers | Ronald H. Gann
Theology/Doctrine

Limited Atonement: The Crucifixion In Context

Understanding Limited Atonement (Part 4)

(Extracted From *The Scandal Of Sovereignty*; Ronald H. Gann [Aventine Press, 2012])

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John 3:16 is one of the most widely quoted verses from the New Testament, and is arguably the most famous prose recorded in all of antiquity. It has been called the “gospel in a nutshell” by various theologians and a “metropolis of gospel truth.”¹ It is considered to be a summary statement of some of the most central doctrines of traditional Christianity. No other single statement in the Bible so aptly sums up God’s redemptive purpose in Christ for fallen humanity.

At the beginning of John 3, Nicodemus, a prominent Pharisee and a ruling member of the Jewish Sanhedrin, came to Jesus under the cloak of night as a representative of Israel’s intelligentsia. He sought a private interview with the Lord, convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, but equally confused by its implications. Jesus responded to Nicodemus’s confession by affirming in John 3:16 that God is loving toward men and sacrificial in nature. The verse is as powerful in spirit as it is profound in structure. Christ declared:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The Lord’s response to Nicodemus, as recorded by John, speaks to the love that God has for His creation and the extent of that love—so great that He sacrificed His only Son on our behalf. It teaches that anyone who believes in Jesus Christ, God’s Son, will be saved. This verse gives all believers the glorious hope of eternal life in heaven through the love of God and the death of Christ.

So ubiquitous in Scripture is the message of John 3:16 that it has invaded the farthest recesses of American culture. Watch a nationally televised sporting event, for example, and notice the number of “John 3:16” placards hoisted by camera-ready fans. Consider star athletes like quarterback Tim Tebow, the first college sophomore to win the Heisman Trophy, who, among other reasons, became famous for inscribing the verse in his eye paint. In the U.S., the *In-N-Out* Burger chain prints John 3:16 on the inside of the bottom rim of their paper cups. The clothing chain *Forever 21* prints it on the bottom of their shopping bags, and *Tornado Air Systems* prints it on the packaging of their fuel-saver products. It’s not uncommon, of course, to see John 3:16 written as graffiti on highway overpasses and in back alleys. It seems that wherever we turn in America, we are reminded in one way or another that God loved the world to such a degree that He sent His only Son to die for us.

The truth behind this magnificent verse hardly seems contentious. But sometimes the passages we think we know the best are the ones we actually understand the least. And this is especially true in the case of John 3:16. In fact, there are a host of Bible passages, not unlike John 3:16, which are *interpolated* with tradition rather than *interpreted* from sound exposition. And no doctrine has been more victimized by John 3:16 and its *interpolation*, including the traditionalism, eisegesis, and assumptions imposed upon it, than Limited Atonement.

In like manner as the Bereans in Acts 17:11 who were commended by Luke for their deference to Scripture, we must remember that when it comes to the discipline of biblical interpretation “context is king.” This cheeky slogan simply means that the context drives the meaning of a phrase. Interpreting a Bible verse apart from its immediate context, as Dr. Ron Rhodes reminds us, is “like trying to analyze a Rembrandt painting by looking at only a single square inch of the painting, or like trying to analyze Handel’s *Messiah* by listening to only a few short notes.”²

Reinforcing Dr. Rhodes point is a popular parable that many ministers, myself included, often use to demonstrate the dangers inherent to poor hermeneutics. A man dissatisfied with his life, so the parable goes, decided to consult the Bible for guidance. He closed his eyes, flipped the Bible open, and pointed to a spot on the page. Opening his eyes, he read the verse under his finger. It said, “Then Judas went away and hanged himself” (Matt. 27:5b). Closing his eyes again, the man randomly selected another verse. This one read, “Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise’” (Luke 10:37b). Having interpreted both verses out of context, the man had no choice but to conclude that God was commanding him to commit suicide in like manner as Judas. Not surprisingly, the man’s tragic conclusion was the result of his tragic hermeneutics.

The background of a verse is absolutely crucial in determining the meaning of the foreground. Every word in the Bible is part of a verse, every verse is part of a passage, every passage is part of a chapter, every chapter is part of a book, and every book is part of the whole of Scripture. No verse in the Bible can be disassociated from the paragraph, chapter, and book in which it is found. We must endeavor, therefore, to ascertain the author’s intended meaning by (1) recognizing its place in the canon; (2) taking into account the historical considerations relevant to the passage; (3) establishing the literary genre of the paragraph (i.e. poetical, prophetic, historical, narrative, apocalyptic, etc.); (4) acknowledging the audience to whom it is addressed; and (5) apprehending the author’s purpose for writing.

Exegetical study of the New Testament, I hasten to add, must always be done under the watchful eye of the Old Testament, which serves as our chaperone on the road to discovery. While the New Testament interprets the Old Testament in Christian theology, the Old Testament nevertheless provides clarification and subtext to the New Testament that is not readily apparent to non-Jewish readers. In the end, the *Analogy of Faith*—the rule which stipulates that Scripture interprets Scripture—is our clarion call. It must be heeded and applied before any interpretive conclusions are made.

Sadly, today’s evangelicals aren’t known for being profound, sober-minded, or consistent with their hermeneutics; instead they’ve developed a reputation for being superficial, trivial, doctrinally erratic, and theologically naive. The case put forth against Calvinism, in my estimation, only proves this point. The so-called proof-texts brought to bear against Limited Atonement—John 3:16 being chief among them—are supposedly

numerous, formidable, and unavoidable. In most cases, Arminians tell us, they are incontrovertible. And I grant that if we arrive at our interpretations of these texts based merely on a superficial reading and allow our traditions and presuppositions to color our take-away, they might be right. But when each text is subjected to contextual analysis, rather than to a glossary of assumptions, only the opposite proves true.

The science of biblical exegesis, unfortunately, is a discipline that goes largely untapped by a vast majority of lay people. In their haste to prove Limited Atonement false, they blunder over the academics. As is so often the case, either critical analysis of their so-called proof-texts is ignored, or the immediate context is kicked to the wayside, or various word meanings are misappropriated and misapprehended, or the *Analogy of Faith* is dismissed. It is regrettable that many well-intentioned Christians remain convinced that they are purveyors of sound hermeneutics when in fact they violate almost every cardinal rule of the science.

It has been my experience that many evangelicals, particularly Arminians with whom I occasionally dialogue, stop short of going beyond the face value of Scripture. It seems they are spooked by biblical exposition; that is, if they scratch beyond the surface of a verse, they risk waking a sleeping monster (in the form of an alternative meaning) that contradicts their traditions. In many cases, they retreat from exegesis altogether, demonstrating a dispassion for Greek lexicons, a cavalier understanding of grammatical constructions, and an utter disregard for etymological roots. John Hendryx, the creator and editor of Monergism.com—arguably the most robust online resource on Reformational thought—diagnoses the problem this way:

The movement against Reformed Theology turns out to be a kind of an irrational moral suppression of one of the most robustly God-honoring theological traditions in existence today. Even when faced with insurmountable biblical evidence, many out there ... grind their teeth at the biblical revelation which points to God's sovereignty in the salvation of men. *There is a desperation about this anti-Calvinist movement which clings to one or two favorite verses without taking into consideration either context or what the rest of the Scriptures say* (emphasis added).³

So what exactly are these supposed proof-texts that many Christians allege are incontestable, plentiful, and disprove Limited Atonement outright? In brief, Arminians lay claim to four verses primarily. They cite John 3:16 unreservedly, almost mechanically really, and compound it with others like John 1:29, 1 John 2:2, and 1 Timothy 4:10—each of which speak to the fact that Jesus died for the “world” and shed his blood on behalf of “all men.”

1. **John 3:16:** “For God so loved the *world* that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”
2. **John 1:29:** “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, ‘Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the *world!*’”

3. **1 John 2:2:** “He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole *world*”
4. **1 Timothy 4:10:** “... we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of *all men*”

On the surface, these verses appear to make a cocksure case against Limited Atonement and pose a legitimate challenge to the Calvinist. But when examined thoroughly, and within their immediate contexts, we see an alternative meaning suddenly emerge. So we must ask: Do John 3:16, John 1:29, 1 John 2:2, and 1 Timothy 4:10 *really* teach that Jesus Christ spilled his blood for every single human being who has ever lived, and who is currently alive, and who will one day live?

Did Jesus Die For The Whole “World”?

We know that God is the author of all Scripture (1 Tim. 3:16) and that He is not a God of confusion (1 Cor. 14:33). We therefore can be certain that no two passages of Scripture are going to teach something contrary to one another. But if this is true, how then do we reconcile the dozens of verses in Scripture that speak to an atonement that is particular, definite, and limited in scope with those that seem to purport an unparticular, universal, and unlimited atonement? To ascertain the answer, we must defer to the science of exegetical study—the critical examination, evaluation, and interpretation of the texts in question.

Three statements recorded by the apostle John, at first glance, appear to buttress the credibility of Universal Atonement. In John 3:16 the apostle quotes the Lord himself: “God so loved the *world* that he gave his one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in him shall not perish” (John 3:16, emphasis added). Arminians argue famously from this verse that salvation is available to everyone (“whoever”), not merely the Elect, and that Christ’s death was on behalf of every single inhabitant of the earth (“the world”).

In John 1:29 the apostle also cites John the Baptist who, upon seeing Jesus pass by the Jordan riverbank, declared “Look, the Lamb of God, *who takes away the sin of the world!*” (emphasis added). Elsewhere, in his first epistle to the churches in Asia Minor, he asserts that the death of Christ “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, *and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world*” (1 John 2:2, emphasis added). As with John 3:16, Arminians argue from these two verses that Christ’s vicarious atonement reaches beyond the Elect (“not only for ours”) and clings to every person on the planet (“the whole world”).

Without digging beyond their shell, it seems that John 3:16, John 1:29, and 1 John 2:2 are *prima facie* evidence in favor of Universal Atonement; namely, that the cross-work of Jesus Christ is applicable to all men everywhere. Arminians have rallied around these verses historically, in particular John 3:16, as the substratum for their crossology. *The Five Articles of the Remonstrance*, for example, which challenged the merits of Calvinism at the Dort Synod in 1619, said as much. Article 2 states:

That agreeably thereto, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, *died for all men and for every man, so that he has obtained for them all*, by his death on the cross, redemption and the forgiveness of sins; yet that no one actually enjoys this forgiveness of sins except the believer *according to the word* [“world”] *of the Gospel of John 3:16 ...* (emphasis added)

In short, because John 3:16 uses the term *world* in reference to God’s love, as does John 1:29 and 1 John 2:2 in reference to Christ’s propitiation, we’re asked to accept as legitimate orthodoxy the tradition of Universal Atonement. Apparently no further study is necessary. But are the allegations against Limited Atonement, borne from a cursory reading of these proof-texts, an open-and-shut-case as Arminians would have us believe? Is Calvinism debunked on the grounds that our English Bibles more clearly convey that which the Greek text does not?

Hardly.

The common denominator linking John 3:16, John 1:29, and 1 John 2:2 to the atonement debate is the apostle’s curious use of the term *world*. All Christians, regardless of their theological pinstripes, recognize this literary feature in John’s corpus. But Arminians would have us suspend our hermeneutical rules at this juncture and accept a blanket definition for *world* (to mean all human beings everywhere and for all time and without exception) which can then be applied uniformly in Scripture wherever the word is found in relationship to the atonement. That is to say, when Jesus said “God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,” (John 3:16), Arminians maintain that John had in mind the entire human family. When the Baptist declared that Christ “takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), we are told that John had in mind every single person, both living and dead. And when John wrote that the crucifixion of Christ “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2), he, again, had in mind all people everywhere and for all time and without exception.

But this type of hermeneutic, much less this lone definition for *world*, is exceedingly flawed, for the meaning of the term in John’s writings is not as easily ascertained as many who are unfamiliar with Greek initially suppose. While certainly handy in advancing the Arminian agenda, to apply a universalistic definition to *world* and affixing it to every text germane to the atonement is to blunder scholastically.

Translated from the Greek word *kosmos*, from which we get the English word “cosmos” (meaning “universe”), standard Greek lexicons reveal a multifaceted meaning for the term *world*. In fact, we learn from James Strong (1822-1894) and his Greek work *par excellence* that there are at least *eight* different tenses in which the word *kosmos* or “world” is employed throughout Scripture. According to Strong, *kosmos* carries with it the following definitions, depending on the context involved:⁴

1. *Kosmos* is used generically to describe “an apt and harmonious arrangement or constitution, order, government.”

2. *Kosmos* describes “an ornament, decoration, adornment, i.e. the arrangement of the stars, ‘the heavenly hosts,’ as the ornament of the heavens” (e.g. 1 Pet. 3:3).
3. *Kosmos* describes “the world, [or] the universe” (e.g. Acts 17:24).
4. *Kosmos* describes “the circle of the earth, the [physical] earth” (e.g. John 13:1; Eph. 1:4 cf. Job 38:4).
5. *Kosmos* describes “the inhabitants of the earth, men, the human family” (cf. Rom. 3:19).
6. *Kosmos* describes “the ungodly multitude; the whole mass of men alienated from God, and therefore hostile to the cause of Christ” (e.g. John 15:18; Rom. 3:6 cf. John 5:24).
7. *Kosmos* describes “world affairs, the aggregate of things earthly;” namely the evil world system or culture (e.g. John 12:31 cf. Matt. 4:8; 1 John 5:19).
8. *Kosmos* describes “any aggregate or general collection of particulars of any sort [such as] the Gentiles as contrasted to the Jews” (e.g. Rom. 11:12) or believers as contrasted to unbelievers (e.g. John 1:29; 3:16-17; 6:33; 12:47; 1 Cor. 4:9; 2 Cor. 5:19).

So which of the eight tenses listed above are we to apply to *kosmos* or “world” in John 3:16, John 1:29, and 1 John 2:2? And does this definition apply across the board? As already noted, exponents of Universal Atonement assume the fifth definition for all three verses; that is, Jesus is said to have died for all “the inhabitants of the earth, men, the human family.” As will be seen shortly, proponents of Limited Atonement, on the other hand, ascribe to these texts the eighth definition: namely, that Jesus died for an “aggregate or general collection of particulars of any sort [such as] the Gentiles as contrasted to the Jews” or, in this case, believers as contrasted to non-believers. Both definitions are in keeping with the Greek word *kosmos* and are therefore orthodox, but only one can be correctly applied to the texts in question.

So which side is correct? Did Jesus die for all men or did he die for an aggregate of men? In deducing our answer, each of John’s letters and books come into play and prove indispensable in our analysis. This includes the Gospel of John, the Book of Revelation, and the epistles of 1, 2, and 3 John. We must search these five books carefully and evaluate the writer’s usual intent behind *kosmos* and how he applied the term.⁵

On this point, A.W. Pink (1886-1952), an English evangelist, Reformed pastor, and a biblical scholar of the highest order, has done Reformed Theology a monumental favor. After taking upon himself this academic task several decades ago, he found that John used *kosmos*, or “world,” eighty-six times in his corpus. He used the term in reference to the *earth* twenty-six times.⁶ Three times he used it to refer to *Jews* and

Gentiles specifically.⁷ Twelve times he used *kosmos* in reference to *believers* and *unbelievers* combined, or all of *humanity*.⁸ Three times he used it to refer to the *world system*, that is, the wicked ways of society.⁹ Thirty-one times he used it in reference to the *wicked*, excluding believers, which is his most common use of the term.¹⁰ And finally, John used *kosmos*, or “world,” eleven times with regards only to the Elect.¹¹

Noting the varied usage of the term *world*, the context of each passage is critical in our deliberation, lest the meaning become absurd. As an example of such absurdity, if we use the definition for *kosmos* that Arminians apply uniformly to John 3:16, John 1:29, and 1 John 2:2—meaning all “the inhabitants of the earth, men, the human family”—and blatantly ignore context and the *Analogy of Faith*, what, then, is to stop us from applying this same definition to *kosmos* in 1 John 2:15 and in James 4:4? Those texts should give us pause:

Do not love the world [*kosmos*] or anything in the world [*kosmos*]. If anyone loves the world [*kosmos*], the love of the Father is not in him (1 John 2:15).

You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world [*kosmos*] is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world [*kosmos*] becomes an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

Here, as in other texts (e.g. John 12:31; Matt. 4:8; 1 John 5:19), the *world* is depicted in a negative sense and, though not directly stated, as the object of God's *hatred*. This creates all sorts of hermeneutical problems for Universal Atonement. John tells us that “God so loved the *world*” that He made “an atoning sacrifice ... for *the whole world*.” At the same time, he tells us that, as Christians, we are *not* to love the world. Moreover, James adds that to love the world is to show “hatred toward God” and to ultimately take up arms against Him as His adversary.

The puzzle is obvious. God loves the *world*. Yet God seems to hate the *world*. So which one is it? Does God love every human being in the whole world or does He hate them as His enemies? How exactly does the *kosmos* that God seemingly hates in James 4:4 jive with the *kosmos* that God obviously loves in John 3:16? Are they one and the same by definition? Pink crystallized the argument this way:

But the objector comes back to John 3:16 and says, “*World means world*.” True, but we have shown that “the world” does not mean the whole human family. The fact is that “the world” is used in a general way.

When the brethren of Christ said “Show thyself to the world” (John 7:4), did they mean “Show thyself to all mankind”? When the Pharisees said “Behold, the world is gone after him” (John 12:19), did they mean that “all the human family” were flocking after him? When the apostle wrote, “Your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom. 1:8), did he mean that the faith of the saints at Rome was the subject of conversation by every man, woman, and child on earth? When Revelation 13:3 informs us

that “all the world wandered after the beast,” are we to understand that there will be no exceptions?

These, and other passages which might be quoted, show that the term “the world” often has a relative rather than an absolute force.¹²

If by “world” we can only mean every single human being who has ever lived and will live and without exception, as Arminians argue and which Universal Atonement demands, then we are forced to conclude from 1 John 2:15 and James 4:4 that God hates all “the inhabitants of the earth, men, the human family” as equally as He is said to love them in John 3:16, and to have died for them in John 1:29 and 1 John 2:2. And to arrive at such a contradiction is to make the Bible paradoxically absurd and theologically incongruent.

It’s no mystery, of course, that the Bible has different meanings in mind—other than every single person for all time and without exception—when it speaks of the *world* in 1 John 2:15 and James 4:4. These texts draw upon the seventh tense for *kosmos* in the Greek language, specifically “world affairs, the aggregate of things earthly” (e.g. John 12:31 cf. Matt. 4:8; 1 John 5:19). In other words, to fall in love with the ways of society and to befriend secular culture, says James and John, is to be at enmity with God and to be devoid internally of His Spirit.

The Arminian hermeneutic crumbles under careful scrutiny. It fails to recognize the intent of the apostolic writers who clearly went to embellished lengths to correct the false notion that salvation was for the Jews alone. They used such phrases as “the world,” “all men,” “all nations,” and “every creature,” to correct this mistake. These expressions are intended to show that Christ died for all men without *distinction* (i.e. he died for Jews and Gentiles alike) but they are not intended to indicate that Christ died for all men without *exception* (i.e. he did *not* die for the purpose of saving each and every lost sinner). We cannot naturally assume a universalistic meaning whenever or wherever the term *world* appears in Scripture, lest blatant contradictions abound. If we show no restraint with context, the God of order quickly morphs into the Author of confusion.

Context is king, as we have duly noted. Therefore, in getting to the bottom of whether or not John 3:16, as well as John 1:29 and 1 John 2:2, teach Universal or Limited Atonement, we must bow to critical examination. Because Calvinists and Arminians agree that the term *world* is used in the same way in all three verses, though we disagree over its meaning, we need only to look at John 3:16 as our case study. What we conclude from this verse can be rightly applied to John 1:29 and 1 John 2:2 as well; on this point both sides are in agreement. The context of John 3:16 reads as follows:

“No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but

whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

To prove the Calvinist argument from context and from the *Analogy of Faith*, it is necessary to stress verse 18 in John 3, which includes the words: "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already." From this clause alone we can draw the full meaning of the passage. The interpretive sequence is as follows:

<p>John 3:16-18</p> <p><i>"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life ... Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already"</i></p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God sent his Son to save the <i>kosmos</i> ("world") 2. God did not send his Son to judge the <i>kosmos</i> ("world") 3. Believers are saved 4. Believers are not judged 5. Unbelievers are not saved 6. Unbelievers are judged 7. Since unbelievers are not saved, but are judged, contrary to the <i>kosmos</i> ("world") which is saved and not judged in John 3:16, unbelievers are not part of the <i>kosmos</i> ("world") in this passage 8. Since believers are not judged, but are saved, just as the <i>kosmos</i> ("world") in John 3:16 is saved and not judged, the <i>kosmos</i> ("world") represents only believers in this passage

The exegesis of John 3:16-18 is clear-cut. God demonstrated His love by offering His Son as an eternal sacrifice so that an aggregate of the world—that is, a specific or particular people—would receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life through faith in Christ. This aggregate of people, we learn from Revelation 5:9-10, includes different *types* of humans, but not the human race as a whole. Since it is clear in this passage (v. 18) that those *not* included among this aggregate will endure God's judgment for their unbelief, it is utterly unwarranted to read into *kosmos* some universal view of the atonement.

In the past, God exercised his redemptive love only to and for Israel. When Christ came, however, God extended that love to include the Gentile nations. By using the word *kosmos* in this context, Jesus was saying in John 3:16 that God's love was made manifest in the Son and that same love now extended beyond the borders of the covenant people to non-covenant people worldwide. In other words, Christ came and sacrificially died as a love gift for believing Jews and believing Gentiles alike. He died for different *types* of people groups, but not all people.

John sheds additional light on this interpretation in Revelation 5:9-10. While caught up to heaven in a rapturous vision, he beheld with his own eyes this aggregate of the world for which Christ died:

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, *and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation*. You have

made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth” (emphasis added).

Drawing from John’s eyewitness testimony of the apocalypse, we learn that the death of Christ secured a redemption that is universally applied to all classes, types, and peoples of the earth. His atonement redeemed *from the world* men from every tribe, tongue, race, and nation. In this way we can rightly say that Christ’s atonement is both universal (it extends beyond the borders of Israel to include both Jew and Gentile alike) as well as limited (it is applicable only to Jews and Gentile who have been chosen to believe).

Because the Bible clearly and adamantly opposes universal salvation, the Calvinist understands John 3:16 to say in effect: “God so loved the world—that is, He loved an aggregate group of believing men, women, and children hailing from every tribe and nation, and not just ethnic Jews—that He sent His only begotten Son that whoever believes in him will not die spiritually, but will be saved out of the world and have everlasting life.”

Similarly, we understand the words of John the Baptist in John 1:29 to say: “Look! Jesus Christ! He is God’s sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of world—that is, he redeems from their sins an aggregate group of believing men, women, and children hailing from every tribe and nation.” Lastly, we understand the apostle John to be saying in 1 John 2:2: “Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for the Jews alone, but also for the sins of the whole world—that is, an aggregate group of believing men, women, and children hailing from every tribe and nation. He is the sacrificial Messiah for every *type* of people group; for elect Jews and non-Jews alike who believe.” This same interpretation applies also to Paul’s use of the term “all men” in 1 Timothy 4:10.

The doctrine of Limited Atonement is not only beautiful, it is wondrously true. The Scriptures teach that Christ’s death ransomed “his offspring” (Isa. 53:10) but not the progeny of the serpent (Gen. 3:15). He died for his “sons and daughters ... [his] children” (Heb. 2:10-14) but not for “illegitimate children and not true sons” (Heb.12:8). Through his sacrifice, he ransomed his “sheep” (John 10:11) but leaves in sin the ornery goats (Matt. 25:33); he delivered his “church” (Eph. 5:25) but condemns the “synagogue of Satan” (Rev. 3:9); he made satisfaction for “many” (Matt. 26:28) but grants that most should perish (Matt. 7:13 cf. Luke 13:24). Christ died for “his people” (Matt. 1:21) and only for “his friends” (John 15:13).

Lack of theological precision ought not to be tolerated, because ambiguity is always the friend of error. Nowhere is this more evident than in the traditional handling of important texts like John 3:16. Let us remember, therefore, that while life is promised universally to all who believe in Christ, faith is nevertheless not common to all. For Christ is made known and is exalted on high for the whole *kosmos* to see, but it is the Elect whose eyes have been opened by the monergistic work of God’s Spirit so that they may seek Him unfailingly by faith. Alas, it is for them and them alone that Jesus Christ died on the cross.

—Ronald H. Gann

¹ John Phillips, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*; (Kregal Publications, 1989); p. 71

² Ron Rhodes, *Rightly Interpreting the Bible: Methodology*; as cited at <http://home.earthlink.net/~ronrhodes/Interpretation.html>

³ John Hendryx, *Arminian Suicidal Tendencies (Part II): How Does Reformation Theology Interpret John 3:16? (Exposing the Straw Man)*, as cited at www.monergism.com

⁴ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *kosmos* (Strong's 2889)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2011

⁵ Each instance in the writings of John for the word "world" are as follows: John 1:9, 1:10, 1:29, 3:16, 3:17, 3:19, 4:42, 6:14, 6:33, 6:51, 7:4, 7:7, 8:12, 8:23, 8:26, 9:5, 9:32, 9:39, 10:36, 11:9, 11:27, 12:19, 12:25, 12:31, 12:46, 12:47, 13:1, 14:17, 14:19, 14:22, 14:27, 14:30, 14:31, 15:18, 15:19, 16:8, 16:11, 16:20, 16:21, 16:28, 16:33, 17:5, 17:6, 17:9, 17:11, 17:12, 17:13, 17:14, 17:15, 17:16, 17:18, 17:21, 17:23, 17:24, 17:25, 18:20, 18:36, 18:37, 21:25, 1 John 2:2, 2:15, 2:16, 2:17, 3:1, 3:13, 4:1, 4:3, 4:4, 4:5, 4:9, 4:14, 4:17, 5:4, 5:5, 5:19, 2 John 1:7, Rev. 3:10, 11:15, 12:9, 13:3, 13:8, 16:14, 17:8

⁶ The earth: John 13:1; 6:14; 9:5a; 9:32; 9:39; 10:36; 11:27; 16:21; 16:28; 17:5; 17:11a; 17:12; 17:23; 17:24; 18:36; 18:37; 21:25; 1 John 4:1; 4:9; 2 John 1:7; Rev. 11:15; 13:8; 17:8

⁷ Jews and Gentiles: John 4:39; 18:20; Rev. 16:14

⁸ Believers, unbelievers and humanity: John 1:9-10; 3:17; 3:19; 7:4; 8:26; 9:5b; 12:19; 12:25; 14:30; 14:19; 16:11; Rev. 3:10

⁹ World system: John 12:31; 1 John 5:19; 4:3-4

¹⁰ The wicked: John 5:24; 7:7; 8:23; 12:31; 13:1; 14:17; 14:22; 14:31; 15:18-19; 16:8; 16:20; 17:6; 17:9; 17:11b; 17:15-16; 17:17; 17:21; 17:23; 17:25; 1 John 2:15-17; 3:1; 3:13; 4:5; 4:17; 5:4-5; Rev. 12:9; 13:3

¹¹ The Elect: John 1:29; 3:16; 3:17c; 6:33; 12:46-47; 6:51; 8:12; 11:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:14

¹² A. W. Pink, *Objections to God's Sovereignty Answered by Arthur W. Pink*, internet sermon