

A Price for a People

Tom Wells

A Book Review by

Dr. Stanford E. Murrell

In 1992, Banner of Truth Trust (PO Box 621 Carlisle, PA 17013) published an excellent book by Tom Wells, a Christian minister and author in Cincinnati, Ohio. In *A Price for a People* Tom Wells presents a clear and precise explanation of the scriptural teaching of the meaning of the redemptive work of Christ at Calvary. Though the book is only 158 pages in length, over 45 Old Testament passages, and more than 178 New Testament passages, are examined. *A Price for a People* may be divided into three general parts.

Doctrinal. In the doctrinal part of the book (chapters 1-15) many familiar arguments, and some not so familiar, are set forth with concision and insight to explain just why Christ had to die for His own. To prove his points, Mr. Wells uses a multitude of rhetorical questions as he anticipates the most commonly asked questions concerning the death of Christ and the great doctrines of reconciliation, propitiation, and substitution. A partial list of the rhetorical questions anticipates the succinct answers supplied in the narrative: *For whom did Christ die? What kind of act was the death of Christ? What kinds of things keep a person from coming to Christ? How can the wrath of God be removed? What is meant by redemption? What can be known about redemption in the Old Testament? What qualifications were necessary for a redeemer? Why is it important to know doctrine? From what has Christ redeemed men? What does the death of Christ have to do with slavery to sin? Does the Bible teach that there is enmity, hostility, and estrangement between God and man? Can God be propitiated, appeased? When were men redeemed? When were men reconciled to God? When did God turn His wrath away? Who died with Christ? Are men foreknown by God? Didn't Christ die for the world? When did God's elect die to sin? Etc.* In the doctrinal section, the "hard" texts are examined for they are appealed to by those who oppose the concept of a definite atonement.

Practical. After setting forth numerous arguments to prove that Christ died for His own family, His own sheep, and His own people as a Kinsman-Redeemer, Substitute thereby freeing men from sin, Satan, and the wrath of God which was appeased, the practical application of the doctrine of a definite redemption is dealt with in chapters 16-18. In this section, some very surprising information is revealed about the love of God and some rather startling suggestions are made concerning the proper presentation of the gospel. The conclusions Mr. Wells draws, while open for immediate misunderstanding, are hard to refute as being wise.

Supplemental. In the third and final section of *A Price for a People*, seven appendices provide supplemental material in support of the major arguments presented in the doctrinal part. Though placed as an appendix, this section should not be overlooked. It contains excellent information reflected in the title of each appendices: *The Use of Universal Terms; The Time of Redemption; The Greek Word for Purchase; Who are the 'Many' for Whom Christ Died? 'Man' and 'All Men' in Romans 5:12-20; Some Thoughts on Terminology; Repentance and Faith.*

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Selected Thoughts Extracted from this Work

Stanford E. Murrell

A Clear and Present Danger

One of the great dangers that face those within the Christian community is an assumption that the doctrines of grace are clearly understood by all. Rather than assume something that may or may not be true, attention should be turned to discovering what the Bible teaches about the death of Christ. A serious inquiry might begin with an important question concerning the death of deaths in the death of Christ. The question is this:

What kind of act was the death of Christ?

The simple answer, in part, is that Christ died in order to bring men to God. Men must be brought to God because they have been gripped by powers that keep them away from God. Three powers have united to control the soul of the natural man:

- Sin
- Satan
- God's judicial system

Because of the pollution of sin, because of the power of Satan to keep souls in bondage, because of the wrath of God against those who sin in the kingdom of Satan, man is in desperate need of redemption. The basic idea of the word *redemption* is not hard to grasp. It means “*deliverance*”. Something is redeemed when it is *set free*. The word *release* or *ransom* would also convey this thought.

Redemption in the Old Testament Illustrated

There are some specific Old Testament illustrations of the act of redemption taking place. For example, an Israelite could sell himself as a slave to a foreigner who lived in Israel in order to pay off a debt. However, it was not the Lord's desire that he remain a slave forever. In fact, at any time a blood relative could redeem him by paying a purchase price. Once the price was paid the foreign master *had* to give up the slave—even if he did not want to. The purchasing price for freedom was to be based upon the number of years left until the Year of Jubilee. The Year of Jubilee was a special period celebrated every 50th year. All male Hebrew slaves were set free from their foreign masters in the land. (Lev. 25:8-55) To use a simple analogy, if the work of a slave was worth \$300 per year and there were 5 years left before the year of Jubilee, then the purchase price to be paid was \$1500. Once the price was paid, the slave was redeemed and because he was redeemed he was free to go and live a life of his choice.

Another example of a price being paid for a people is found in Numbers 3:11-13. The background for this passage is the Exodus. Prior to the day of divine deliverance, God killed the firstborn of the Egyptian household in the 10th plague. At the same time that God killed the

firstborn of Egypt, He claimed all of Israel's firstborn for Himself. When the Lord claimed something for Himself that was alive, it was usually sacrificed to Him. It was put to death. But God did not want to destroy the firstborn of Israel. Therefore He planned for the redemption of the children. Singling out the Levites from the twelve tribes of Israel, God decreed that they would take the place of the firstborn offspring of every Israelite woman.

So far, so good. One Levite would be set apart for religious service in place of one firstborn to an Israelite woman from the other tribes of the land. The Levite was the 'money' or 'medium of exchange' by which another child of Israel was redeemed. While the Levite served the Lord in sacrificial service, the firstborn of another was free to do his own work and live his own life. (Cp. Num. 3:46-38) Why? Because a "price" had been paid for them in the form of another person.

But a problem arose. The medium of exchange, the Levite, a type of 'money' was in short supply. During the wilderness journeys there were 273 more first-born Israelites than there were Levites born. The practical question was what to do with the excessive firstborn Israelites. They could no longer be "redeemed" by a Levite for there was a shortage of Levites. What could be done? In grace and mercy a solution was settled upon. The tribal families of the extra firstborn were to collect 5 shekels for each child. 273 families were to take up 5 shekels apiece for each child. This large sum of money (1,365 shekels) was to be given to Aaron and his sons for the work of the ministry. (Num. 3:46-48) In this way, a price was paid and the firstborn were free once more to live and work.

A Theological Truth

The theological truth that under-girded these Old Testament practices is that a price had to be paid for a people. A redemption price had to be paid in order for there to be life and freedom. The price of redemption could be another person (a Levite for a first born) or 5 shekels of silver.

Redemption Involving Sin

In these two illustrations of a price being paid to free a slave or to free a first born, there was no sin involved in the process. But what would happen if sin were involved in a situation? Was there a redemption price that could be paid? The careful answer is, "Yes" and "No." There were certain situations in which a ransom could *not* be paid for a transgression. Pre-meditated murder was one such instance. Numbers 35:31 *Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death.* On this point the Law was clear. There was no price of redemption that could be paid for a murderer. However, there were other situations where a price could pay for a person even though sin or transgression was involved. A biblical example is set forth in Exodus 21:28 *If an ox gore a man or a woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit. 29 But if the ox were wont to push with his horn in time past, and it hath been testified to his owner, and he hath not kept him in, but that he hath killed a man or a woman; the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death. 30 If there be laid on him a sum of money, then he shall give for the ransom of his life whatsoever is laid upon him.*

According to the Law of Moses, any man who let his bull run loose after he had been warned that it was a dangerous animal was guilty of negligent homicide. He was a murderer of sorts and was subject to punishment by death. However, such a person could be set free from the penalty of the Law by paying a ransom or a fine to the relatives of the dead man or woman his bull had killed.

From this illustration it can be said—and seen—that there was a sense in which a murderer would be set free under the Law. The owner of the animal was not innocent for he had been warned, but the warning was neglected. Now a ransom had to be paid or the man would die. The great principle is once more established: sin and redemption can meet in the Law of God and justice be satisfied. The solution to the sin problem was freedom by the payment of a price.

Redemption: A Family Matter

There is another facet of redemption: it was often a family matter. Under the Old Testament economy, most of the time the “redeemer” was a family member. The family member often felt an obligation to do something in a given situation to deliver his kinsman from bondage. The book of *Ruth* teaches this truth in a touching narrative.

The historical narrative lies in the period of the Judges (Judges 1:1), in the 12th century BC, at the close of a great famine in the land of Israel. (Cp. Judges 6:3-6) Elimelech, a native of Bethlehem, had, with his wife Naomi and two sons, taken refuge in Moab (a nearby country) from a famine. There, after an interval of time, Elimelech died (Ruth 1:3), and his two sons, having married women of Moab, also died, within a ten year period. Their wives, Orpah and Ruth, were left widows (Ruth 1:5). When Naomi decided to return to Palestine, her two daughters-in-law accompanied her on her way (Ruth 1:7). Orpah, however, turned back and only Ruth remained with Naomi, journeying with her to Bethlehem, where they arrived “*in the beginning of barley harvest*” (Ruth 1:22).

At Bethlehem Ruth found work gleaning in the fields during the harvest season. Because of her willingness to work, and because of her great personal integrity Ruth was soon noticed by Boaz, the owner of the field, who happened to a near kinsman of her father-in-law, Elimelech.

Boaz gave the lovely lady from Moab permission to glean as long as the harvest continued. Boaz also told Ruth that he had heard of her faithfulness and devotion toward her mother-in-law. Going on his way, Boaz directed the reapers to make intentional provision for Ruth by dropping in her way grain from their bundles (Ruth 2:15 f). In this manner Ruth was able to return to Naomi in the evening with a whole ephah of barley (Ruth 2:17). In answer to many questions by Naomi, Ruth explained that her success in gleaning was due to the good will of Boaz, and the orders that he had given.

The next day Ruth returned to the fields where she remained to glean with other young women throughout the barley and wheat harvest, making her home with her mother-in-law (Ruth 2:23). Throughout this period of time, Naomi was anxious for the remarriage of Ruth for several reasons not the least of, which was the fact that the barley harvest was coming to an end. It would be good if Ruth had a husband to provide for her. Then there was the matter of the land. In the providence of the Lord, Naomi still owned a piece of land, which she could sell in order to raise money to live. And that is what Naomi decided to do. But whom should the land be sold to? Naomi was free to sell the land to any man in Israel. However, it made sense to offer it to a relative, and Boaz was relative.

One day, Naomi sent Ruth to Boaz to remind him of his legal duty as near kinsman of her late husband Elimelech (Ruth 3:1 f). According to the Law of Moses, he should purchase the plot of land, which Naomi owned if he could. Boaz acknowledged his legal duty and promised to buy the land. He also offered to take Ruth in marriage. But first, a closer kinsman had to be given the same opportunity to fulfill the legal duties for he was of nearer relationship than Boaz. (Ruth 3:8-13) Though the situation suddenly became stressful because Ruth preferred Boaz to all others, Naomi was confident that Boaz would fulfill his promise, and advised Ruth to wait in patience. Boaz wasted no time. He adopted the customary and legal measures to obtain a decision. He summoned the near kinsman before ten elders at the gate of the city, related to him the circumstances of Naomi's return—with her desire that Ruth should be married and settled with her father-in-law's land as her marriage-portion, and called upon him to declare his intentions.

The nearer kinsman, whose name and degree of relationship are not stated, declared his inability to undertake the new dependency of a wife and more land. In legal language he resigned his rights to Boaz according to ancient custom in Israel (Ruth 4:6 ff). Boaz accepted the responsibilities transferred to him. The elders and bystanders bore witness of the great transaction and pronounced a formal blessing upon the union of Boaz and Ruth who soon married. 4(Ruth 4:9-12; *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*)

The Romance of Redemption

The romance of Ruth and Boaz is the romance of Redemption. In this beautiful narrative the story of salvation is recapitulated. Every Christian can identify with the details of the narrative for we have a Kinsman-Redeemer who met the three things that were true of every kinsman-redeemer:

- He had to be a family member (cp. 1 John 4:2,3)
- He had to have the ability to redeem. Since redemption was from debt or slavery or death, that meant that he could not be in debt or a slave (or be dead!) himself, and he had to have a surplus from which he could help another. (Matt. 1:23)
- He had to have a willing heart (Rev. 1:5; John 10:11)

Redemption Define: “Freedom by Paying a Price”

Though a 1000 years had passed between the time of the Judges and Ruth and the days of Christ, the concept of redemption was still familiar to men in part because slavery was still practiced. Under Greek law, which influenced the Roman Empire, a slave could gain his freedom if he could gather the price the master asked for him. There could be freedom by paying a price. Without any religious overtones, freedom from slavery could be gained by paying a ransom.

In addition to this, the Greek world did recognize a freedom for slaves as a religious act. When a slave had gathered enough money together to buy his free, he and the master would go to the temple of a god and the slave would give the money to the temple officials. They in turn would use it—to “buy” him from his master for the temple god. It was assumed by all that the god would not demand any service and the slave would be set free. In Christ the concepts of “redemption” and “price” are brought together.

- ◆ **Mark 10:45** *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a **ransom** for many.*
- ◆ **Romans 3:24** *Being justified freely by his grace through the **redemption** that is in Christ Jesus: 25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*
- ◆ **Ephesians 1:7** *In whom we have **redemption** through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;*
- ◆ **1 Peter 1:18** *Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not **redeemed** with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:*
- ◆ **1 Corinthians 6:19** *What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are **bought with a price**: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*
- ◆ **Galatians 3:13** *Christ hath **redeemed** us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:*
- ◆ **Revelation 5:9** *And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast **redeemed** us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;*

Redemption from the Dominion of Sin

Having defined what redemption is, **freedom by paying a price**, attention can be turned to what the Christian has been saved from. According to scripture all men are naturally held in bondage by

- sin, Rom. 6:20
- Satan, Matt. 6:24; John 8:42-47
- and the judicial system of God which judges sin and Satan. John 3:36; Rom. 1:8; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6

Though men may not admit their bondage, it makes no difference. They are under the wrath and condemnation of God. How then do men come to God? By the purchase of Christ. (Rev. 5:9) Jesus Christ “*purchased men for God.*” No wonder Paul wrote, “*You are not your own; you were bought with a price.*” (1 Cor. 6:19,20 cp. 7:22,23) The death of Christ redeems His people by freeing them from the penalty of their sins. *In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sin.*” {Eph. 1:7) That redemption is freedom by the payment of a price. This freedom is a release from the necessity to pay for our own sins. The price is the ‘*blood,*’ the sacrificial death of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. **Redemption saves men from the dominion of sin.**

Redemption and Reconciliation

Because the soul is set free by the paying of a price from

- the wrath of God and
- the power and pollution of sin,
- the enmity between God and man is removed and replaced with fellowship.

Christians are not simply blood bought slaves to God. We are friends of God and God is our friend. In fact, we are now members of the royal family of God. The certainty of reconciliation is established in Scripture by statements that though we were once alienated from God through sin, hostile to Him, not being subject to the law of God, and worthy of condemnation, we are now in a different state.

- ◆ **Col.1:21** *And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled*
- ◆ **Rom. 8:7** *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*
- ◆ **Rom. 5:10** *For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.*
- ◆ **2 Cor. 5:19** *To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.*

***Redemption brings reconciliation
and reconciliation brings fellowship.***

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1Corinthians 2:9,10

Redemption and Propitiation

In addition to freedom from sin and fellowship with God, redemption propitiates God.

- ◆ **Rom 3:25** *Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God;*
- ◆ **1 John 2:2** *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*
- ◆ **1 John 4:10** *Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

The word *'propitiation'* is an obscure biblical word that refers to the act whereby the wrath or hostility of another is turned aside or satisfied in some manner. 'Appeasement' is a synonym. When someone is angry with us and we appease them or propitiate them then the anger is turned away. That God is angry with man is the testimony of Scripture.

- ◆ **John 3:36** *He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.*
- ◆ **Rom 1:18** *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;*
- ◆ **Rev 6:17** *For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?*
- ◆ **Rev 11:18** *And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.*
- ◆ **Rev 14:10** *The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb:*
- ◆ **Rev 16:19** *And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.*
- ◆ **Rev 19:15** *And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*
- ◆ **Rev 20:15** *And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*

Despite the wrath of God against man, the work of Christ has propitiated Him. The love of God for men and His anger against them finds reconciliation and satisfaction at Cavalry. No wonder Paul gloried in the Cross. (Gal. 6:14)

Redemption Accomplished and Applied

The meaning of the word redemption (freedom by the payment of a price), the worthiness of the Redeemer (who was a family member with the ability and willingness to pay the debt of honor), the powers that redemption delivered from (sin, Satan, and the judicial system of God), and the two great results of redemption (reconciliation and propitiation), allows for the next important question to be addressed, *For whom did Christ die?* The question is neither an idle question nor one for academic consideration alone. It is very practical for the death of Christ means either:

- All men will be saved by the great work of redemption at Calvary, or
- Christ redeemed and reconciled and turned the wrath of God away from men who will nevertheless be lost forever. In other words, His redemption will not redeem them, His reconciliation will not reconcile them to God, and His propitiation will not turn God's wrath away from them.

Most Christians recognize that the Bible teaches that not all men will be saved. Judas went to *his own place*. (Acts 1:25) Multitudes perish. (Luke 16:23) However, many Christians believe that people still go to hell though Christ died for them. Despite the fact that the work of Christ at Calvary was designed to pay the price of redemption, reconcile men to God, and turn away the wrath of God, people still go to hell—according to some people.

A logical protest against such reasoning is not improper. Either Christ reconciled men to God or He did not. Either Christ paid the price for sin or He did not. Either Christ propitiated the wrath of God or He did not. It cannot be argued both ways. Either Christ definitely accomplished something at Calvary or He did not. Either Christ's death 'established opportunities' for men to be saved or His death established certainties, even the securing of salvation for souls. And if Christ did secure the salvation of souls then that number had to be definite and limited. The redemption, which was accomplished, must be applied to those for whom Christ died. It is as simple and straightforward as that.

The answer to the question, *For whom did Christ die?* is clear then. He died for His own people, all those—and only those, whom He would bring into God's family forever. No wonder God's children adore Him! (Tom Wells)

Didn't Christ Die for the whole World?

It is a great shock to many Christians to consider that Christ did *not* die for the whole world in an indiscriminate sense—as they have been taught for so long. It sounds almost unbelievable. It has the idea of being unkind, unfair, and unloving. The heart of some would much rather hear about a God who at least *tried* to save all men by dying for them then to hear that the death of redemption was designed to accomplish something *definite* in order to be applied to those for whom salvation was designed. The heart of multitudes are comfortable to think that Christ came to make men *savable*, even though Jesus said that He came to seek and to *save* those that are lost. (Luke 19:10) Countless Christians have no problem with souls being in hell for which Christ died, paid the price of redemption, and appeased the wrath of God. But for others, such a view of God and Christ and the work of redemption is unworthy.

Others believe that the God of salvation is sovereign. He does not *try* to save; He is *mighty* to save. (Isa. 63:1) Christ did not come to make all men *savable*; He redeemed His own. The work of redemption was not haphazard in order to provide a *potential* salvation. The Shepherd came to lay down His life for His sheep in a *definite* manner. (John 10:11)

If Christ came to *save His people from their sins* (Matt. 1:20) in a definite way, where did the idea arise of a universal atonement? Are there not scriptures that speak of Christ dying for all men in a comprehensive way? The answer is this: there are universal passages in the Bible that can be interpreted to teach that Christ died for all men without exception, but such an interpretation is invalid in light of other considerations.

Selected Scriptures appealed to for a Universal Atonement

- ◆ **John 3:16** *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*
- ◆ **1 John 2:2** *And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.*
- ◆ **2 Cor 5:14** *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:*
- ◆ **Matt 18:14** *Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish.*
- ◆ **1 Tim 2:4** *Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.*
- ◆ **2 Peter 3:9** *The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.*

As the discussion of these passages unfolds, two thoughts must be kept in mind.

- First, not all men will be saved. There is a heaven and there is a hell. And in hell there will be those who have rejected Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. However, if Christ died for all sins of all men in a universal way, if Christ is a propitiation for *the sins of the whole world* without distinction, then on what basis are people ever punished? If the answer is rejection of Christ and unbelief then the obvious response would be, “*Is not unbelief a sin? And if it is a sin, was it not included in the sins for which Christ died, according to the teachings of universal atonement? And if Christ died for that sin too how can individuals be punished for it?*”
- The second point that must be kept in mind is that *the Scriptures normally reduces the value of universal terms, terms like ‘all,’ ‘every,’ and ‘world.’* Again, this point is surprising for many because they have heard endlessly that *‘all means all. It’s as simple as that’*. Well, it is not *‘as simple as that’* for the scriptural evidence does not validate reductionism. Consider the biblical evidence from just a few passages.
- ◆ **Acts 2:17** *And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:* Here, the scriptures teach that the Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh. Question. Does this include the flesh of animals and birds? No—not their flesh. It’s talking about human being, isn’t it? The NIV says ‘on all people’. So ‘all flesh’ in this case excludes the whole animal kingdom. But we’re not done. Does ‘all flesh’ (or, ‘all people,’ if you prefer) mean ‘each and every man who ever lived’? Clearly not. Many of them were

already dead when the Lord gave this promise. Does it mean ‘all who were alive when the promise was given?’ No, it doesn’t mean that either. What does it mean, then? It means ‘some men and women,’ or, as we say in English, ‘all kinds of people,’ meaning some from many different groups. (Tom Wells) So we see that ‘all’ does not always mean ‘all.’ And the point is established: Scripture *normally* reduces the value of universal terms.

- ◆ **1 Tim 6:10** *For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* Question. Is it true that every evil in the world is rooted in the love of money? Satan’s first sin is at the root of all the sins that have come after it. Was the love of money the root of Satan’s fall? Surely not! Among humans the sin of Adam and Eve lies at the root of all other sins. Did they fall through the love of money? No. Money, if it had existed at that time, would have been meaningless to them, since there would have been no one to buy from, and nothing to buy! Everything was theirs, except a single tree in the middle of the garden. (Tom Wells) What then does 1 Tim 6:10 mean? It means that ‘Quite a few evils can be traced to the love of money.’ (Tom Wells) What 1 Tim 6:10 does not teach is that ‘all means all.’
- ◆ **John 3:26** *And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.* In context, the disciples of John are informing him that Jesus was baptizing people and everyone was going to him. Later, John the Baptist says of Jesus, *And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony.* (John 3:32) But then he immediately added, *He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true.* (John 3:33) In the space of just a few words ‘everyone’ responded to the ministry of Christ, ‘no one’ received Him, and some accepted it and certified that God is truthful.

In a natural reading of the narrative, people do not normally stop and argue that a contradiction exists. Why not? *Because we normally reduce universal words without even noticing what we are doing.* (Tom Wells) In reading the context it is obvious that many (but not all literally) were leaving John to be with Jesus. It is also obvious that many (but not all literally) rejected the message of the Message. And it is obvious that those who did receive Christ as the Lamb of God would believe that God is truthful.

The term ‘world’ in scripture is used in much the same way as the word ‘all.’ Example.

- ◆ **John 6:33** *For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.* Observation. If Christ gave life to each and every man, none would be lost. It is clear here, however, that the phrase, ‘the world’ stands for those who would believe on Him. Christ gives life to His people, and to no other. Yet here they are called ‘the world,’ perhaps because they come from ‘every tribe and language and people and nation.’ (Rev. 5;9) (Tom Wells)

- ◆ **Rom 11:11,12,15** *I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy. 12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fullness? ...15 For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?* Twice in these verses the word ‘world’ appears. First, Paul speaks of ‘riches of the world.’ What does he mean? In verse 11 Israel’s transgression brings salvation to Gentiles. This salvation of Gentiles is what he calls ‘riches for the world’ and ‘riches for the Gentiles’ in verse 12. It’s clear, then, that Paul uses the word ‘world’ as a synonym for ‘saved Gentiles.’ (Tom Wells) The conclusion is that ‘the world’ is a group smaller than each and every man who ever lived.

A Journey into John’s Writings

With the scriptural evidence in mind that it is permissible to understand the term world in a less comprehensive way, *What does 1 John 2:2 and John 3:16 teach?* The answer is this. Jesus Christ ‘is the atoning sacrifice [propitiation] for our sins [the sins of the elect, for the sins of those who will believe in this immediate location] and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world’ [or the sins for all who will ever believe]. In the words of the author of Hebrews, if anyone rejects Christ there is ‘no sacrifice for sins left, but only a fearful expectations of judgment’ (Heb 10:26,27) The ancient religions claimed to have sacrifices of their own that would appease the gods. But their claims were worthless. Christ has come to save all that will believe both Jew and Gentile, without distinction. No all will be saved. God does love the world in the sense that His affection is directed towards mankind. God loves Gentiles as well as Jews. He loves blacks as well as whites. He loves the poor as well as the rich. It is not without exception but without distinction that God loved the world and sent His only begotten Son.

The Love of God and the Family of God

When the extent of the atonement is seen to be definite for the elect, the question of God’s love arises: *Does not God love all men?* The assumption is that God does love all men and in a sense He does. God has a love for all men from eternity past for He maketh the sun to rise and shine on the just and the unjust like. God has many gifts of grace and divine mercy while he freely bestows. There are general benevolent gifts. Matthew 5:43-45 *Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; 45 That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*

Though there is a general love of benevolence for His creation, God has a special love for the family of God, just as we have a special love for our mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, wives and children. God has a family, which He loves. The concept of the family of God is set forth in various passages.

- ◆ Hebrews 2:11-13 *For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12 Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. 13 And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.*
- ◆ Hebrews 2:14, 16, 17 *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil... 16 For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. 17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.*
- ◆ Hebrews 13:12 *Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.*

The Lord Jesus became a man so that He might die for His family, the people of God. His death was the price of their liberty. He was willing to pay the price because He is the kinsman-redeemer of His people. (Tom Wells)

Christ died for the Church

To press the point that the death of Christ was limited in design to the elect and to the family of God, the Holy Spirit reminds Christians that Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her. (Eph. 5:23) Now the Church, like the family of, is not small. In fact, it is very large for it gathers in souls of every tribe and nation and tongue. (Rev. 5:9; Acts 20:28) However, neither the family of God nor the Church is all inclusive in that every man, woman, and child is a family member or a member of the body of Christ. Only the Church shall rise up to praise the Lamb that was slain.

- ◆ Revelation 5:6 *And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth. 9 And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; 10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.*

And what shall happen to those who are not in the family of God? They shall continue to serve their father the devil John. (John 8:4) And what shall happen to those who do not become members of the child? They shall remain outside the fellow of the saints by chance as well as by Divine design. It is an important point to always remember that men do not want to be saved (Rom. 3:11) until God makes them willing. God is under no obligation to make any one willing to come to faith. But if and when He does, it is according to mercy.

Here then is a simple test for individuals. Ask yourself these questions. *Am I a family member by way of the new birth?* If the answer is *no*, then ask, *Do I honestly want to be a family member?* *Am I a child of the King?* If the answer is again, *no*, the follow up question would be, *Do I want to be?*

The Death of Christ for the “Many”

For those who believe in a universal atonement whereby the death of Christ atoned for every sin of every man, thereby reconciling all men to God, the following passages should be considered.

- ◆ **Matt 1:21** *And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*
- ◆ **Hebrews 9:28** *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.* Note that sin is done away with for the many that look for Christ.
- ◆ **Mark 10:45** *For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*
- ◆ **Isaiah 53:11,12** *He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.* Note that the many are the same that shall be justified.

Each of these passages teaches the same thing. Christ is the ransom for His people. No others are included.

Who Died with Christ?

There is another way of answering the question, *For whom did Christ die?* And that is by asking ‘*Who died with Christ?*’ Physically, two thieves died with Jesus but spiritually many died with Him as per 2 Corinthians 5:14,15. *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: 15 And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.*

Paul’s point is this: when Christ died, His people died to sin. Once more we see what we have seen again and again: Paul speaks of the result of Christ’s death as having taken place right there at the cross, when He was crucified. Where were we redeemed? At the Cross! Where were we reconciled to God? At the Cross! Where was the wrath of God turned away from us! At the Cross! And we can add another question and answer. Where was it that we died to sin? At the Cross!

Five Moments of Salvation

Again the question arises, *When did God's elect die to sin?* There seems to be no less than five answers to that question. They can be listed.

1. We died to sin when God chose us. *'He chose us in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.'*
 - ◆ **Eph 1:4** *According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:*
 - ◆ **Rom 8:29** *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.*
2. We died to sin with Jesus Christ on the cross.
 - ◆ **2 Cor 5:14** *For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:*
3. We died to sin when we were born again.
 - ◆ **1 John 2:3** *And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.* This is the beginning of the outworking of our death to sin. Here it is really, though imperfectly, happening.
4. We died to sin when we were baptized. There we symbolically died to sin. Our baptism pictured our leaving our old life of sin and entering on a new life of righteousness.
5. We will die to sin in all its capacity to harm us and to offend God when we die physically. Then we will be morally done with sin forever. Even then we will know one effect of sin—we will not have our new bodies until the resurrection.

Here, then, are the great facts in the history of the salvation of each of God's elect. Each of these facts has particular men and women in view:

1. God chose His people in eternity past, with the goal of parting them from their sins. He *'predestined them to be conformed to the likeness of his Son'* (Rom. 8:29). He had particular individuals in mind. Not one of them would be lost.
2. God sent His Son to die for those He had chosen to part from their sins. *'He will save his people from their sins,'* the angel told Joseph (Matt. 1:21). His people died with Christ, when He died. Particular individuals died to sin. Not one them would be lost.

3. God calls His people to Himself and brings them to the new birth. *'Those he predestined, he also called'* (Rom. 8:30). They are converted as particular individuals, one at a time. Not one of them will be lost.
4. At death (and beyond) God finishes the good work that He started at conversion. *'He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.'* (Phil. 1:6). He will take these same particular individuals to Himself forever. Not one of them will be lost.

Christ our Substitute

One of the great doctrines associated with the death of Christ is that He died a substitute for others.

- ◆ **John 10:11** *I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.*
- ◆ **John 10:14-16** *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. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.*

Jesus loved to think of Himself and His people under the figure of Shepherd and sheep. As a Good Shepherd He will die for His sheep—but not for others. He will die for all His sheep, Jew and Gentile, (John 10:16) but not for others. Jesus will die as a Good Shepherd and He will die as a Substitute. No death can be substitutionary if both the substitute and the men for whom He dies experiences death. Mark 10:45 speaks of *'a ransom given in place of many.'*

A Look at some Hard Texts

- ◆ **2 Peter 2:1** *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying **the Lord that bought them**, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.*

Does this text settle the question once for all? If God or Christ has bought false teachers, how can anyone say that Christ died only for God's elect? The answer to the concern is bound up with a simple oversight on the part of many. They forget that to buy something means to obtain possession of it, when 'redemption' words are being used. They want to make 'buy' mean 'pay' or 'put down a price,' but that's not what it means. If that fact is kept in mind then it can be realized that this verse does not, cannot, mean that Christ died for men whom He will never make His own. And once that is understood, it will be easier to look at another view of the passage.

How has Christ acquired these men? There are three possible ways.

- Christ acquired them by saving them. That is clearly not the case here.
- Christ acquired them by their profession. They claimed to be Christians. They said in effect, '*We belong to Christ,*' though in their hearts they denied Him.
- He acquired them by changing their lives, by freeing them from many of their sins. To redeem a man is to free him from something. According to verse 20-22 of this chapter, there are such people who were freed from many vices by professing faith in Christ. But they were not really saved. They were like sows that are washed outwardly, but that still love the mud.(Matt. 7:22,23)

It is in the sense of the last two ways that it can be said that Christ acquires some men. But He did acquire them, not by true redemption but by false accusation.

- ◆ **Heb 2:9** *But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.*

The argument from this verse might go this way: since Christ tasted death for everyone, there is no one for whom He did not taste death. That would mean that He died for all the men and women who ever lived. Is that what this verse teaches? Perhaps not.

To begin with, the term '*everyone*' is one of those universal terms that one has to be careful of.

Second, the context is what determines the meaning of a word. In context God has promised to put the world under man. (Heb. 2:6-8a) Of course, if men are to rule the world they will have to be redeemed. But they could never come to rule if Christ had not died for every one of them.

- ◆ **1 Tim 4:10** *For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, specially of those that believe.*

Does this passage mean to say that Christ died for each and every person who ever lived? There is no need to think so. The standard Greek dictionary gives 'preserver' as one meaning of the word translated 'Savior' here. And God does preserve or save all men from many dangers besides the misery of hell. Paul does not need to mean more than that here. (cp. Acts 27:34) God is indeed the Savior or Preserver of all men in many kinds of difficulties. But above all He saves believers preserving them, not simply in time but also in eternity.

What is the Gospel?

The gospel calls men to repentance. *I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.* (Luke 5:32) *Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven.* (Acts 2:38) We must not preach the gospel unless we tell men they must repent. In particular, men must repent of their self-sufficiency. (Acts 17:29-31) Emphasizing the Lordship of Christ best does this. (Acts 9:10)

What does the Bible Teach About the Love of God?

- Neither God nor Christ is said to love anyone in Matthew.
- Christ is said to have loved the rich ruler in Mark.
- Neither God nor Christ is said to love anyone in Luke.
- John's gospel is rich in references to the love of God and Christ. Whom do they love?
 - ❖ Nine times they are said to love one another.
 - ❖ Nineteen times they are said to love believers.
 - ❖ Once God is said to love the world.
 - ❖ Once Christ is said to love His friends.
- In none of the references is it clear that a man was told that God loves him. The love of Christ for the rich young ruler is a comment from the writer. (Mark 10:21) The love of Christ for His friends was told to the Apostles. (John 15:13).
- A study of the epistles and the book of the Revelation yields similar results.

What does all of this mean? It means that the assumption that in preaching the gospel in the New Testament there was a great deal more said to sinners about God's love for them than is actually the case.

Nor were lost men told that Christ died for them in the Book of Acts! The death of Christ was preached because it had been reversed by His resurrection and because it convicted the Jew of their sin of putting Christ to death. (Acts 2:23,24, 36 cp. 4:10 cp. Acts 13:16-41; 17:2-3; 17:22—31; 20:17-35; 22:1-21; 24:10-21 and 26:2-39) It is the resurrection that gets the emphasis. So far as the record shows, there is no sermon in the Book of Acts which contains the words, *"God loves you and Christ died for you."*

How to Understand the Gospel

The best way to understand the gospel is to realize what it meant to those in the first century. They looked for a New World to come as the family of God. When they thought about the love and grace of God they saw it for themselves and spoke of it often. However, the Christians would not have been amused if the unbelieving community used the language of the church for themselves. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* (Rom. 8:35) *If God be for us, who can be against us?* (Rom. 8:31-32) Until those outside the family of God came to faith they had no claim to the special love of God. Therefore, the special love of God for His own should not be given indiscriminately to those outside the sphere of faith. (Matt. 7:6)

Why Temper the Message of Love?

There is no reason for men to come to faith if God loves them anyway. To crystallize the reality of the wrath of God and the reality of hell is a sobering message warning sinners to flee from the wrath to come. The gospel calls men to repentance, which means that the gospel calls upon men to put down their arms of rebellion against the Sovereign. Until the Lordship of Christ is once more forcefully presented in a kind but confrontational manner, there is little reason to hope that sinners will see their need of a Savior.