

Articles and Sermons :: A Letter to a Limited Atonement Brother

A Letter to a Limited Atonement Brother - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2011/3/23 19:22

My dear brother M---,

Thank you so much for your email. I've been wanting to write back to you since I read it, but I thought I would take the time to ponder what you have said and mull over it before replying. I want you to know that I didn't take any of your words as an attack... actually the opposite! I told your dad how much I truly appreciate you, what you wrote, and your gracious brotherly spirit. That kind of attitude is exactly the kind of attitude brothers who disagree ought to have. I also love your heart for the gospel and for souls. Keep preaching the word of life, my brother!

First off, I want you know (as I think you already do) that I am decidedly persuaded of Calvinism and that I believe in the election/predestination of individuals unto salvation. I also agree with you that God does not make people sin but allows them to do that themselves. So I appreciate your comments against humanism and freewill, etc. Amen and amen: no one can come to Christ unless the Father Himself draws him.

However, we must be aware that not all Calvinists are 5-point Calvinists, and to think in such categories is simplistic and theologically unhelpful. There has always been disagreement about limited atonement, and it is a far cry to say that 5-point Calvinism has gone unmolested since the days of the Reformation. The great reformer himself, Martin Luther, did not believe in limited atonement, though he believed in election, and it may be shocking for many 5-pointers to know, but John Calvin himself did not hold to limited atonement. Of course, that is contested because who wants to surrender Calvin? After examining the evidence for myself, I am convinced that there is no difficulty: classic Calvinism is 4-point, not 5-point, and to believe in unlimited atonement is to be more truly Calvinistic. I consider myself to be a classic Calvinist as opposed to the brand of Calvinism that evolved after John Calvin died. I strongly recommend you read this short online book by Paul Hartog on John Calvin's view of the extent of the atonement: *A Word for the World: John Calvin on the Extent of the Atonement*. It is written in a fully irenic and objective spirit and quotes Calvin extensively, as well as considers the arguments which limited atonement adherents put forth. Since the Reformation to the present day there is an impressive catalogue of men who have been classic Calvinists and who have stood against the doctrinal addition of limited atonement (just to give you an idea, John Newton and J.C Ryle are two of them). An outstanding website on this whole issue is <http://www.calvinandcalvinism.com/> which is run by an extremely well-read librarian at Reformed Theological Seminary. It deserves serious attention.

I'd like to share with you some exegetical thoughts of mine on this subject. I still stand firmly on my philosophical convictions expressed in the article regarding the love of God. What we say about the extent of the atonement is a direct statement about the character of God, and that's serious business. I believe that limited atonement casts a shadow on God's loving character and lowers Him into being a pragmatist. Sure He loves, but it is pragmatic love. His plan dictates His love rather than His love dictating His plan. I am convinced that limited atonement is a false doctrine and that 5-point Calvinism is not strong enough to stand against the kind of hard questions that are coming down the line in our 21st century about the character of God.

I also stand by my conviction that the exegetical case for unlimited atonement is leaps and bounds greater than the case that can be made for limited atonement. I am well aware of the Scriptural case for limited atonement, but I believe the way Scripture is handled by limited atonement adherents is unwarranted, answerable, and in many places just downright exegetical. There are no such gymnastics with unlimited atonement. Take, for example, the exegetical explanations of 2 Peter 2:1, Hebrews 10:29 by limited atonement adherents. Further, the reinterpreting of the words "all" and "world" to mean "the elect" is a reinterpretation driven by systematic arguments, which arguments are easily refuted; and if those arguments are refuted, then there isn't any warrant for reinterpretation. This is one reason why a discussion of the extent of the atonement must primarily be engaged in the philosophical realm, because an appeal to such Scriptures are not easily going to persuade anyone until those philosophical arguments have been dealt with. Nonetheless, there are exegetical points that need to be made.

Let me just point out a few:

Titus 3:4 - "But after the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared..." M---, you replied that this "is

describing believers not all mankind", but while I agree that only believers are the ones who are "saved" and "justified by His grace", you cannot limit this word to believers only. It is the Greek word *philanthropia* which means "love for mankind", and the force of it we dare not dismiss. Paul is talking about God's love for mankind. See how other translations render it:

"But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared..." (NASB)

"But when the kindness and love for humanity of God our Savior appeared..." (Analytical Literal Translation)

"But when the goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior to man appeared..." (Amplified)

Greek scholar Marvin Vincent wrote:

"Love is too vague. It is love toward men; comp. Titus 3:2. Only here and Acts 28:2 : φιλανθρώπως kindly, Acts 27:3 (note). While it cannot be asserted that the heretical characteristics noted in the Pastoral Epistles point collectively to any specific form of error, it is true, nevertheless, that certain characteristics of the economy of grace are emphasized, which are directly opposed to Gnostic ideas. Thus the exhortation that supplications be made for all men, supported by the statement that God wills that all men should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:1, 1 Timothy 2:4), is in the teeth of the Gnostic distinction between men of spirit and men of matter, and of the Gnostic principle that the knowledge (επίγνωσις) of truth was only for a limited, intellectual class. To the same effect is the frequent recurrence of all, for all, in connection with the saving and enlightening gifts of God (1 Timothy 2:6; 1 Timothy 4:10; 1 Timothy 6:13; Titus 2:11). So here: not only has the saving grace of God appeared unto all (Titus 2:11), but it has revealed itself as kindness and love to man as man."

It is God's love for mankind (God's philanthropy!) that has appeared by the gospel. It is His grace that brings salvation that has appeared to "all men" (2:11), which "all men" is the same as in 3:2: "To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men." Are we to think that Paul means only the elect here? How confusing would be his use of words!

God loves mankind because God made mankind and they are special to Him. That love for mankind is expressed through the gospel.

1 Timothy 2:1-6 - "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

Again, context determines that "all men" really means all men and not merely the elect (compare v. 1 and v. 5). Plus, Jesus is the mediator between God and man (as man) and not the elect.

1 Timothy 4:10 - "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." Think about it, M---. If Paul was a believer in limited atonement, why would he phrase it this way and cause such needless confusion? Why would he not just say: "Who is the Savior of all who believe"? Such a statement would be perfectly true and consistent. But the point is, Paul wanted to emphasize that Christ is n't just the Savior of those who believe, but He is the Savior of all men, even those who don't believe. If we rob this verse of this point then it really makes no point at all.

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." Here is a well-known verse, but let me break it down for a moment. Let me rewrite the verse adding some appropriate helps:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son for the world, that whosoever of the world that believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Because God loves the world, He gives His Son for the world. He does this so that (to enable) "whosoever" believes in Him should not perish. Obviously, in order to believe on Christ so as not to perish, Christ must have died for you (there is no salvation apart from Christ). So the "whosoever" must belong to the "world" that God gave His Son for. Thus I rendered the verse as it is above. But if we interpret "the world" to be "the elect" the verse would make no sense, for then it would

uld read:

"For God so loved the elect, that He gave His only begotten Son for the elect, that whosoever of the elect that believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Whosoever of the elect? That doesn't make sense. The verse loses its sense and its precious force if we interpret it this way, and robs God of the glory of His love for mankind which is being spoken of in this beautiful verse. If limited atonement adherents had their way, this would only prove that God doesn't love all men, but is a God of pragmatic love - His love being dictated by His plan.

I'll give just one more exegetical point, and one that I consider to be exceptionally formidable.

Romans 3:25 - "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation, through faith, by his blood, to show his righteousness, because of the passing over of the sins done aforetime, in the forbearance of God."

This verse contains an extremely important truth about the cross. Paul is telling us that one of the main things the cross did was that it vindicated God for certain confusing behavior that He had done in the past. The cross declared that God was righteous in doing that behavior. What did He do? He pretermitted sins. Pretermission means "omission", to "leave undone", as if an order were put onto your desk and you don't throw it away, you just don't do anything about it. The idea is that God pretermitted sins by not punishing them, even though His justice demanded they be punished, and this caused a lot of confusion in the Old Testament: "Why do the wicked go unpunished?" Even more, "Why do they prosper? Where's the justice of God?" These questions are answered by the cross. God was righteous in pretermitting sins, forbearing punishment, because He was operating with the knowledge of the death of Christ, which was the sacrifice for those sins. He delayed punishment in order for sinners to be saved. Romans 2:4 tells us why God forbears punishment (pretermits): "Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth you to repentance?" So the point of God delaying punishment is that He wants the sinner to be saved, and this is possible because Christ died for the sinner, and therefore the sinner can be saved by Christ if he believes. The moment he believes, his sins, past, present and future are justly forgiven. This appeared confusing before the cross, but after Christ died it made sense why God could and would do that.

Now here is the crucial question: Whose sins did God pretermite, the elect only or the non-elect too? In the past, and even today, God forbears to punish the sins of the elect and the non-elect, otherwise we would see that only the elect's sins are pretermitted and the non-elect are punished instantaneously, because only the elect would have the possibility for salvation since Christ only died for their sins. But this is clearly not the case. The non-elect as well as the elect have their sins pretermitted because Christ died for the sins of the non-elect as well as the elect, providing for the salvation of all men, thus enabling God to pretermite all, otherwise God would be unjust. God is patient with all men because salvation has been provided for all men, therefore God can withhold punishment with the intent of leading all men to repentance.

Salvation would not be possible without the death of Christ ("without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness"), and if salvation is impossible, then pretermission is impossible. The only reason God delays punishment is so that men can be saved, which necessitates the death of Christ for them. This is evidently true for the non-elect, otherwise, God is unjust to pretermite their sins, and is furthermore a cruel mocker toward them, giving them time to repent for a salvation that is not real.

You see, when a person sins, they right then and there deserve damnation (see Jonathan Edward's excellent sermon, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God). God delays punishment so that they may be saved by believing on Christ, because there is a possibility for them to be saved. Once a sinner believes on Christ, all their sins are justly forgiven, and God's pretermitting mercy toward them is shown to be just. Christ enables pretermission. This is one of the main things the cross declares, and vindicates the righteousness of God. If limited atonement were true (that Christ did not die for all men) then the cross does not vindicate God's behavior in His dealings with the majority of men, for He forbears to punish the non-elect. Therefore the doctrine of limited atonement makes God unjust. Since we know that God is just, limited atonement must be false. Christ did in fact die for the sins of all men, just as the Scriptures plainly teach, vindicating God's forbearance of all. I consider this a central argument that is irrefutable.

M---, I know that there are many precious brothers who believe in limited atonement, many of whom I appreciate and respect. I agree with you that limited atonement adherents have often made powerful evangelists, but I believe this is not due to the doctrine of limited atonement but despite it, and is due, rather, to happy inconsistencies within these men's theologies. I stand by my conviction that the free offer of the gospel as portrayed in Scripture is entirely different than the so-c

alled offer of salvation made by limited atonement adherents ("If you believe you will be saved..." rather than "God wants to save you! Believe!"; compare 2 Cor. 5:20). Such a gospel I want nothing to do with. If limited atonement were true, the gospel would only be good news after you believe it, but not before. Yet in the Bible it is the very good news of God's love for you in Christ that itself impels you to believe! Under the limited atonement system, men are left wondering whether they are elect, for election determines whether God loved them and gave Himself for them. Under true gospel preaching, men are pointed to God's love in Christ for them, and to believing in Christ for salvation. As it is in Scripture, it is only after a person has believed that they are made aware of their election from before the foundation of the world. And notice in Romans 8:29-30 that predestination doesn't have to do with whether Christ died for you or not, but it has to do with effectual calling. This is the single greatest error of Calvinists - they misunderstand the issue of election. God does not elect to determine whom Christ dies for, but to determine who will believe in Christ (read carefully John 1:11-13, 6:44-45, 65, Acts 13:48, Romans 9:11, 23-24, 11:4-5, Galatians 1:15, Ephesians 1:5, Philippians 1:5-6, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Timothy 1:9, James 1:18, 1 Peter 1:2). This is the true doctrine of election that Calvin understood.

Let me recommend to you a book entitled *The Death of Christ* by Norman F. Douty, which is considered a classic critique of limited atonement. While I didn't agree with everything he wrote, and felt like the book could have been better and stronger, I believe it is an excellent place to start. Douty interacts with all the philosophical and exegetical arguments for limited atonement, and presents a large body of proof for unlimited atonement. He also provides an extensive list of theologians since the beginning of the Church who held to unlimited atonement. Let me share a quote with you from the book, where he touches an issue that exposes the all-too often empty rhetoric of limited atonement:

"Here it is appropriate to reply to the repeated assertion that Christ's propitiation actually, and not just potentially, propitiates, and that so His reconciliation reconciles, His redemption redeems, and His atonement atones. John Murray says the death of Christ is to be considered as "effective" propitiation, reconciliation and redemption, and that "the atonement is efficacious substitution." It is pertinent to inquire why the author entitles his book "Redemption Accomplished and Applied" if redemption accomplished is redemption applied? We maintain as strongly as he that Christ's propitiation propitiates, His reconciliation reconciles, His redemption redeems, and His atonement atones so far as its own intrinsic efficacy is concerned, but not with reference to any sinner, unless he repents and believes. Without these acts, even the elect are only potentially the recipients of these benefits.

"Do not Limited Atonement men themselves summon sinners to enter into the good of Christ's propitiation through faith (Rom. 3:25), beseech them to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:20), call upon them to come under the atoning blood? Now what does all this amount to but seeking to bring men into the place where Christ's propitiation, reconciliation, redemption and atonement, completely efficacious in themselves, become completely effective for them?

"No, even the elect are not actually possessed of these values until the Spirit has induced them to repent and believe. Until then, all of Christ's saving work is theirs only potentially. In other words, His death has only provided these benefits for them; the application of them is contingent on their repentance and faith. We hold that these same benefits are equally provided for the non-elect, who never enjoy them in their experience, because of their impenitence and unbelief. I, too, am a Limited Atonement man, if I am permitted to apply the adjective to atonement's possession, rather than to its provision." (p. 51)

So you see, M---, how the limited atonement argument, that "the cross actually saves", is really just mere rhetoric. Who believes that a man is saved by the death of Christ apart from faith? Only those on the fringe who hold to the erroneous view of eternal justification.

Lots to think about, right? Having said all this, I believe the real issue that is at stake is not the mere exegetical case for the extent of the atonement, but the issue of the character of God, for what we say about this doctrine is a direct statement about who God is. Before sovereignty, before election, before the eternal decrees, God is love. It is this true knowledge of God that Jesus Christ came to reveal, and by seeing Jesus we see the Father. But Christ did not come to show us that God was sovereign, or holy, or one - these are true, and certainly Christ doesn't alter them, but these we knew or could learn elsewhere. No, the thing that Christ tells us about God is that God is love: God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

I hope this gives you some food for thought and that we can keep up the dialogue, since there's so much more to discuss. Feel free to write back. Again, I really appreciate your email and your kindness in this matter.

Soli Deo Gloria!
Your brother,
-Eli

from: <http://www.timothyministry.com/2011/03/letter-to-limited-atonement-brother.html>

Re: A Letter to a Limited Atonement Brother - posted by Giggles (), on: 2011/3/23 19:40

I usually refrain from these threads, but I must say you always puzzle me brother Greg when you post them.

Re: - posted by sermonindex (), on: 2011/3/23 19:44

I felt that the 2 articles I posted by Brother Eli brought fresh thought into the equation and are worthy to be read and considered. Perhaps more stronger questions can be related directly to eli through the link at the bottom of the article.

We do post articles on God's sovereignty, election and preserving power in sermons and articles from time to time. We have been against what is an arguing spirit in the saints when considering the finer points of salvation and the 2 major general opposing views.

I trust these articles can be read with the former spirit of meekness and learning and consideration.

Re: A Letter to a Limited Atonement Brother - posted by boG (), on: 2011/3/23 21:22

Quote:
-----An outstanding website on this whole issue is <http://www.calvinandcalvinism.com/> which is run by an extremely well-read librarian at Reformed Theological Seminary. It deserves serious attention.

Agreed. I am a big fan of that website. It is very informative. Although I am still not so certain about Calvin's own views on the extent of the atonement.

Quote:
-----And notice in Romans 8:29-30 that predestination doesn't have to do with whether Christ died for you or not, but it has to do with effectual calling. This is the single greatest error of Calvinists - they misunderstand the issue of election. God does not elect to determine whom Christ dies for, but to determine who will believe in Christ (read carefully John 1:11-13, 6:44-45, 65, Acts 13:48, Romans 9:11, 23-24, 11:4-5, Galatians 1:15, Ephesians 1:5, Philippians 1:5-6, 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 2 Timothy 1:9, James 1:18, 1 Peter 1:2). This is the true doctrine of election that Calvin understood.

A poignant distinction. Indeed, Eli gives some food for thought. I will also have to consider his point on Romans 3:25; I had not heard that before.

Re: , on: 2011/3/23 21:42

Not sure how one can reconcile "no freewill" with no limited atonement.

It's been said, if you pull out anyone of the letters that comprise the acronym TULIP, all the rest fall with it.

Eli's a great Brother and great with eschatology.

I'm the non-calvinist that's still a member of a Reformed Theology Church - so I'm sure I'd confuse anyone at this point .. until I get started on my "Foreknowledge & Freewill" rant again, but too tired tonight.
LORD Bless y'all & Eli & Gang, Amen!!

Re: A Letter to a Limited Atonement Brother - posted by savannah, on: 2011/3/24 1:03

"Limited Atonement"

By Dr. Greg Bahnsen

A very unhealthy notion that plagues the fundamentalist church is the idea that Christ laid down his life for each and every individual; that he went to the cross to save all men without exception. Such a view is not consistent with Biblical Christianity. Sometimes a person will acknowledge the total depravity of man, unconditional election of God the Father, prevent grace of the Spirit and yet deny the particular redemption of Christ; such a position is known as "fourpoint Calvinism" and is as inconsistent as it is unorthodox.

If it be said that before creation the Father singled out in election those whom He destined to save and that the Spirit's activity of bringing men to repentance and faith is operative (to that extent) only in the lives of God's elect and yet that Christ offered up His life for the purpose of saving every single individual, then the unity of the Trinity has been forsaken. For in such a case Christ clearly sets out to accomplish what God the Father and Spirit do not intend to do; Christ here would be out of harmony with the will and purpose of the other two persons of the Trinity. Hence anyone who expounds "four-point Calvinism" has inadvertently destroyed the doctrine of the Trinity (by dissolving its unity) and is logically committed to a polytheistic position.

It should also be noted that the doctrine of particular redemption is necessary to the orthodox view of Christ's substitutory atonement; the only alternatives to it are universal salvation or salvation by works (both are unbiblical). If Christ atoned for the sins of all men then all men will be saved, for a righteous God cannot condemn a man twice; if the man's sins have been atoned, he cannot be sent to Hell on the basis of them. Scripture makes it abundantly clear that Christ through his sacrifice made a full and actual (no potential) redemption; "who gave himself to us to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for himself a peculiar (chosen) people" (Titus 2:14); "he will save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21; "he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking ... his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption" (Hebrews 9:12).

It is clear that Christ presented an actual and not potential redemption on the cross; the gospel is good news, not good advice, it tells us what has been accomplished, not what might come about. Upon the cross Christ cried out "It is finished" ; nothing was left to be done, for full atonement had been made. Hence, if Christ (as it is suggested) died for every man, all men shall be saved without exception; yet scripture clearly does not teach universal salvation. And if (contrary to scripture) it is responded that Christ's redemption is only potential, to be made actual when the sinner believes, then salvation is said to depend finally on something the sinner does. And that is tantamount to salvation by works (as well as being based on an erroneous view of Christ's atonement).

Isaiah prophesied that Christ would "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied"; yet if Christ went to the cross with the intention of saving every individual, he certainly has been defeated and cannot be satisfied. But our Lord is not defeated; all power has been given to him in heaven and earth. His sufferings do accomplish what he intends, for the salvation he provides is not abstract and universal, it is particular and personal. Christ died for his people, the elect (Matthew 1:21). "All that the Father gives me will come to me ... for I came down from heaven to ... do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:37, 38); "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep (not the goats) ... I know my own ... and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:11, 14-18); "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give to them eternal life, and they shall never perish (John 10:24-29); "glorify the son ... since thou hast given him power over all flesh, so that he might give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him. I (have) accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do" (John 17:1-4); "feed the church of the Lord which he obtained for himself with his own blood" (Acts 20:28); Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her' (Ephesians 5:25-27); "who gave himself ... to purify for himself a chosen people of his own" (Titus 2:14).

Those holding to the indefinite atonement of Christ will often appeal to scriptural passages which speak of salvation in terms of "the world," or "all men," "all nations, etc." However, in most instances these words were used by the N.T. writers to emphatically correct the mistaken Jewish notion that full salvation was not for the Gentiles. These expressions are intended to show that Christ died for all men without distinction (not all men without exception). If the referent of "world" in 2 Cor. 5:19 ("God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself") were taken to be every single individual, then that verse teaches that Christ's work was to the effect of reconciling every man to God (i.e. universal salvation) -- which is clearly unscriptural. The general evangelistic call goes out to all men in our preaching, while it is only the elect who are moved by the Holy Spirit to respond with repentance and faith to that redemption accomplished for them by Christ.

If redemption were indefinite and potential, then none would be saved. For man, who is dead in sin and unable to receive

e the things of the Spirit of God (cf. Eph. 2:1; I Cor. 2:14), would never be able to appropriate that potential redemption for himself. No man is able to come to Christ except that Father draw him (John 6:44). The sinner drinks iniquity like water and does not seek God (Job 15:16; Rom. 3:11), so he can no more choose to come to Christ and gain for himself the benefits of the atonement than a leopard can change his spots (Jer. 13:23). Praise be to God who did not make only partial atonement for the sins of his people, who did not allow the salvation of His elect to be thwarted by leaving it up to them to respond, who fully saved us by having His Son actually obtain salvation for His sheep!

Particular redemption is the only triune, monotheistic, substitutionary, personal, effectual, and biblical (hence, orthodox) doctrine of Christ's atonement; all else (including fundamentalism's redemption for every individual) are doctrines pleasing to men but unsatisfactory in their Theology, anthropology, and soteriology. Sola Scriptura!

Re: A Letter to a Limited Atonement Brother - posted by rufnrust (), on: 2011/3/24 7:55

Simply put, limited atonement is an unspeakable insult to a God who has a record of "over" providing.

Ruf

Testing all things with Scripture - posted by makrothumia (), on: 2011/3/24 10:06

Dear brothers,

Please consider the following assertion in the light of the divinely inspired choice of expression actually found in the writing left to us. The quote in question is below:

"It is clear that Christ presented an actual and not potential redemption on the cross; the gospel is good news, not good advice, it tells us what has been accomplished, not what might come about."

The biblical record left to us directly contradicts this assertion!

One of the most well known passages of the Bible actually states the "potential" of salvation using this Greek grammar - "That whosoever believeth in Him MIGHT NOT perish" John chose the SUBJUNCTIVE, rather than the INDICATIVE mood. Greek scholars know the difference. Basically, the subjunctive is used when the writer does not want to express an actual reality, instead a possible one. Furthermore, a more literal translation of the last phrase of the same verse would be... "but might have everlasting life." Here again John chose the SUBJUNCTIVE mood.

Both "might not perish" and "might have everlasting life" are in the Subjunctive not the active mood. So despite the assertion of the above quote, John the apostle chose to describe the "potential" of salvation through faith as a possibility rather than an actuality.

makrothumia

Re: Testing all things with Scripture, on: 2011/3/24 12:32

Could I ask, then, how to understand the following verse? Does it only become active and perfect (past), to believers who continue believing?

1 John 5:4

For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, our faith.

Re: Testing all things with Scripture, on: 2011/3/24 13:28

Brother makrothumia - where did you get your exegesis of John 3:16?

Joh 3:16 ForG1063 GodG2316 soG3779 lovedG25 theG3588 world,G2889 thatG5620 he gaveG1325 hisG848 only begottenG3439 Son,G5207

thatG2443 whosoeverG3956 believethG4100 inG1519 himG846

should notG3361 perish,G622

butG235 haveG2192 everlastingG166 life.G2222

With all of my respect for you, that's all I can ask right now.

Re: , on: 2011/3/24 13:35

Alive-to-God - your question regarding "believers who "continue" believing Does go into what John 3:16 Does say.

In the "whosoever believeth" - "Believeth" is a Present Active Participle which is "continuous action" which makes this "believing" a continuous action.

"....whosoever believing in Him, 'Not Perish' but 'possess' eternal life" - that's the actual reading of John 3:16.

Re: - posted by makrothumia (), on: 2011/3/24 14:24

Hello brother,

I have no one to blame :-) for my exegesis but me. Both verbs for "perish" and "have" are subjunctives. The definition for subjunctive is somewhat interpretive itself, depending on which scholar you are reading.

In short the subjunctive differs from the indicative in that the writer chose to not express the action as an absolute certainty. Subjunctive is further removed from actual reality than the indicative. It may be seen as a probability, but not as a definite actuality.

Knowing this, I simply translated the negative along with the subjunctive "perish" as "might not perish" (not trying to overly differ from "should not"). I simply prefer the word "might" over "should". I did not even mention that "perish" is actually an Aorist, Middle, Subjunctive - and being a Middle voice lays the focus on the individuals participation in the resulting outcome. It is necessary to understand the implication of Middle voice to fully appreciate this.

As I indicated earlier, I also translated the subjunctive verb "have" as "might have". This verb is actually a Present Active Subjunctive. If I were to be even more literal, I would translate it "might presently have" or "should presently have". The difference between actually have and should have are intentional by the apostle John's use of the subjunctive.

Once again John chose not to use the Indicative mood for either of these verbs in this sentence. This point is very relevant, for John could have chosen an indicative and did not. This is how we recognize that the subjunctive was intentional on his part. To fully appreciate the difference between the actual and the potential requires one to become familiar with the grammatical implications of both Subjunctive and Indicative. There are many resources available to help us appreciate the differences.

I hope that helps. We should all give thanks to God for the men who have dedicated their lives to providing us with the available helps to grasp these things.

Re: , on: 2011/3/24 14:46

Thanks for your reply Brother.

You're taking your understanding from words that aren't in the original and why I gave the #ed to Strong's version.

Just to make this easier for me as well - I'll just give two verses where this same grammar is used.

Joh 3:16 ForG1063 GodG2316 soG3779 lovedG25 theG3588 world,G2889 thatG5620 he gaveG1325 hisG848 only be gottenG3439 Son,G5207 thatG2443 whosoeverG3956 believethG4100 inG1519 himG846 should notG3361 perish,G622 butG235 haveG2192 everlastingG166 life.G2222

First we see that the word "should" is not in the text and that "have" G2192 is a Present Subjunctive Active - as seen in Rev 19:7 (just for the one) "Let us be glad and rejoice".

The Present Subjunctive is also a continuous or repeated action despite when the action takes place. Continuous as also the Present Active Participle was that connects these two words "Believing" with "have" - they continue as contingent upon one another.

An example of the "not perish" (removing the added "should") - "not" is just that, "not" and "perish" - is an Aorist Subjunctive Passive that in another passage reads - "He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death", Rev 2:11.

It's just a simple action - "will not"! No "mights" about it. Will Not is Will Not.

The "potential" is open to those whom GOD sent His Son for - that, "whosoever" that continues to believe, out from the entire world that He Loves.

Re: A Letter to a Limited Atonement Brother, on: 2011/3/24 19:26

Hi Jesus-is-GOD,

Thanks for your reply. I'm a bit bemused by your objection to makrothumia's original post, as what he said seems to be in line with both Berry's Interlinear, and Young's Literal.

(Young) John 3:16 for God did so love the world, that His Son--the only begotten--He gave, that every one who is believing in him may not perish, but may have life age-during.

Not sure if this will look 'Greek' when submitted, so please bear with me if it doesn't. The important bit is the English translation.

John 3:16 outwV gar {FOR SO} hgaphsen (5656) o {LOVED} qeoV {GOD} ton {THE} kosmon {WORLD} wste ton {THAT} uion autou {HIS SON} ton {THE} monogenh {ONLY BEGOTTEN} edwken (5656) {HE GAVE,} ina {THAT} paV {EVERYONE} o {WHO} pisteuwn (5723) {BELIEVES} eiV {ON} auton mh {HIM} apolhtai (5643) {MAY NOT PERISH,} all {BUT} ech (5725) {MAY HAVE} zwhn {LIFE} aiwnion {ETERNAL.}

I don't have a problem with the point makrothumia is making, because it accords with other verses, for instance,

(KJV)John 1:7 The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.

(Young) John 1:7 this one came for testimony, that he might testify about the Light, that all might believe through him;

John 10:10 The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have more abundantly.

John 10:10 The thief doth not come, except that he may steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they may have life, and may have abundantly.

Okay, I'm getting it. There are lots of 'might's in the KJV, and 'may's in Young's.

makrothumia said

Quote:

-----There are many resources available to help us appreciate the differences.

I glanced in my Newberry's, and the best I can make out of this is that the subjunctive throws open the door to a continuously standing offer of what the one believing into Christ must receive by believing.

Am I close?

The 'may' and the 'might' do not introduce 'doubt' about what Christ purchased for us, nor what is promised to those who believe, but rather that UNTIL one 'believes', all is un-fulfilled in the un-believer's experience.

Jesus-is-GOD, please bear with me. I'm not trying to stir up strife, nor disagree with you, but rather, to consolidate my understanding on this little bit of study on the point makrothumia attempted to highlight. I'm open to correction.

Re: John 3:16 + Atonement - posted by savannah, on: 2011/3/25 2:22

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone believing into Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16)

God gave His Son for the purpose of, or, so that, His end be achieved. His end being specifically that every believing one should not perish, but that every believing one should have everlasting life.

The word translated 'that' is the greek word hina. Strongs #2443 - in order that (denoting the purpose or the result): - albeit, because, to the intent (that), lest, so as, (so) that, (for) to.

The Father gave His Son for the purpose of those who believe. The Son is given so that the believing ones will not perish, but opposite to that, have eternal life. That is the purpose of the giving.

So, what John 3:16 teaches is:

ALL who A (believe in Him)

will not B (perish)

but will have C (everlasting life)

What does this text tell us about who WILL believe or who CAN believe?

The answer is: ABSOLUTELY NOTHING! The text does not address the issue of who WILL believe or who CAN believe.

Scripture elsewhere addresses who will, who can, and who actually do, believe unto their eternal salvation (See John 6 for example), as well as who He (Jesus) dies for (John 10:15, John 15:13).

John 3:16 is not telling me that "if I do the act of believing, then I shall have eternal life", rather that verse is saying that "if I am one of the believing ones, then I will have eternal life", without committing itself to how I become "a believing one."

ἅπασαν τὴν πίστιν (pas, ho, pisteuwn), means "all the believing ones" or "everyone believing," or more literally, "the believing all", NOT "That Every Single Person Can or Might Believe." The KJV translates it "whosoever believeth".

The word ἅπασαν (pas), an adjective which means all, should not have been translated here as whosoever. Many are erroneously teaching that this verse implies "That Every Single Person Can or Might Believe", which is simply not what is being taught in this verse, nor the verse preceding.

Whosoever was just a bad translation. Literally, (ἅπασαν τὴν πίστιν) would be "The All" and (ἅπασαν τὴν πίστιν) "Believing", which imparts ownership of the belief to "the" "all". So "The Believing All" would be the ones who have everlasting life.

We know from Scripture that the faith (believing) of God's elect (Titus 1:1) is the gift of God (Eph. 2:8) given in time, but which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began (2 Tim. 1:9). We also know that Christ quickened us (Eph. 2:5), or made us alive, or regenerated us, and that He does so to whom He will (John 5:21), and that it is not of man's will (Rom. 9:16).

This is Gospel Grace in Christ, redeeming grace, persevering grace, grace which cannot and does not fail, but is, effectually

al grace. Just as He purposed it.

Has God saved the human race? Yes! He saved them(2) in the garden. He saved them(8) in the ark. He saved mankind in the ark as well as animal kind in the ark. Does that mean he saved all the animals? All without exception, every last single one? No! He saved 2 of each kind in the ark, and so saved the race from extinction.

God has saved from eternal damnation and extinction, mankind, with an eternal salvation in Christ Jesus, which was His eternal plan from before time began. History is that which He as Creator has decreed. It is being unveiled and revealed before the eyes of His creatures. All Glory be to God Alone! For He is the All-Glorious One.

"Grace at the start, grace to the end, grace in the middle, grace without fail, grace without mixture, grace without addition, grace that allows no boasting, grace that precludes all glorying but in the LORD." J.S.

Re: , on: 2011/3/25 5:19

Hi AtG. There's no problem at all with your post to me. If you felt there would be, I'd feel as if I had failed you in some way.

The possibility is 'always' there that I may have misunderstood another's words or the direction they were pointing to... that's a definite and only through drawing it out with conversation will I see where I may have done this.

First, I'd like to say that I fully agree with this line of your post - "The 'may' and the 'might' do not introduce 'doubt' about what Christ purchased for us, nor what is promised to those who believe, but rather that UNTIL one 'believes', all is unfulfilled in the un-believer's experience."

Yes, completely.

Now regarding Brother Makrothumia's post - I'm not sure if we disagree with one another or not. I hoped he come back and straighten out anything that I posted that may have been contrary to what he is seeing in the language.

I prayed before posting this because I need to separate what emotions are stirred by the sheer mention of Calvin. I won't touch him personally here, but having joined a Reformed church, I assumed that I'd learn more of the assurance of Grace from the Senior citizen group that I joined for mid-week Bible study. These were folks that had been a part of this Church for most of their lives. One day stays in my mind and heart as if it happened yesterday, but this was about 5 yrs ago and I can't shake it. The question was asked and went around the entire class of their assurance of salvation and there wasn't one there that could answer with assurance. The answer was basically, in a shortening of words, "I hope so." The one man who I loved most, my father's age and like my ideal of a father, broke my heart the most when he said that. He hung his head down and seemed to almost be beating himself. This was beyond just his humility, this was fear and as I knew him, it was unfounded fear. They have no idea if they are the Elect or not. I'll end that part from my emotional side with that.

I'd like to say to Brother Makrothumia - if I've misunderstood your doctrine based upon two words, I am deeply sorry and pray you'll see where the misunderstanding stems from --- those two words. I do understand them as AtG has posted in my quote.

GOD Bless and again I say, I've respected your posts from my beginning here at SI.

Thank you to both of you.

Your Sister