

“Paul could and did honestly say to everyone he met, ‘Christ died for you.’ In complete contrast, a book on biblical counseling that we have long recommended to readers declares, ‘As a reformed Christian, the writer [author] believes that counselors must not tell any unsaved counselee that Christ died for him, for they cannot say that. No man knows except Christ himself who are his elect for whom he died.’”[1]

In the above excerpt from *What Love is This?*, Dave Hunt addresses a statement by Jay Adams,[2] a reference Hunt also utilizes in *Debating Calvinism*.^[3]

What we find in this brief excerpt from the late founder of the Berean Call concerning the subjects of the extent of the atonement and its relation to evangelism is a fine example of the dangerous tendency of letting unjustified theological presuppositions determine one's approach to Scripture. If Hunt's assumption (that the atonement is universal and general and a provision made for every individual that ever lived) is true, then it is reasonable to assume that Paul and the Apostles would have shouted from the hilltops, “Christ died for you!” But, in fact, one would search in vain to find the phrase, “Christ died for you” anywhere in the Bible. Hunt boldly states that “Paul could and did honestly say to everyone he met, ‘Christ died for you”, but he cites no Scripture whatsoever to prove this unwarranted assertion.

Though there is no instance where Paul makes the above declaration in Scripture, it is at least possible that he *may* have made such a statement to fellow Christians as an encouragement to them. But, contra Hunt, it is inconceivable that Paul would have told unbelievers that Christ died for them seeing that for Paul the atonement meant that all the sins of *particular individuals were actually atoned for*, a declaration Paul could not make to the yet unconverted.

Understand that the importance of this issue comes to light when we realize that what Hunt is essentially arguing is that if Calvinism is true, the gospel is necessarily hindered from going forth to every single creature. The reason why Hunt and many other synergists accuse Calvinists of being unevangelistic—or at the very least inconsistent with their own theology in their practical evangelism—is that some of these non-Calvinists have a confused definition of what preaching the gospel actually entails.

Incidentally, while proclaiming, “Christ died for you”, may be an improvement over modern

evangelicalism's so-called gospel of, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life", it still has significant flaws. As we have already noted, there is a reason you will find no such declaration made to the lost in any of the recorded sermons in the book of Acts. Does this mean the apostles failed to preach the gospel? Hardly. Paul tells us precisely what the gospel is in 1 Corinthians chapter 15:

"I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures...."

Notice first of all that the very same apostle whom Hunt claims announced a potential, universal atonement "to everyone he met" actually says quite plainly that "Christ died for *our* sins according to the Scriptures." Paul knows that Christ died for his own sins as well as the sins of the entirety of the *ecclesia* (1 Corinthians 1:24; Jude 1:1), but he does not irresponsibly extend the atonement beyond the bounds of God's elect people. Also, since Paul is writing to the church and not preaching a sermon on Mars Hill or writing a tract directed at the lost, he could say in his epistle, "Christ died for *our* sins".

The irony is this: Hunt accuses Calvinists of undermining the proclamation of the gospel via Limited Atonement because, "the Calvinist cannot look an unsaved person in the eye and say with confidence, 'Christ died for *you!*'".[4] But if Hunt's view of the atonement is correct, that "...Christ died to save all mankind..." and that some sinners are not saved simply "because all do not accept that payment"[5], this means that there is nobody *in particular* for whom Christ died. If Hunt would follow the logic of his own propositions he would restrict himself from declaring to *anyone*, "Christ died for you". Hunt and other synergists are forced to redefine the atonement and turn it into a general, potential, take-it-or-leave-it offer which secures no particular individual's salvation. In spite of this equivocation, he is persistent that such a position poses no theological problem. He writes,

"Unquestionably...the blood of the Passover lambs was shed for multitudes who perished. In fulfillment, the blood of Christ, the true Passover Lamb, must also have been shed for many who perish."[6]

To illustrate the absurdity of this statement, think of a false convert upon his death descending into hell and declaring among those weeping and gnashing their teeth that "Christ died for you". Such an "atonement" is truly vacuous, having actually atoned for nothing since the sinner is still condemned (John 3:36) having died in his sins (John 8:24) being eternally separated from a thrice-holy God.

It is also worth noting that this last statement from Hunt is built upon a faulty hermeneutic which views the NT in light of the Old. His argument therefore suffers an additional blow when this Dispensational error is shown to be built upon sand, being itself a clear departure from the principle of progressive revelation and the analogy of faith.[7] We will not attempt to take up these subjects here but simply note that one would do well to acknowledge that everyone employs an interpretive framework:

"The major issue in interpretation is, should the New Testament be brought into conformity to the literalism of the Old Testament, or should the Old Testament be interpreted and understood in the light of the New? Dispensational theology makes the Old Testament determinative in interpretation and non-Dispensational theology makes the New Testament determinative and explanatory of the Old."[8]

It is my experience that many Dispensationalists are often unconscious that such interpretive methods must even come into play for those who simply "take the Bible literally".[9] But the reality is that the New Covenant is not like the Old (Hebrews 8:8-9). It is a new and better covenant, and, unlike the Old, *everyone* under the New Covenant has actually been redeemed and become children of God (John 1:12-13; Hebrews 8:11-13).[10] Reading the Bible through the lense of arbitrary dispensations and ignoring covenantal distinctives and progressive revelation is detrimental to biblical theology. It is completely unacceptable to develop a theology of the atonement by interpreting the NT through the preparatory types and shadows found throughout the OT as Hunt erroneously does.

For whom did Christ die? The Calvinist has both logic and Scripture on his side to maintain that Christ died to secure the salvation of God's elect people and can simultaneously evangelize the lost (since evangelism is not indiscriminately declaring, "Christ died for you"). The atonement pertains to a particular people ("those who are *the called*" [1 Corinthians 1:24 NASB]) and is not a general, "potential atonement" (whatever that is) intended to secure the salvation of no one in particular.

We can proclaim the truth of God's Word and rightly carry out the Great Commission without declaring to the lost, "Christ died for you". Likewise, synergists should take some of their own medicine, follow the logic and likewise refrain from the use of such a statement since an atoning sacrifice which does not actually propitiate the wrath of God and credit the sinner with Christ's imputed righteousness is not a 'universal atonement' but rather no atonement at all.

[1] Hunt, D., *What Love is This? Calvinism's Misrepresentation of God* (3rd ed.), The Berean Call, Bend, OR, 2006, p. 31.

[2] Adams, J.E., *Competent to Counsel*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1970, p. 70.

[3] Hunt, D., and White, J., *Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views*, Multnomah Publishers, Sisters, OR, 2004, p. 106.

[4] Hunt, ref. 1, p. 316.

[5] Hunt, ref. 1, p. 339.

[6] Hunt, ref. 3 p. 367.

[7] Downing, W.R., *Biblical Hermeneutics*, PIRS Publications, Morgan Hill, CA, 2002, pp. 174-75.

[8] Downing, W.R., *Theological Propaedeutic*, PIRS Publications, Morgan Hill, CA, 2010, p. 266.

[9] This is not meant to be condescending. It is in the nature of Dispensationalism to view any departure from what may be perceived to be the "literal" reading (which often entails reading the NT in light of the OT) as spiritualizing or allegorizing the text. I was as guilty of this mentality as Hunt was.

[10] These covenantal distinctions are blurred by our paedobaptist brethren as the continuity between the OT and NT is overemphasized (in my opinion) in paedobaptist covenant theology. Note also that it is because of these covenantal distinctives that reformed Baptists argue for regenerate church membership.

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