

John Owen's Argument for Definite Atonement in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*: A Summary and Evaluation¹

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FOR WHOM DID God the Father intend that Jesus die? What did his death actually accomplish or secure for those people? Did God have a single intent for all those for whom Jesus died? Could God fail to accomplish his intent? Three major soteriological systems answer these questions differently.

(1) Calvinism argues that God intended for Jesus to die effectually for the sins of only the elect.² His death accomplished and secured the salvation of the elect alone,

and God applies that accomplishment to the elect when they repent and believe at conversion. This view is usually called limited atonement, definite

atonement, or particular redemption.

(2) Arminianism argues that God intended for Jesus to die for the sins of all humans without exception. His death was a universal provision that made it possible for anyone to be saved. The benefits of Jesus' atonement are applied to anyone contingent on a person's repentance and faith at conversion. This view is usually called unlimited atonement or general atonement.³

(3) Amyraldism (or Amyraldianism) argues that God's intention is twofold: (1) according to God's general will, he intended for Jesus to accomplish (in the sense of procure or obtain) the salvation of all humans without exception, and (2) according to God's effectual will, he intended for Jesus to die effectually for the sins of only the elect. The former is a universal, infinite provision,

and the latter is a particular, definite, limited application, which the elect experience at conversion. This view, which maintains general atonement, is also called hypothetical universalism, post-redemptionism, ante-applicationism, and four-point Calvinism.⁴

Enter John Owen (1616–1683). Both J. I. Packer and John Piper have made astounding claims about John Owen and his famous book *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (henceforth, *DDDC*).⁵ In 1959, Banner of Truth reprinted *DDDC* with an introduction by J. I. Packer.⁶ Packer’s moving introduction, now a classic that has been reprinted separately, includes this remarkable paragraph in praise of *DDDC*:

It is safe to say that no comparable exposition of the work of redemption as planned and executed by the Triune Jehovah has ever been done since Owen published his. None has been needed. Discussing this work, Andrew Thomson notes how Owen “makes you feel when he has reached the end of his subject, that he has also exhausted it.” That is demonstrably the case here. His interpretation of the texts is sure; his power of theological construction is superb; nothing that needs discussing is omitted, and (so far as the writer can discover) no arguments for or against his position have been used since his day which he has not himself noted and dealt with. One searches his book in vain for the leaps and flights of logic by which Reformed theologians are supposed to establish their positions; all that one finds is solid, painstaking exegesis and a careful following through of biblical ways of thinking. Owen’s work is a constructive, broad-based biblical analysis of the heart of the gospel, and must be taken seriously as such. It may not be written off as a piece of special pleading for a traditional shibboleth, for nobody has a right to dismiss the doctrine of the limitedness, or particularity, of atonement as a monstrosity of Calvinistic logic until he has refuted Owen’s proof that it is part of the uniform biblical presentation of redemption,

clearly taught in plain text after plain text. And nobody has done that yet.⁷

Similarly, John Piper calls Owen’s *DDDC* “a difficult but compelling book” that is

probably his most famous and most influential book. It was published in 1647 when Owen was thirty-one years old. It is the fullest and probably the most persuasive book ever written on the doctrine sometimes called “limited atonement,” or better called “definite atonement” or “particular redemption.” . . . *The Death of Death* is a great and powerful book—it kept me up for many evenings several decades ago as I was trying to decide what I really believed about the third point of Calvinism (limited atonement).⁸

Both Packer and Piper claim that Owen’s *DDDC* is the finest defense of definite atonement,⁹ and Packer boldly asserts that one cannot disprove the doctrine of definite atonement without disproving Owen’s *DDDC*.¹⁰ One of the most popular books on Calvinism calls *DDDC* “the most thorough defense of the doctrine of limited atonement ever written.”¹¹ Robert L. Reymond declares of Owen’s *DDDC*, “No Arminian has ever answered his argument.”¹² Assertions like these provoked me to read and evaluate Owen’s *DDDC* 360 years after he first penned it. Owen is a theological giant,¹³ and *DDDC* is one of his greatest theological legacies.¹⁴ This essay summarizes and evaluates Owen’s argument in *DDDC*.

1. A SUMMARY OF OWEN’S *THE DEATH OF DEATH IN THE DEATH OF CHRIST*

DDDC defends definite atonement based on the atonement’s teleological nature. Owen’s thesis is that the Trinity planned, accomplished, and applied the atonement for the same humans, namely, the elect. That is, the Trinity did not plan and accomplish the atonement for all humans without exception and then apply the atonement to an exclusive subset of that group, namely, the

elect or those who would believe.¹⁵

Owen's preface (149–56) mentions that he worked on *DDDC* for more than seven years (149), from age twenty-four to thirty-one. Advocates of "the general ransom" usually hold out five "flourishing pretences" for their view (152–54): it

- (1) exalts God's glory by highlighting his "good-will and kindnesses" and "free grace"
- (2) magnifies "the worth and value" of Christ's satisfaction by extending it "to all"
- (3) is supported "by many texts of Scripture"
- (4) displays God's "love and free grace"
- (5) comforts those who have personal "doubts and perplexities" about Christ's death

Owen strongly disagrees, and he designed *DDDC* "to be purely polemical" (421). *DDDC* divides into four major sections or "books," and what follows briefly traces Owen's argument.¹⁶ The headings are somewhat reductionistic since the whole book argues for definite atonement by refuting and responding to the objections of general atonement. Arguments that overlap in various sections of this essay reflect overlap in *DDDC*. Except for the footnotes, the following summary of *DDDC* is presented from Owen's point of view.

1.1. BOOKS 1–2: ARGUMENTS FOR DEFINITE ATONEMENT

Books 1 (157–200) and 2 (200–36) argue that the Trinity planned and executed the atonement as a means to effect exactly the end that they intended, namely, to save certain people.

1.1.1. The Ends and Means of the Atonement: Teleological Distinctions

At the heart of the debate about the extent of the atonement is the distinction between the ends and the means. The "end" of something is what an agent intends to accomplish in it and by it (160). It is a carefully designed goal. The "means" is what an agent uses or does to accomplish an end (160). The logical and chronological order is fourfold:

- (1) desiring an end,
- (2) designing the means to that end,
- (3) employing those means, and then
- (4) accomplishing that end (160–61).

For example, David's son Absalom

- (1) desired to be king,
- (2) planned to revolt against his father,
- (3) revolted, and then
- (4) set himself up as king (160).

Unlike any other persons, God always accomplishes exactly what he designs; he flawlessly uses his planned means precisely to accomplish his desired ends (162).

The ends or goals of the atonement involve both what (1) the Father "intended *in it*" and (2) "was effectually fulfilled and accomplished *by it*" (156). First, the Father intended or purposed to save certain sinners from their sins (157–58). Second, the atonement accomplished or effected eternal redemption, namely, reconciliation, justification, sanctification, adoption, and glorification (158–59). General atonement necessarily results in one of two options: either (1) "God and Christ failed" to accomplish what they intended or (2) all humans will be saved (i.e., universalism) (159).

The means of the atonement involves Jesus' death, the culmination of his perfect obedience in life. There are two basic types of means: some are inherently good, and others are not inherently good but serve merely to accomplish the desired end (162). For example, studying as a means to achieve knowledge is inherently "the most noble employment of the soul," but "cutting off a leg or arm" as a means to stay alive, drinking "a bitter potion" as a means to be healthy, or throwing a ship's goods overboard as a means "to prevent shipwreck" fit the latter category (162–63). Jesus' death fits the latter category (180).

1.1.2. The Agents of the Atonement: The Trinity

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are each Agents involved in planning and accomplishing

the end for which the atonement was the means. First, the Father is the atonement's "chief author" (163). Although "instrumental causes" in Jesus' death included Satan and ill-willed humans, God himself predestined the means of Jesus' death (Acts 4:28), and Jesus willingly gave up his life, which no one could take from him (163). The Father's role involves "two peculiar acts": sending and punishing his Son (163). First, the Father sends his Son to die (163–71). This is why Scripture sometimes calls the Father "our Saviour" (164). Second, the Father places "the punishment of sins" on the Son, whose atonement serves as a penal substitution (171–74). This raises a "dilemma" for Universalists:

God imposed his wrath due unto, and Christ underwent the pains of hell for, either [1] all the sins of all men, or [2] all the sins of some men, or [3] some sins of all men. If the last, some sins of all men, then have all men some sins to answer for, and so shall no man be saved.... If the second, that is it which we affirm, that Christ in their stead and room suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the world. If the first, why, then, are not all freed from the punishment of all their sins? You will say, "Because of their unbelief; they will not believe." But this unbelief, is it a sin or not? If not, why should they be punished for it? If it be, then Christ underwent the punishment due to it, or not. If so, then why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died from partaking of the fruit of his death? If he did not, then did he not die for all their sins. Let them choose which part they will (173–74; cf. 234).

Second, the Son voluntarily and willingly participates in his Father's plan, which involves incarnation, sacrificial offering ("oblation"), and intercession (174–77). Third, the Holy Spirit participated in Jesus' incarnation, sacrificial offering, and resurrection (178–79).

1.1.3. *The Means of the Atonement: Jesus' Mediatorial Sacrificial Offering and Intercession*

As the mediatorial High Priest, Jesus is the means through which the Father accomplishes his intended end, and Jesus' mediatorial role involves two facets: sacrificial offering and intercession.¹⁷ The objects of Jesus' sacrificial offering and intercession are coextensive, that is, the people for whom Jesus intercedes are the same people for whom he died (181–201, 208). "That he died for *all* and intercedeth only for *some* will scarcely be squared" with Rom 8:32–34 (182). The very nature of the office of priest requires both offering and intercession (183–84). By dividing Jesus' mediatorial role so that his objects are not coextensive, universal atonement undercuts a Christian's comfort and assurance (186). In Jesus' incarnation, sacrificial offering, resurrection, ascension, and intercession, there is "not one word of this general mediation for all. Nay, if you will hear himself, he denies in plain terms to mediate for all" (190) in John 17:9, where "Christ refused to pray for the world, in opposition to his elect" (177). Further, 1 Tim 2:5 does not claim that Christ Jesus is the Mediator for all humans without exception (190).

1.1.4. *The Divine Design of the Atonement: Tying Up Teleological "Loose Ends"*

"The main thing" on which the controversy turns and "the greatest weight" of the issue is tied to the atonement's design (200). One alternative to definite atonement is blasphemous: the Trinity lacks "wisdom, power, perfection, and sufficiency," and Jesus' sacrificial offering and intercession are unable to accomplish the desired end (201, 224). The atonement's "supreme and ultimate" end is "the glory of God," who is himself "the chiefest good" (201). An "intermediate and subservient" end "is the *bringing of us unto God*," in which salvation is the end and faith is the means (202). Scripture's support of definite atonement falls under three categories.

(1) The Father and Son share the same intended end (i.e., “counsel, purpose, mind, intention, and will”) for the atonement (208–11). They effected exactly what they intended to accomplish for the same people, and “Christ died for all and only those” for whom the intended accomplishments are applied (211).

(2) The atonement actually accomplished and effected (or procured or produced) redemption, forgiveness of sins, deliverance, reconciliation, sanctification, and eternal life (211–14). If Jesus’ death actually accomplishes this, “then he died only for those” who experience these accomplishments; but since all humans without exception do not experience these accomplishments, “they cannot be said to be the proper object of the death of Christ.... The inference is plain from Scripture and experience, and the whole argument (if I mistake not) solid” (214).

(3) The humans for whom Jesus died are the same humans for whom the Father and Son planned, accomplished, and applied the atonement. Scripture describes this group as “many,” “sons,” “sheep,” “children of God,” “brethren,” “elect,” “his people,” and his “church” (214–15).

Thomas More makes a series of objectionable charges in this regard (215–21). More claims, “there are more ends of the death of Christ” than that of definite atonement. More is incorrect because the only end is “the fruit of his ransom and propitiation, directly intended, and not by accident.... The end of any work [by God] is the same with the fruit, effect, or product of it” (216). More claims that Scripture does not claim that Jesus died “only for many, or only for his sheep.” An “undeniable consequence,” however, of statements that Jesus died for his sheep or church is that he did not die for those who are not his sheep or church. “If this be adding to the word of God (being only an exposition and unfolding of his mind therein), who ever spake from the word of God and was guiltless?” (217). Furthermore, in the very passage where Jesus says that he “gave his life for his sheep” (John 10:11, 15, 26), he adds

that “some are not of his sheep,” and if this is “not equivalent to his sheep only, I know not what is” (217).

1.1.5. The Accomplishment and Application of the Atonement: Distinct but Inseparable Facets

Accomplishment (“impetration”) refers to what Jesus’ death and intercession obtain, meritoriously purchase, acquire, or secure; application, which occurs “upon our believing” (223), refers to the actual enjoyment of what was accomplished (222–36). Arminians and Amyraldians distinguish two groups of people with reference to the atonement’s accomplishment and application: (1) the accomplishment is for all humans without exception, and (2) the application is for only those who believe (222–23). This distinction is fundamentally flawed because it misrepresents the teleological nature of the atonement (223–26).

The atonement’s accomplishment and application are distinct but inseparable (232–36). If a man intends to redeem a captive, he pays the price (i.e., accomplishment) and the captive is freed (i.e., application) (223). Although faith is the conditional means by which the atonement is applied to certain people, faith itself “is actually purchased and procured for us” unconditionally (223–24, 227); Jesus died in order that God’s elect would believe (235). The atonement is not like medicine in a cabinet that is generally available to be applied to whomever uses it; this analogy fails because the medicine was not prepared only for specific people (232–33).¹⁸ The same people for whom Jesus accomplished redemption are the same people to whom he applies it (224–26, 232). Jesus’ atonement is the means for saving certain people, exactly like the Trinity designed. If some people are the objects of the atonement’s accomplishment but not its application, then Christ fails to reach the designed end (224) and is “but a half mediator” (235). Scripture “perpetually” joins accomplishment and application (225–26), and the doctrine of reprobation does not allow their separation (227). General atonement is contrary

to common sense, reason, and Scripture (233). The atonement's value, worth, or dignity, however, is "infinite and immeasurable; fit for the accomplishing of any end and the procuring of any good, for all and everyone for whom it was intended, had they been millions of men more than ever were created" (231).¹⁹

1.2. BOOK 3: ARGUMENTS AGAINST GENERAL ATONEMENT

Book 3 (236–94) presents sixteen arguments against general atonement. The thesis common to these arguments is that (1) the atonement by design actually saves certain people and not others and (2) the dilemma of general atonement is either universalism or the Trinity's failure to effect exactly the end that they intended.

Argument 1 (236–38): Jesus' death ratified "the new covenant of grace," which is for certain people, not all without exception.

Argument 2 (238–40): Faith comes by hearing the good news about Christ (Rom 10:17), and it is unbecoming of God's wisdom to send Jesus to die for all humans without exception while knowing that millions of humans never hear this good news (238). "What wise man would pay a ransom for the delivery of those captives which he is sure shall never come to the knowledge of any such payment made, and so never be the better for it?" (238). Or what physician with "a medicine that will cure all diseases" would intend to heal all without exception, but then tell relatively few people about his medicine (239)?

Argument 3 (240–43): To say that Jesus *conditionally* died for all humans without exception is "extreme madness" (241) and "a vain fruitless flourish" (242). It is as if a person promises "dead men great rewards upon condition they live again of themselves" (242). If God designed Jesus' death to save all humans without exception on the condition of their faith; if Jesus' death does not secure that faith; and, if humans are inherently unable to exercise faith, then how is it that any are saved (243)? Jesus' death purchased salvation, which

includes the gift of faith (243).

Argument 4 (243–45): If in "the eternal purpose of God," humans divide into two exclusive categories, and if Scripture says that Jesus died for one of these categories and nowhere that he died for the other category, then he did not die for all humans without exception (243). The conclusion is valid because the conditions are true. Scripture distinguishes between two exclusive categories of humans: those God loves and those God hates; those he knows and those he does not know; those appointed to life and those fitted for destruction; elect and reprobate; sheep and goats (243–44). Scripture explicitly says that Jesus died for the former category and nowhere that he died for the other (see argument 5). Some, however, may affirm that Jesus died for the former category, but object that Scripture never says that he died "only" for the former category. This argument, however,

is of no value; for is it not, without any forced interpretation, in common sense, and according to the usual course of speaking, to distinguish men into two such opposite conditions as elect and reprobate, sheep and goats, and then to affirm that he died for his elect, [is it not] equivalent to this, he died for his elect only? Is not the sense as clearly restrained as if that restrictive term ["only"] had been added? Or is that term always added in the Scripture in every indefinite assertion, which yet must of necessity be limited and restrained as if it were expressly added? as where our Saviour saith, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," John xiv. 6;—he doth not say that he *only* is so, and yet of necessity it must be so understood. As also in that, Col. i. 19, "It pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;"—he doth not express the limitation "only," and yet it were no less than blasphemy to suppose a possibility of extending the affirmation to any other. So that this exception, notwithstanding this argument, is, as far as I can see, unanswerable (245).

Argument 5 (45–46): “The Scripture nowhere saith Christ died for *all men*, much less for all and every man” (245). Since Scripture clearly and repeatedly says that Jesus died for a specific group, “it must be clearly proved that where *all* is mentioned, it cannot be taken for all believers, all his elect, his whole church, all the children God gave him, some of all sorts” to conclude it teaches general atonement (246). The burden of proof here is on advocates of general atonement.

Argument 6 (246–49): Jesus died as a substitute for only certain people; he died in their place. He freed them from God’s wrath, and he satisfied God’s justice for *only their* sins—not the sins of all humans without exception (246–47). First, general atonement requires a double payment for sins: both Jesus’ death and eternal punishment (247). Second, Jesus did not intend to satisfy God’s justice for those “innumerable souls” who were already “in hell” (247). “Did God send his Son, did Christ come to die, for Cain and Pharaoh, damned so many ages before his suffering?” (248). Third,

If Christ died in the stead of all men, and made satisfaction for their sins, then he did it for all their sins, or only for some of their sins. If for some only, who then can be saved? If for all, why then are all not saved? They say it is because of their unbelief; they will not believe, and therefore are not saved. That unbelief, is it a sin, or is it not? If it be not, how can it be a cause of damnation? If it be, Christ died for it, or he did not. If he did not, then he died not for all the sins of all men. If he did, why is this an obstacle to their salvation? Is there any new shift to be invented for this? or must we be contented with the old, namely, because they do not believe? that is, Christ did not die for their unbelief, or rather, did not by his death remove their unbelief, because they would not believe, or because they would not themselves remove their unbelief; or he died for their unbelief conditionally, that they were not unbelievers. These do not seem to

me to be sober assertions (249).

Argument 7 (249): Jesus died for certain people as their Mediator, a role that includes his sacrificial offering and intercession. Jesus is not a Mediator for all humans without exception, so general atonement “is a dishonest subterfuge that hath no ground in Scripture, and would make our Saviour a half mediator in respect of some, which is an unsavoury expression” (249).

Argument 8 (249–53): Jesus died for the sanctification of certain people. If Jesus’ blood “doth wash, purge, cleanse, and sanctify them for whom it was shed, or for whom he was a sacrifice, then certainly he died, shed his blood, or was a sacrifice only for them that in the event are washed, purged, cleansed, and sanctified,” and it “is most apparent” that this is not the case for all humans without exception (250). Jesus’ death effects sanctification, which is “the certain fruit and effect of the death of Christ in all them for whom he died; but all and every one are not partakers of this sanctification, this purging, cleansing, and working of holiness: therefore, Christ died not for all and every one” (252).

Argument 9 (253–57): Jesus’ death obtained and merited the blessings that he freely gives to certain people, and this includes faith, which is an “absolute indispensable necessity unto salvation” (253).

If the fruit and effect procured and wrought by the death of Christ absolutely, not depending on any condition in man to be fulfilled, be not common to all, then did not Christ die for all; but the supposal is true, as is evident in the grace of faith, which being procured by the death of Christ, to be absolutely bestowed on them for whom he died, is not common to all: therefore, our Saviour did not die for all (257).

Argument 10 (257–58): Jesus’ death was the antitype of which Israel’s deliverance from Egypt was the type. There is “just proportion ... between

the types and the things typified,” so “only the elect of God, his church and chosen ones, are redeemed by Jesus Christ” (258).

Arguments 11–15 (258–90): General atonement is incompatible with the very nature of “[11] *redemption*, [12] *reconciliation*, [13] *satisfaction*, [14] *merit*, [15] *dying for us*” (259). General atonement is “too long for the bed, and must be cropped at the head or heels” (259). If Jesus accomplished these five benefits for all humans without exception, then universalism is true; universalism, however, is not true, nor is general atonement (261, 264, 287–90). Jesus did not die to satisfy God’s justice as a penal substitution (280–85) for reprobates like Cain and Pharaoh, who experience eternal punishment for their sins; otherwise, there would be a double-payment for their sins (273, 289–90). “A second payment of a debt once paid, or a requiring of it, is not answerable to the justice of God demonstrated in setting forth Christ to be a propitiation for our sins, Rom. iii. 25” (273). “How comes it that God never gives a discharge to innumerable souls, though their debts be paid?” (273). Jesus’ “priestly office” included bearing “the punishment due to our sins, to make atonement with God, by undergoing his wrath, and reconciling him to sinners upon the satisfaction made to his justice: therefore cannot these things be denied without damnable error” (282). “The elect do, in their several generations, lie under all the wrath of God in respect of merit and procurement, though not in respect of actual endurance—in respect of guilt, not present punishment” (285). “To affirm Christ to die for all men is the readiest way to prove that he died for no man, in the sense Christians have hitherto believed, and to hurry poor souls into the bottom of Socinian blasphemies” (290).²⁰

Argument 16 (290–94): “Some particular places of Scripture, clearly and distinctly in themselves” affirm definite atonement.

(1) Gen 3:15. “Christ died for no more than God promised unto him that he should die for. But

God did not promise to him all,” but only the woman’s seed, namely, the elect (290–91).

(2) Matt 7:23; John 10:14–17; 1 Cor 6:20. On the last day, Jesus will profess to some that he never knew them, yet he laid down his life specifically for those he knew as his own.

(3) Matt 11:25–26. Jesus did not die for those from whom the Father hid the good news according to his good pleasure.

(4) John 10:11, 15–16, 26–29. Not all humans are Jesus’ sheep, that is, the elect. Jesus as a Shepherd laid down his life for the sheep—not “for goats, and wolves, and dogs.” Thus, “plainly he excludes all other” and means exactly the same thing “as if he had said he did it for them only” (292).

(5) Rom 8:32–34. God’s sending his son to die for the elect is the pinnacle of his expression of love for them. If Jesus died for all humans without exception, then God demonstrates the very same love for reprobates. However, God freely gives “all things that are good” to those for whom Jesus died, and he certainly does not give such things as “faith, grace, and glory” to reprobates. Thus, “we conclude that Christ died not for all.” Christ’s resurrection and intercession “for them for whom he died” affords “two invincible arguments.” First, Jesus’ death has “infallible effects” and “doth infallibly free all them from condemnation for whom he died.” Second, there is a connection “between the death and intercession of Jesus Christ,” that is, Jesus intercedes for those for whom he died. Heb 7:25 affirms that he completely saves those for whom he intercedes. Thus, “it is undeniably apparent that the death of Christ, with the fruits and benefits thereof, belongeth only to the elect of God” (293).

(6) Eph 1:7. “If his blood was shed for all, then all must have a share in those things that are to be had in his blood,” including redemption, which is not experienced by all humans without exception (293–94).

(7) 2 Cor 5:21; Isa 53:5; John 15:13. If Jesus died for all humans without exception, then they would all be “made the righteousness of God in

him” and be saved (294).

(8) John 17:9, 19. Jesus intercedes for the elect and “not for the world” (294).

(9) Eph 5:25. Jesus died for “his church,” and “a man’s own wife is the only allowed object of his conjugal affections” (294).

1.3. BOOK 4: ARGUMENTS AGAINST OBJECTIONS TO DEFINITE ATONEMENT

Book 4 (294–421) refutes exegetical and theological objections to definite atonement.

1.3.1. Exegetical Arguments against Objections to Definite Atonement

Various places in Scripture speak of the atonement with “general and indefinite expressions” (294). Objections to definite atonement invariably appeal to these sorts of texts.

TEN FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES FOR UNDERSTANDING “GENERAL AND INDEFINITE EXPRESSIONS”²¹

(1) Jesus’ death has “infinite worth, value, and dignity” and is “sufficient in itself” to save all humans without exception (295). It could save all humans without exception if that were God’s desired end (295–96; cf. 420), but there is a difference between its sufficient value and efficient accomplishment and application (296). Proponents of general atonement “exceedingly” undervalue its infinite worth, which is foundational for evangelizing all humans without distinction (296–98). Jesus death is infinitely sufficient for universal evangelism even “if there were a thousand worlds” (297). Since gospel preachers do not know God’s secret will, they may “justifiably call upon every man to believe” since “there is enough in the death of Christ to save every one that shall do so” (298).

(2) “Many general expressions in the Scripture” highlight that the new covenant breaks down the dividing-wall between Jews and Gentiles (298–99). Thus, objections to definite atonement based on terms like “*all, all men, all nations, the world, the*

whole world, and the like, are all of them exceeding weak and invalid” (299).

(3) “Man’s duty and God’s purpose” are distinct and have “no connection between them” (299). “The duty of ministers of the gospel” is to evangelize all humans without distinction, “in exhortations, invitations, precepts, threatenings,” but ministers should not worry about God’s secret eternal purpose, namely, “whom he purposeth to save, and whom he hath sent Christ to die for in particular.” Their job is to “command and invite all to repent and believe,” but they do not know to whom God will grant repentance and faith (300).

(4) “The Jews were generally infected with this proud opinion” that salvation belonged exclusively to them, but universal language sharply corrects their “erroneous persuasion” (301–02). General expressions “do not hold out a collective universality, but a general distribution into men of all sorts” (302).

(5) Context determines the equivocal meaning of general expressions using “world” or “all”; the mere presence of those words does not *de facto* substantiate general atonement (302–09). Some advocates of general atonement quote texts with these general expressions “as though the victory were surely theirs,” but “the words themselves, according to the Scripture use, do not necessarily hold out any collective universality” (303). Such an assumption wreaks havoc of passages like John 1:10; 8:26; 12:19; 1 John 5:19; Rev 13:3; Col 1:6; and Rom 1:8 (306–07, 335).

It being evident that the words *world, all the world, the whole world*, do, where taken adjunctively for men in the world, usually and almost always denote only some or many men in the world, distinguished into good or bad, believers or unbelievers, elect or reprobate, by what is immediately in the several places affirmed of them, I see no reason in the world why they should be wrested to any other meaning or sense in the places that are in controversy between us and our opponents (307).

The key distinction is that such general terms may indicate (1) “collectively,” all “without exception” or (2) “distributively,” all without distinction or “all of some sorts” (307). The second sense is ten times more common than the first (307), and to assume the first results in nonsensical interpretations of passages like John 12:32; 6:37 (cf. Rev 5:9); Luke 11:42; Acts 2:17; 10:12; Rom 14:2; 1 Cor 1:5; 1 Tim 2:1–2, 4, 8; Matt 9:35 (308). The use of the OT in the NT substantiates definite atonement because the OT predicts “that *all nations, all flesh, all people, all the ends, families, or kindreds of the earth, the world, the whole earth, the isles, shall be converted,*” but “none doubts but that” this refers only to God’s elect. So “why should the same expression used in the Gospel, and many of them aiming directly to declare the fulfilling of the other, be wire-drawn²² to a large extent, so contrary to the mind of the Holy Ghost?” (309)

(6) Sometimes Scripture describes a group of professing Christians “according to the appearance they have” even though some may be hypocrites (309–10). This is significant for understanding “those places that seem to express a possibility of perishing and eternal destruction to them who are said to be redeemed by the blood of Christ” (310).

(7) Charitable judgments about the genuineness of professing Christians may not be true (310–11).

(8) There is an “*infallible connection*” between “faith and salvation,” not between human responsibility to believe and God’s alleged intention that all without exception believe (311–12).

(9) The gospel should be preached to all without distinction because “the elect and reprobates” are distributed “throughout the whole world” (313). The number who hear the gospel, however, is coextensive with neither general nor definite atonement because (1) some never even hear the gospel and (2) among those who do hear the gospel, the hearing must be accompanied by faith, which God graciously gives

to whom he desires, namely, the very same people for whom Jesus died (314).

(10) Saving faith involves recognizing that sinners cannot save themselves and that only Jesus can save sinners; “resting upon” Jesus “as an all-sufficient Saviour”; and only then rightly inferring that Jesus died particularly for them (314–16).

EXEGESIS OF THREE GROUPS OF DISPUTED TEXTS

Proponents of general atonement cite general terms in three groups of texts to prove that God intended for Jesus to die for all humans without exception and that Jesus’ death is ineffective for some for whom he died. The above principles apply especially to these three groups of disputed texts (316–68).²³

(1) Texts containing the word “world”: John 3:16; 1 John 2:1–2; John 6:51; 2 Cor 5:19; John 1:9, 29; 3:17; 4:42; 1 John 4:14; John 12:46 (319–43)

(2) Texts containing the word “all”: 1 Tim 2:4–6; 2 Pet 3:9; Heb 2:9; 2 Cor 5:14–15; 1 Cor 15:22; Rom 5:18 (343–59)

(3) Texts allegedly depicting the perishing of those for whom Christ died: Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11; 2 Pet 2:1; Heb 10:29 (359–68)

None of these texts substantiates general atonement. To the contrary, these texts uphold definite atonement without any contradiction. Proponents of general atonement cite John 3:16, for example, but a right understanding of God’s love, τὸν κόσμον, and πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων perfectly harmonizes with definite atonement (319–29); as David used Goliath’s own sword to sever Goliath’s head, so proponents of definite atonement may use John 3:16 to refute general atonement (319). The same is true of the other passages, such as ἰλασμός and ὅλου τοῦ κόσμου in 1 John 2:2 (330–38), οἱ πάντες in 2 Cor 5:14–15 (350–52), ὁ ἀδελφός in Rom 14:15 and 1 Cor 8:11 (360–62), and τὸν ἀγοράσαντα αὐτοὺς δεσπότην ἀρνούμενοι in 2 Pet 2:1 (362–64).

REBUTTAL OF THOMAS MORE

Thomas More’s *The Universality of God’s Free Grace* is easily refuted (368–403).²⁴ More is guilty of eisegesis, for example, by “turning indefinite propositions into universals” (372).

1.3.2. THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS AGAINST OBJECTIONS TO DEFINITE ATONEMENT

Some final objections by proponents of general atonement are worth refuting (404–21). Definite atonement is not an obstacle to faith (409–11). General atonement does just the opposite of definite atonement: it devalues rather than exalts God’s free grace and the merit of Jesus’ atonement (411–15; see table 1), and it undermines rather than supports “*gospel consolation*” and assurance (415–21).

2. AN EVALUATION OF OWEN’S THE DEATH OF DEATH IN THE DEATH OF CHRIST

What I perceive to be “weaknesses” and “strengths” in Owen’s *DDDC* is no doubt significantly influenced by my cultural context, and I submit the following evaluation respectfully and corrigibly. Although the weaknesses are not trivial, the strengths more than compensate for them.

2.1. WEAKNESSES

2.1.1. Frustratingly Cumbersome Writing Style

Content aside, Owen’s writing style is frustratingly cumbersome to the modern reader. Owen employs flowery phrases and elaborate sentence structures that tend to prevent readers from discerning his point as they trip over his verbiage. Although verbosity among writers was not unusual even among poets in Owen’s era, Owen

Table 1. Owen’s Antitheses: General vs. Definite Atonement²⁵

UNIVERSALISTS	SCRIPTURAL REDEMPTION
(1) Christ Died for all and every one, elect and reprobate.	(1) Christ died for the elect only.
(2) Most of them for whom Christ died are damned.	(2) All those for whom Christ died are certainly saved.
(3) Christ, by his death, purchased not any saving grace for them for whom he died.	(3) Christ by his death purchased all saving grace for them for whom he died.
(4) Christ took no care for the greatest part of them for whom he died, that ever they should hear one word of his death.	(4) Christ sends the means and reveals the way of life to all them for whom he died.
(5) Christ, in his death, did not ratify nor confirm a covenant of grace with any federates, but only procured by his death that God might, if he would, enter into a new covenant with whom he would, and upon what condition he pleased.	(5) The new covenant of grace was confirmed to all the elect in the blood of Jesus.
(6) Christ might have died, and yet no one be saved.	(6) Christ, by his death, purchased, upon covenant and compact, an assured peculiar people, the pleasure of the Lord prospering to the end of his hand.
(7) Christ had no intention to redeem his church, any more than the wicked seed of the serpent.	(7) Christ loved his church, and gave himself for it.
(8) Christ died not for the infidelity of any.	(8) Christ died for the infidelity of the elect.

seems to excel them all. Even modern readers trying to avoid an unfair anachronistic judgment cannot help but wish that Owen would have followed the classic advice of Strunk and White: “Omit needless words.”²⁶

2.1.2. Frustratingly Complex Argumentation

Owen’s argumentation is frustratingly complex. *DDDC* does not appeal to most English-speaking people today because it addresses a thick, deep, and heavy subject in a dense, complicated, exhausting, repetitive way. It certainly does not read like a compelling novel that one cannot put down. When Owen acknowledges at one point, “Although I fear that in this particular I have already intrenched upon the reader’s patience” (221), it is hard to disagree with him, both in that instance and in general throughout the volume.²⁷

2.1.3. Overstated Elevation of Definite Atonement’s Importance

General atonement deeply offends Owen because it robs God of his glory for planning, accomplishing, and applying a definite atonement. Owen’s elevation of the relative importance of definite atonement, however, is overstated. Packer, for instance, describes *DDDC* as “a polemical piece, designed to show, among other things, that the doctrine of universal redemption is unscriptural and destructive to the gospel.”²⁸ “Destructive to the gospel” is strong language that could use qualification,²⁹ and Owen uses such strong language repeatedly in *DDDC*.³⁰ I agree with Owen that general atonement is unbiblical, but it is not necessarily heresy.³¹ Owen does not call it heresy, but he lacks a single gracious word for it in this regard. I agree with Owen that definite atonement is biblical, but that does not mean that those who hold to general atonement are compromising the gospel. Historic Arminians, Amyraldians, and Calvinists all agree on the fundamentals of the faith, that is, what some would call first-order or first-level doctrines. First-level doctrines are so important that one cannot knowingly deny them and still be a Christian. The extent of the atone-

ment is decidedly *not* such a doctrine.³² (§3 below elaborates on this by suggesting ways that believers should avoid unhealthy schism over the extent of the atonement.)

2.1.4. Excessively Uncharitable Rhetoric

Owen’s anti-Arminian and anti-Amyraldian rhetoric is excessively uncharitable. Perhaps some measure of leniency should be extended to Owen since this type of persuasive speaking was less offensive in his historical context. The application for contemporary theologians, however, is that rhetoric such as *ad hominem* and cutting, unkind, derogatory ridicule has no place in Christian argumentation, especially as a characteristic tendency (cf. 2 Tim 2:24–26). Pragmatically, such rhetoric offends rather than persuades one’s opponents.³³

Consider the following examples.³⁴ “Free-will” is “corrupted nature’s deformed darling, the Pallas or beloved self-conception of darkened minds” (150). General atonement “seems to us blasphemously injurious to the wisdom, power, and perfection of God, as likewise derogatory to the worth and value of the death of Christ” (159). Some people deny that the people for whom Jesus intercedes are the same people for whom he died, and Owen claims to remove their objections “as a man removeth dung until it be all gone” (187), exclaiming, “I cannot be persuaded that any man in his right wits would once propose it” (188). Some propose that Jesus is a double Mediator (a general Mediator for all without exception and a special mediator for some), but this is “so barbarous and remote from common sense,—in substance such a wild, unchristian madness, as contempt would far better suit it than a reply” (189). It is an “uncouth distinction” (190). Based on Heb 2:9; 9:26; John 1:29; and 1 John 2:2, some claim that Jesus is a propitiation for all humans without exception, but these words “have no tolerable sense,” making the words of Scripture “wrested and corrupted, not only to the countenance of error, but to bear a part in unreasonable expressions” (198).

Thomas More’s argument in *Universality of Free Grace*

serves only to declare with what *copia verborum* the unlearned eloquence of the author is woven withal; for such terrible names imposed on that which we know not well how to gainsay is a strong argument of a weak cause. When the Pharisees were not able to resist the spirit whereby our Saviour spake, they call him “devil and Samaritan.” Waters that make a noise are usually but shallow. It is a proverb among the Scythians, that the “dogs which bark most bite least” (215).

More’s words “bear no tolerable sense” (216).

We must be content to view such evasions as these, all whose strength is in incongruous expressions, in incoherent structure, cloudy, windy phrases, all tending to raise such a mighty fog as that the business in hand might not be perceived, being lost in this smoke and vapour, cast out to darken the eyes and amuse the senses of poor seduced souls.... What ... is there to be picked out of this confused heap of words which we have recited? ... What a nothing is that heap of confusion which is opposed to it! (218).

“How blind are they who admire him for a combatant who is skilful only at fencing with his own shadow! and yet with such empty janglings as these, proving what none denies, answering what none objects, is the greatest part of Mr More’s book stuffed” (221).

Counter-arguments advanced by adherents of general atonement are “empty clamours” (303), “poison,” and “venom” (316) that pervert Scripture and abuse reason (317). Such proponents are “lying in wait to deceive” (316) and “poor pretenders” who “are indeed very children” (317). They are “poor deluded things” who “exceedingly betray their own conceited ignorance, when, with great pomp, they hold out the broken pieces of an old Arminian sophism with acclamations of grace to this *new* discovery (for so they think of all that is new to them)” (311–12; cf. 313; 404). Their argu-

ment that Jesus’ dying for the “world” means that he died for all humans without exception “is so weak, ridiculous, and sophistically false, that it cannot but be evident to any one” (318). “A weaker argument, I dare say, was never by rational men produced in so weighty a cause” (319).

Thomas More’s argument for general atonement from 2 Pet 3:9 “comes not much short of extreme madness and folly” (348). More argues for a parallel between the extent of Adam’s sin and Christ’s death: “Never, surely, was a rotten conclusion bottomed upon more loose and tottering principles, nor the word of God more boldly corrupted for the maintenance of any error, since the name of Christian was known” (355). More wrongly calls his arguments “reasons” because they are unreasonable (369). “Such logic is fit to maintain such divinity” (370). He deceives himself and others “for want of logic” that “is exceedingly ridiculous” (374). He employs “the whole Pelagian poison of free-will and Popish merit of congruity, with Arminian sufficient grace, in its whole extent and universality” (381). More’s total argument is a “heap of words, called arguments, reasons, and proofs” with a “manner of expression” that is “obscure, uncouth, and oftentimes unintelligible,” a “way of inference” that is “childish, weak, and ridiculous,” and exegesis that is “perverse, violent, mistaken, through ignorance, heedlessness, and corruption of judgment, in direct opposition to the mind and will of God revealed” in Scripture (403).

“What then, I pray, is this your universal free grace? Is it not universally a figment of your own brains? or is it not a new name for that old idol free-will? ... Are not the two great aims of their free grace to mock God and exalt themselves?” (411; cf. 413)

Finally, Owen’s label for definite atonement in Table 1 above, “Scriptural Redemption” (as opposed to labeling advocates of general atonement as “Universalists” [414–15]), is a rather biased label! It reminds one of people who piously take the higher ground by referring to themselves

as “Biblicists” rather than Arminians or Calvinists.

2.1.5. *Significantly Improvable Theological Method*

A governing rule for those evaluating a book is to refrain from faulting an author for not writing the book *they* would have written. At the risk of violating that standard, I would suggest that Owen’s theological method is significantly improvable.

The theological disciplines break down into at least five categories: exegesis, biblical theology (BT), historical theology (HT), systematic theology (ST), and practical theology (PT). Shrewd theologians employ a theological hermeneutic that recognizes the complex interrelationships between these disciplines, while recognizing that they build on one another with exegesis as the foundation.³⁵ *DDDC* employs exegesis and ST almost exclusively with very little BT, HT,³⁶ or PT. Consequently, Owen’s ST conclusions, which are superb, are often based on the assumed meaning of proof-texts rather than proven exegesis.³⁷ His ST conclusions could be significantly fortified with a more rigorous theological method, particularly by giving more attention to BT.³⁸ This is not to charge Owen with being an un-shrewd theologian who fails to recognize BT, HT, and PT.³⁹ Rather, it highlights a methodological area that, if improved, could significantly strengthen his thesis.

2.2. **STRENGTHS**

2.2.1. *Sober and Passionate Preoccupation with Scripture*

Foundational to Owen’s theological method is his recognition that Scripture is the final authority.⁴⁰ Consequently, *DDDC* is soberly and passionately preoccupied with Scripture, text after text after text.

Owen’s original work could never be a best-seller in a culture like contemporary America, where Christian bookstores are stocked with psychological self-help books that aim to make money by making individuals feel better about

themselves. The first words that drip from Owen’s pen in the preface create a mood of sobriety that *DDDC* maintains: “READER, If thou intendest to go any farther, I would entreat thee to stay here a little. If thou art, as many in this pretending age, *a sign or title gazer*, and comest into books as Cato into the theatre, to go out again,—thou hast had thy entertainment; farewell!” (149).

Piper remarks, “Owen loves the cross and knows what happened there better than anyone I have read.”⁴¹ This is the case in *DDDC* as in Owen’s other writings. *DDDC* considers what Scripture says about the extent of the atonement and evidences Owen’s consuming preoccupation with (i.e., meditation on) Scripture. The result is that *DDDC*, although polemical, has rich devotional value. It is worshipful. Owen stands amazed at the foot of the cross and marvels at how big God is and how small humans are. He exalts God’s rich love and wisdom. And he is deeply offended that others would denigrate one bit of God’s glory that he deserves for designing the atonement efficiently for particular people.

2.2.2. *Appropriate and Commendable Use of Logic*

God is not irrational, and he expects believers to be rational when interpreting and applying his revelation.⁴² Logic is occasionally necessary for arriving at conclusions that are not explicit in the text such as God’s tri-unity or Jesus’ two natures united in one person without division. Jesus himself expected the Sadducees to use such logic with reference to the resurrection (Matt 22:31–32). Owen appropriately and commendably uses “sound or restored reason”⁴³ to “connect the dots” to defend definite atonement exegetically and systematically.⁴⁴ *DDDC* “is a masterpiece in the subordinate use of logic in theology, where valid consequences are granted.”⁴⁵

2.2.3. *Relatively Thorough and Cumulatively Convincing Argument*

Although *DDDC* is exhausting to read, it is also

exhaustive; it remains the most thorough defense of definite atonement in print over 360 years after Owen penned it. Owen's repeated piling of argument on top of argument creates a cumulative case that is convincing.⁴⁶

3. APPLICATION: TEN PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO BELIEVERS FOR AVOIDING UNHEALTHY SCHISM OVER THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT

It is an understatement to say that the extent of the atonement can be a controversial issue among Christians. Unfortunately, the doctrine of the extent of the atonement is often inflammatory, and there are many ways to create unhealthy schism over it. Regardless of whether believers hold to general or definite atonement, they can hold to their position in an unhealthy, divisive way. The following practical applications suggest errors that believers should avoid for the sake of unity in Christ's body.

(1) Believers should avoid uncharitably denigrating other positions, including both the proponents and their arguments.⁴⁷ Christian conversations and debates should be characterized by respect and graciousness. Intramural arguments among Christians are not merely between fellow human beings created in God's image, but brothers and sisters "for whom Christ died" (Rom 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11).

(2) Believers should avoid setting up and tearing down "straw men," but instead represent the position of others so accurately that adherents of that position are satisfied with the representation. For example, if a Calvinist is disagreeing with Amyraldism, the Calvinist should describe Amyraldism in a way that an Amyraldian would not find objectionable. This requires doing one's homework by carefully reading the best literature by proponents of other views. One of the most common straw men for definite atonement, for example, is that it eliminates the need for evangelism—a charge overwhelmingly rebutted, not only in Owen's

DDDC, but also historically in the works of other Calvinists such as Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), George Whitefield (1714–1770), William Carey (1761–1834), Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834–1892), David Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981), and John Piper (1946–).

(3) Believers should avoid viewing other positions as heresy,⁴⁸ distinguishing them from the extremes of both universalism and hyper-Calvinism. Universalism affirms that all humans without exception eventually will be saved and denies the existence of eternal punishment.⁴⁹ Hyper-Calvinism excessively maximizes God's sovereignty and minimizes human responsibility with the result that there is no need for evangelism.⁵⁰ Both are grave errors, but Arminianism, Amyraldism, and Calvinism are guilty of neither.

(4) Believers should avoid insufficiently defining their position in a way that does not meaningfully contrast with other positions. Specifically, they should not define their position with the phrase "sufficient for all, efficient for the elect" unless they carefully define every word in the phrase and show how their view contrasts with other positions. Arminians, Amyraldians, and Calvinists alike have used that elastic phrase to describe their position, resulting in confusion rather than clarity and precision.⁵¹ Although the phrase may defuse tensions in many situations, it blurs distinctions and, therefore, is unhelpful to use for defining a position.

(5) Believers should avoid piously claiming that their view is the result of BT and not ST. All positions involve ST because they use logic to correlate biblical texts in order to answer the question, "What does the whole Bible teach about the extent of the atonement?" The answer to this question reflects tensions in other doctrines (See Table 2).

Table 2. Doctrinal Tensions⁵²

DOCTRINE	TENSION	EXPLANATIONS TO RESOLVE THE TENSION
God's Tri-Unity	A. There is one God.	Arians (e.g., Jehovah's Witnesses) deny A.
	B. Three persons are called God.	Tritheists deny B.
	C. Those three persons are distinct.	Modalists and Sabellians deny C.
Christ's person	A. Christ is fully God.	Ebionites and Arians deny A.
	B. Christ is fully human.	Gnostics/Docetists and Appollinarians deny B.
	C. Christ is one person.	Nestorians deny C.
The problem of evil	A. God is all-good	Some Calvinists (e.g., Gordon Clark) qualify A.
	B. God is all-powerful and all-wise.	Finitists (e.g., Edgar S. Brightman) deny B.
	C. Evil exists.	Pantheists (e.g., Benedict Spinoza) and adherents of Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science deny C.
The extent of the atonement	A. The atonement is universal.	Calvinists qualify A.
	B. The atonement is effectual.	Arminians deny B, and Amyraldians deny or qualify B.
	C. Only some people will be saved.	Universalists deny C.

With reference to the extent of the atonement, like Owen's *DDDC*, I would qualify A (in Table 2) by saying that the atonement is (1) unlimited in its sufficiency, value, and availability and (2) definite in its intention, accomplishment, and application. The adjective "universal" (not "unlimited") in the sense of "all without distinction" genuinely and adequately modifies "intention, accomplishment, and application" in a manner consistent with scriptural usage. Calvinists, Arminians, and Amyraldians all "limit" the atonement: Calvinists limit its extent, and the others limit its efficacy.

The point is that each "system" or approach to the extent of the atonement seeks to resolve apparent tensions in Scripture. From the Amyraldian/Arminian perspective, those who deny an unlimited atonement do not satisfactorily account for A. From the Calvinist perspective, those who deny a definite atonement do not satisfactorily account for B. This is not as simple as saying that definite atonement is ST and that general atonement is BT. Both positions involve ST.

(6) Believers should avoid blowing the extent of the atonement out of proportion. This doctrine

is not necessarily⁵³ at the heart of the gospel, nor is it the primary facet of the atonement that Scripture emphasizes.⁵⁴ Arminians, Amyraldians, and Calvinists agree on the atonement's (1) universal availability to all without distinction, (2) definite application to all who repent and believe, and (3) infinite merit or sufficiency to save all humans without exception.⁵⁵ Whether one holds to definite or general atonement, it is a mistake to magnify a position's distinguishing features to the neglect of other doctrines that are much more significant and clear in Scripture.

Scripture could be more explicit regarding the extent of the atonement.⁵⁶ For example, Scripture distinctly emphasizes the universality of human sinfulness by using language that is more precise and is unequivocally unlimited, extending to all humans without exception.⁵⁷ Perhaps the most effective way to communicate this through language is with absolute negatives, which are indisputably clear and unambiguously inclusive. For example, "Absalom has struck down *all* the king's sons, and *not one* of them is left" (2 Sam 13:30 NASB).⁵⁸ Absolute negative language clarifies in

order to avoid misunderstanding and emphasizes universality without exception. That is why when God wants to emphasize that every single human without exception is sinful, he expresses it with absolute negatives: “There is *none* righteous, *not even one*; ... *all* have turned aside, *together they* have become useless; there is *none* who does good, there is *not even one*” (Rom 3:10, 12 NASB).⁵⁹ This language is indisputably unambiguous. God could use this type of language with reference to the extent of the atonement, but he does not. God has not stressed an unlimited nature of the extent of the atonement like he has the doctrine of sin. Scripture could say, “Christ died for *x* (e.g., “all humans” or “the whole world”); there is *not one* human for whom Jesus did not die.” That would be a strong case for general atonement.

(7) Believers should avoid criticizing evangelistic appeals to unbelievers that say “God loves you”⁶⁰ or “Jesus died for you.” A Calvinist can tell unbelievers, “Jesus died for you,” because unbelievers generally understand the conjunction “for” in that sentence to mean that the benefits of Jesus’ death are available if they repent and believe.⁶¹

(8) Believers should avoid requiring adherence to their view when flexibility is appropriate. For example, a Reformed seminary that adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith as its doctrinal statement is not likely to hire a professor who holds to general atonement, nor is an Arminian seminary likely to hire a professor who holds to definite atonement—and rightly so. There is something healthy, however, about a conservative evangelical seminary that allows flexibility on this issue as long as professors hold their view in a non-schismatic, non-crusading way. The same applies with reference to membership requirements for local churches.

(9) Believers should avoid giving the impression that complete understanding is possible regarding the extent of the atonement. They should play the “mystery” card neither too early nor late, recognizing that the pinnacle of doxology is praising God for being infinitely greater than finite minds can

ever comprehend (Rom 11:33–36; cf. Deut 29:29).

(10) Believers should avoid holding their position with sinful pride. The cross of Christ is central to the Christian faith, and those discussing issues inseparably related to the cross are “on holy ground” that should be profoundly humbling. Carl F. H. Henry asked precisely the right question: “How on earth can anyone be arrogant when standing beside the cross?”⁶²

CONCLUSION

Owen’s *DDDC* is a constructive and polemical defense of definite atonement. Its thesis is that the Trinity planned, accomplished, and applied the atonement for only the elect. Books 1–2 argue for definite atonement; Book 3 argues against general atonement; and Book 4 argues against objections to definite atonement.

Unfortunately, *DDDC* has (1) a frustratingly cumbersome writing style, (2) complex argumentation that is challenging to follow at times, (3) an overstatement of definite atonement’s importance, (4) divisive, uncharitable rhetoric, and (5) a theological method that is significantly improvable. Its strengths, however, are more formidable: it is (1) soberly and passionately preoccupied with Scripture, (2) appropriately and commendably logical, and (3) relatively thorough and cumulatively convincing.

Packer is right: Owen addressed the extent of the atonement with unique comprehensiveness, requiring that any who addresses the subject must deal with *DDDC*.⁶³ But Owen’s *DDDC* is not the final word on definite atonement.

ENDNOTES

¹Special thanks to D. A. Carson, Graham Cole, Phil Gons, and Robert Yarbrough for examining this essay and sharing insightful feedback.

²Many Calvinists explain NT passages containing the word “all” or “world” (e.g., 1 John 2:2) by distinguishing between “all humans without distinction” and “all humans without exception.” The former phrase, they believe, is often the best contextual explanation

of such passages, which refer to all kinds of humans without distinction to geography, ethnicity, and/or chronology.

³This essay uses the adjectives “definite” and “general” as labels for the major atonement positions rather than the misleading adjectives “limited” and “unlimited.” Cf. Roger R. Nicole, “The Case for Definite Atonement,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 10 (1967): 200; idem, “Particular Redemption,” in *Our Savior God: Man, Christ, and the Atonement: Addresses Presented to the Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology, 1977–1979* (ed. James Montgomery Boice; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 169; D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 73–74; James Montgomery Boice and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Doctrines of Grace: Rediscovering the Evangelical Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 113–14.

⁴Three notes of clarification are in order: (1) The three major views presented above are admittedly painted with a broad brush since each view has its own subdivisions with distinctive nuances. (2) Some four-point (or four-and-a-half-point) Calvinists are not Amyraldians because they reject hypothetical universalism. (3) Amyraldism is a subdivision of Calvinism, so Amyraldians are Calvinists. This essay pragmatically distinguishes the Amyraldian view of the atonement as distinct from the Calvinist view as delineated above. Cf. B. B. Warfield’s taxonomy of Calvinists in *The Plan of Salvation* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 87–104, 111–12. Warfield asserts that although Amyraldism “is a recognizable form of Calvinism,” it “is not therefore necessarily a good form of Calvinism, an acceptable form of Calvinism, or even a tenable form of Calvinism. For one thing, it is a logically inconsistent form of Calvinism and therefore an unstable form of Calvinism.... Post-redemptionism is logically inconsistent Calvinism” (93–94). Amyraldism is “bad Calvinism” (96).

⁵In this essay, citations of *DDDC* are from vol. 10 of *The Works of John Owen* (ed. William H. Goold; 1850–53; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1967), 139–428. (One may locate these citations in the edition that Banner of Truth published separately in 1958 by sub-

tracting 112.) References to page numbers generally occur in the body (in parentheses), not footnotes. All italicized words in direct quotations reproduce the emphasis in the original. Outdated grammar and punctuation appear verbatim as well.

⁶The below citations of Packer’s “Introduction” are from “‘Saved by His Precious Blood’: An Introduction to John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*,” in Packer’s *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 125–48, 344–46. Throughout *A Quest for Godliness*, Packer repeatedly gives tribute to Owen out of thankfulness to God for this gift to the church. See, e.g., 12–13, 81, 191–94.

⁷Packer, “Introduction,” 136.

⁸John Piper, *Contending for Our All: Defending Truth and Treasuring Christ in the Lives of Athanasius, John Owen, and J. Gresham Machen* (The Swans Are Not Silent 4; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 77–78. Piper elaborates, “If you want the best statement on this doctrine [i.e., definite atonement] go to Owen himself, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*” (78 n. 1).

⁹Roger Nicole similarly states, “If you want full argumentation for it [i.e., definite atonement], I cannot recommend anything better than *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* by John Owen” (“Particular Redemption,” 169).

¹⁰Cf. Jack N. Macleod, “John Owen and the Death of Death,” in “*Out of Bondage*”: *Papers Read at the 1983 Conference* (London: Westminster Conference, 1984), 70; R. K. McGregor Wright, *No Place for Sovereignty: What’s Wrong with Freewill Theism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 153–54.

¹¹David N. Steele, Curtis C. Thomas, and S. Lance Quinn, *The Five Points of Calvinism Defined, Defended, and Documented* (2d ed.; Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004), 131.

¹²Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (2d ed.; Nashville: Nelson, 2001), 1140.

¹³To better understand Owen, his historical context, and his theological framework, see Carl R. Trueman, “Owen, John,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangeli-*

cal's (ed. Timothy Larsen, David W. Bebbington, and Mark A. Noll; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 494–98; idem, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998); idem, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Great Theologians Series; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2007); Justin Taylor, www.JohnOwen.org; Dewey D. Wallace, "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist Theology in English Puritanism" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1965); Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen: Pastor, Educator, Theologian* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971); Sarah Gibbord Cook, "A Political Biography of a Religious Independent: John Owen, 1616–83" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1972); Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1987); Richard M. Hawkes, "The Logic of Grace in John Owen, D.D.: An Analysis, Exposition, and Defense of John Owen's Puritan Theology of Grace" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987); Alan Spence, "John Owen and Trinitarian Agency," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 157–73; Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, see esp. 81–96, 125–48, 191–218; Robert W. Oliver, ed., *John Owen: The Man and His Theology: Papers Read at the Conference of the John Owen Centre for Theological Study, September 2000* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2002); Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (ed. Richard A. Muller; Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Piper, "Communing with God in the Things for Which We Contend: How John Owen Killed His Own Sin While Contending for the Truth," in *Contending for Our All*, 77–113; Kelly M. Kopic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), esp. 15–34, 131–32.

¹⁴For evaluations of Owen's view of the atonement, see Alan C. Clifford, "John Owen (1616–83)," in *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640–1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 2–16; Kenton D. Spratt, "The Cross Saves: John

Owen's Case for Limited Atonement and Its Critics" (MCS. thesis, Regent College, 1992); Neil Andrew Chambers, "A Critical Examination of John Owen's Argument for Limited Atonement in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*" (Th.M. thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 1998); Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, 91–92.

¹⁵Packer clarifies, "Strictly speaking, the aim of Owen's book is not defensive at all, but constructive. It is a biblical and theological enquiry; its purpose is simply to make clear what Scripture actually teaches about the central subject of the gospel—the achievement of the Saviour" ("Introduction," 134). Trueman agrees that *DDDC* "is not a treatise about the limitation of the atonement as such. Rather, as James Packer observes, it is a piece of positive theological construction primarily aimed at establishing the efficacy of Christ's death for the salvation of the elect. The extent of the atonement, while providing the initial reason for writing, is actually part of a much bigger question, that of whether Christ died simply to make salvation possible or to make it actual. In this context, limitation of the atonement can, on one level, be seen as an inference from other doctrines: if the death of Christ is efficacious for salvation, then those who do not come to enjoy that salvation cannot be numbered among those for whom Christ died" (*Claims of Truth*, 185–86).

¹⁶Owen subdivides each of the four books into chapters followed by roman numerals, Arabic numbers, and spelled-out numbering ("First," "Second," "Third," etc.). What follows does not reproduce his elaborate logic in exactly this same form but instead attempts to distil and paraphrase his principal arguments. Also, due to space limitations, these paraphrases often do not cite strings of supporting Scripture quotations. For more thorough summaries of large portions of *DDDC*, see Spratt, "Cross Saves," 17–115, 185–234; Chambers, "Critical Examination," 30–110. Cf. Packer's concise summary ("Introduction," 135–36) and analytical outline in Banner of Truth's 1959 edition of *DDDC* (26–31). Packer's analytical outline is available as a PDF at http://www.johnowen.org/media/packer_death_of_death_outline.pdf.

¹⁷Trueman (*Claims of Truth*, 185–226, 233–40) places this within the broader context of Owen’s theology to explain “the basic structures that inform Owen’s understanding of Christ’s priesthood: doctrinally, the Trinitarian determination of the office of Mediator; biblically and historically, the contextualization of Christ’s ministry against the backcloth of Old Testament teaching on priests and priesthood. The obvious inference of this, and one which pervades Owen’s work, is that the death of Christ cannot be understood in isolation but must be understood within the framework of mediation which is defined by the covenant of redemption and the threefold office, particularly that part which refers to Christ’s priesthood” (196–97).

¹⁸A better illustration is medicine carefully prescribed by a doctor for a specific individual.

¹⁹This is what Calvinists who are sympathetic with Owen mean when they say that the atonement is “sufficient for all.” Its design is limited to specific persons, but its value is unlimited. Calvinism and Amyraldism disagree with reference to the atonement’s design, not its intrinsic value.

²⁰See Trueman, “The Nature of Satisfaction” and “The Role of Aristotelian Teleology in Owen’s Doctrine of Atonement,” chap. 5 and appendix 1 in *Claims of Truth*, 199–226, 233–40.

²¹Owen lists ten principles, but several overlap (2 and 4; 3, 8, and 9).

²²“Wire-drawn” means “drawn out to a great length or with subtle ingenuity; fine-spun; elaborately subtle, ingenious, or refined” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

²³This brief survey does not trace Owen’s exegetical arguments in detail.

²⁴Owen’s exhaustive reply, which rebuts ch. 20 of More’s work, is not traced in detail here. Though not unimportant, this section of *DDDC* probably has the least contemporary relevance. Packer explains, “More’s exposition seems to be of little intrinsic importance; Owen, however, selects it as the fullest statement for the case for universal redemption that had yet appeared in English and uses it unmercifully as a chopping-block. The modern reader, however, will probably find it convenient to skip the sections

devoted to refuting More (I:viii, the closing pages of I:iii and IV:vi) on his first passage through Owen’s treatise” (“Introduction,” 147).

²⁵This table reproduces verbatim what appears in *DDDC* (414–15).

²⁶William Strunk Jr., *The Elements of Style* (4th ed.; rev. E. B. White; Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2000), 23. They explain, “Vigorous writing is concise. A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts. This requires not that the writer make all sentences short, or avoid all detail and treat subjects only in outline, but that every word tell” (23).

²⁷Packer concedes that Owen’s writing style and argumentation are difficult, particularly in *DDDC*, yet he gamely insists that the reader’s challenging, if not tortuous, labor is abundantly rewarding (*Quest for Godliness*, 84, 147, 194).

²⁸“Introduction,” 125; cf. 126–30, 133–34, 137.

²⁹Granted, Packer does not say that it “destroys the gospel.” By “destructive,” he likely means that the implications of universal redemption cannot logically or Scripturally cohere with a substitutionary atonement.

³⁰Cf. §2.1.4.

³¹Heresy may be defined in three broad ways: (1) any theological error, that is, teaching that is incorrect to any degree; (2) divisive theological error, that is, teaching that is both incorrect to any degree and especially divisive; or (3) extreme theological error, that is, teaching that denies essential elements of the gospel. The first type of “heresy” is merely inaccurate; the second is both inaccurate and destructive to the body of Christ; the third is both inaccurate and damning. A Christian can hold to the first and even the second, but not to the third. The third definition essentially combines all three definitions because extreme theological error is errant by definition and divisive by nature. Theologians have generally used “heresy” in accordance with the third definition, i.e., when a person deliberately chooses to reject fundamental biblical truth and accept and propagate extreme theological error. In this sense general atonement

is not necessarily heresy. (The word “necessarily” is important because in some cases general atonement is foundational to a heretical, gospel-denying synthesis such as universalism.) Cf. Alan Cairns, “Heresy,” *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (3d ed.; Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald International, 2002), 207; M. R. W. Farer, “Heresy,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Walter A. Elwell; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 326; Bruce A. Demarest, “Heresy,” *New Dictionary of Theology* (ed. Sinclair B. Ferguson, David F. Wright, and J. I. Packer; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 291–92; Harold O. J. Brown, *Heresies: The Image of Christ in the Mirror of Heresy and Orthodoxy from the Apostles to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988; repr., *Heresies: Heresy and Orthodoxy in the History of the Church* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998]), 2; D. Christie-Murray, *A History of Heresy* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1989), 1.

³²See Wayne Grudem’s thoughtful essay, “Why, When, and for What Should We Draw New Boundaries?” chap. 10 in *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjos Helseth; Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 339–70. Contrast Craig L. Blomberg, “The New Testament Definition of Heresy (or When Do Jesus and the Apostles Really Get Mad?),” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (2002): 59–72. Note Grudem’s interaction with Blomberg (350–51, n. 4–5).

³³Again, cf. §3 below for suggestions on how believers should avoid unhealthy schism over the extent of the atonement.

³⁴Providing this many examples may be a bit over-the-top, but it validates describing Owen’s rhetoric as *excessively* uncharitable.

³⁵A fine example of this is D. A. Carson’s dozens of books and articles. For his explanation of aspects of theological method, see, for example, “Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology,” in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 65–95, 368–75; “The Role of Exegesis in Systematic Theology,” in *Doing Theology in Today’s World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth*

S. Kantzer (ed. John D. Woodbridge and Thomas Edward McComiskey; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 39–76; “Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 17–41; *The Gaggling of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); “New Testament Theology,” in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments* (ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 796–814; “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 89–104.

³⁶To Owen’s credit, he does include a three-page appendix to DDDC that quotes Polycarp, Ignatius, Clement of Rome, Cyprian, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, Prosper, and the council of Valence in favor of definite atonement (422–24).

³⁷See for example, Owen’s method of proof-texting in DDDC 1.1.2 (158–59). Owen’s exegesis is generally not the finest available defense of definite atonement. For example, his exegesis of 1 John 2:2 is not entirely convincing (330–38). Cf. D. A. Carson’s treatment of 1 John 2:2 in *The Epistles of John* (New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming).

³⁸A. T. B. McGowan, reflecting on recent developments on the extent of the atonement, concludes, “It seems to me that there is much study still to be undertaken in relation to the extent of the atonement and the decrees of God.... There is scope for considerable work here. In carrying out this work it is important to continue to engage with Arminian scholars, since historically they too are a product of the Calvinist tradition. The reinvigorated Amyraldian position must also be tackled and their arguments must be faced seriously and carefully. Many pamphlets have been written, but few full-scale studies have been undertaken.” “The Atonement as Penal Substitution,” in *Always Reforming: Explorations in Systematic Theology* (ed. A. T. B. McGowan; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 209. An invaluable contribution to the church today would be a comprehensive monograph

similar to *DDDC*, using contemporary language and incorporating more informed exegesis in combination with BT, ST, HT, and PT. The theological disciplines have each developed significantly since Owen wrote *DDDC* in 1647, and *DDDC*, though thoughtful and invaluable, could be significantly improved by incorporating advances in exegesis (especially Greek grammar and exegetical commentaries), BT, ST, and the developments on the extent of the atonement in HT from Owen's day to the present. An example of a grammatical work worthy of incorporation is J. William Johnston, *The Use of Πας in the New Testament* (ed. D. A. Carson; Studies in Biblical Greek 11; New York: Lang, 2004). Two forthcoming books (both scheduled for 2013) should serve the church well in this regard: David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, eds., *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway) and Andrew David Naselli and Mark A. Snoberger, eds., *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: Three Views* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman), with essays and responses by Grant Osborne, Russell Moore, and Carl Trueman.

³⁹See Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (ed. Richard A. Muller; Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

⁴⁰Cf. Stanley N. Gundry, "John Owen on Authority and Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church* (ed. John D. Hannah; Chicago: Moody, 1984), 189–221.

⁴¹In the foreword to John Owen, *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* (ed. Kelly M. Kopic and Justin Taylor; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 13.

⁴²Tom Wells notes, "A frequent complaint against Reformed or Calvinistic people goes something like this: 'Your view of the Atonement is not the result of Scripture but of logic. In fact, you are rationalists!' Those are harsh words indeed, but necessary, if true.

"When I hear that I am a rationalist I am reminded of something Carl F. H. Henry said in another connection: 'Let those who want to defend irrationalism do it with whatever weapons they can find!'

"Abandon logic altogether and you must abandon all reasoned discourse. There is no discussion that

does not appeal to reason from beginning to end." "For Whom Did Christ Die?" *Reformation and Revival* 5 (1996): 51. Wells's point is valid, but more often than not, the accusation hurled at Calvinists is a bit more nuanced, e.g., "You are rationalistic *and not submitting to Scripture*." These opponents of Calvinism do not reject the use of reason; instead, they accuse Calvinism of using reason *without being sufficiently grounded in exegesis*.

⁴³Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 114. See chap. 4, "Faith and Reason," for Rehnman's explanation of Owen's view of the proper use of logic in theology (109–28).

⁴⁴This is not an absolute endorsement of all of Owen's exegesis and theology without exception in *DDDC*. On the macro-level, Owen's reasoning is outstanding, but on the micro-level, some of his arguments seem weak or flawed.

⁴⁵Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 116. See Paul Helm, "The Logic of Limited Atonement," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 3, no. 2 (1985): 47–54, which responds to the critique of definite atonement by James B. Torrance, who follows John McLeod Campbell. Cf. D. A. Carson, "Logical Fallacies," chap. 3 in *Exegetical Fallacies* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 87–123; Ronald H. Nash, "The Law of Non-contradiction," chap. 8 in *Life's Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 193–207.

⁴⁶I should qualify that I find this to be convincing *at this stage of my theological growth*. I always want to leave the door open to adjusting my understanding if further exegesis and theology convinces me otherwise.

⁴⁷Cf. §2.1.4 above.

⁴⁸Cf. n. 31 above.

⁴⁹Cf. N. T. Wright, "Universalism," *New Dictionary of Theology*, 701–3; D. A. Carson, *Gagging of God*, 515–36; Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

⁵⁰Cf. Curt D. Daniel's 912-page thesis, "Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill" (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 1983); Peter Toon, "Hyper-Calvinism," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, 324; Iain H. Murray,

Spurgeon v. Hyper-Calvinism: The Battle for Gospel Preaching (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1995).

⁵¹For an explanation of the history of this phrase, which originated with Peter Lombard's *Four Books of Sentences*, see W. Robert Godfrey, "Reformed Thought on the Extent of the Atonement to 1618," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1975): 133–71, esp. 136, 142, 149, 159, 164–69; Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 199–206; Raymond A. Blacketer, "Definite Atonement in Historical Perspective," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole* (ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 311.

⁵²Other doctrines where there is similar tension include inspiration, prayer, evangelism, and progressive sanctification.

⁵³Again, the word "necessarily" is important because either view pushed too far results in heresy. One danger to avoid is so minimizing the doctrine's importance that the extent of the atonement seems trivial.

⁵⁴Wayne Grudem suggests, "Although Reformed people have sometimes made belief in particular redemption a test of doctrinal orthodoxy, it would be healthy to realize that Scripture itself never singles this out as a doctrine of major importance, nor does it once make it the subject of any explicit theological discussion." Grudem advises a "cautious" and "balanced pastoral perspective" that places "almost no emphasis on this question at all" (*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 603). Robert W. Yarbrough's concise but detailed treatment of atonement does not even find it necessary to entertain the issue ("Atonement," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* [ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000], 388–93).

⁵⁵Cf. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 597.

⁵⁶When I took a doctoral course on soteriology in spring 2003, my professor respectably defended an Amyraldian view, and I am sympathetic with how he ended our weeks of lively discussion on the atonement's extent: "The fact that God avoids consistent terminology that is equally unambiguous to both

sides suggests that we should inform our understanding as fully and biblically as we are able, be dogmatic on unambiguous texts, charitable on ambiguous issues, and glory in a God whose mind cannot be reduced to ink and paper for the satisfaction of the curiosity of the mind of man."

⁵⁷This paragraph reflects a discovery that Phil Gons and I made while we were studying for our doctoral comprehensive exams in July 2005.

⁵⁸Emphasis added. One could find scores of examples like this by searching on the words "not one," "not even one," "no one," or "none." Cf. Exod 8:31; 9:6; 10:19; Num 11:19; Josh 10:8; 21:44; 23:14; Matt 24:2; Luke 12:6; John 17:12; 18:9; Acts 4:32; Rom 14:7.

⁵⁹Emphasis added. Cf. Psalms 53:3.

⁶⁰See Carson, *Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 77–78.

⁶¹Grudem argues, "It really seems to be only nit-picking that creates controversies and useless disputes when Reformed people insist on being such purists in their speech that they object any time someone says that 'Christ died for all people.' There are certainly ways of understanding that sentence that are consistent with the speech of the scriptural authors themselves. Similarly, I do not think we should rush to criticize an evangelist who tells an audience of unbelievers, 'Christ died for your sins,' if it is made clear in the context that it is necessary to trust in Christ before one can receive the benefits of the gospel offer. In that sense the sentence is simply understood to mean 'Christ died to offer you forgiveness for your sins' or 'Christ died to make available forgiveness for your sins.' The important point here is that sinners realize that salvation is available for everyone and that payment of sins is available for everyone" (*Systematic Theology*, 602).

⁶²Quoted in D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 58.

⁶³Cf. Spratt, "Cross Saves," 14.