

THE REASONS FOR EVANGELISTIC PRAYER-Part 2

Reflects the Fullness of Christ's Atonement

Our Lord freely gave His life when He died for our sins. In [John 10:17–18](#) He said, **“For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.”** He voluntarily went to the cross and gave all of Himself, not merely something He possessed.

“**Ransom**” is a rich theological term, describing Christ's substitutionary death for us. It is not the simple word for “ransom,” *lutron*, but *antilutron*, with the added preposition intensifying the meaning. Christ did not merely pay a ransom to free us; He became the victim in our place. He died our death and bore our sin. He gave Himself.

The phrase “**gave Himself as a ransom for all**” is a comment on the *sufficiency* of the atonement, not its *design*. To apply a well-known epigram, the ransom paid by Christ to God for the satisfaction of His justice is sufficient for all, but efficacious for the elect only. Christ's atonement is therefore unlimited as to its sufficiency, but limited as to its application.

Real benefits accrue “**for all**” because of Christ's all-sufficient atoning work. The Gospel may be preached indiscriminately to all ([Mark 16:15](#)); the water of life and the offer of divine mercy are extended freely to all ([Rev. 22:17](#)); Christ is set forth as Savior for all to embrace ([1 Timothy 4:10](#); [1 John 4:14](#)). Moreover, in a temporal sense, when Adam sinned the entire race was spared from immediate destruction and judgment (a privilege not afforded to the angels who fell—[Hebrews 2:16](#)), and individual sinners now experience common grace and delay in God's judgment on their sins. Nineteenth-century theologian **William G.T. Shedd** wrote,

The atonement is sufficient in value to expiate the sin of all men indiscriminately; and this fact should be stated because it is a fact. There are no claims of justice not yet satisfied; there is no sin of man for which an infinite atonement has not been provided ... Therefore the call to “come” is universal (*Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2 [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980 reprint], 482).

That does not mean that all will be saved. Christ's death was *sufficient* to cover the sins of all men, but it is applied to the elect alone. The price paid was infinite—it was sufficient for all. **“Christ's expiation ... is a divine act. It is indivisible, inexhaustible, sufficient in itself to cover the guilt of all the sins that will ever be committed on earth”** (R.L. Dabney, *The Five Points of Calvinism* [Harrisonburg, Va.: Sprinkle, 1992 reprint], 61). Therefore salvation can sincerely and legitimately be offered to all, though only the elect will respond. **Shedd** wrote, “The extent to which a medicine is offered is not limited by the number of persons favorably disposed to buy it and use it. Its

adaptation to disease is the sole consideration in selling it, and consequently it is offered to everybody” (*Dogmatic Theology*, 2:482).

It is crucial to understand that the atoning work of Christ fully accomplishes everything God declared He would accomplish in eternity past with regard to the salvation of sinners. God’s sovereign purposes are not thwarted in any degree by the unbelief of those who spurn Christ. The atonement of Christ does not represent a failed attempt to save anyone who will not be saved. All those whom God purposed to save from eternity past will be saved (cf. [John 17:12](#)). Yet it is worth reiterating once more that while God’s saving *purpose* is limited to the elect, His *desire* for the salvation of sinners is as broad as the human race. He “**desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**” So Christ “**gave Himself as a ransom [sufficient] for all.**” How graphically the atoning work of Christ reveals to us the heart of God for the salvation of sinners!

That is why Paul refers to the atonement as “**the testimony borne [by Christ] at the proper time.**” This thought precisely parallels [Galatians 4:4–5](#), “**But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law.**” Christ “**gave Himself as a ransom**” at exactly “**the proper time**” in God’s redemptive plan. His redemptive work is the most eloquent testimony ever borne to God’s saving desire for sinners. **Evangelistic prayer for all men therefore reflects the heart of God and honors Christ’s work on the cross.**