

THEOLOGY CLASSES · SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY V: SOTERIOLOGY

Lecture 6: For Whom Did Christ Die? Calling and Regeneration

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Lecture by C. Michael Patton, Th.M., and Rhome Dyke, Th.M., from The Theology Program, published on their public channel. Study notes below from Medina Community Church.

BEFORE YOU WATCH

Penal substitution created a problem the other theories never had: if Christ actually carried actual sins, whose sins did he carry? This session gives the arguments for limited and unlimited atonement their full weight, and Patton refuses to pretend the tension away, landing somewhere he numbers at about four and three quarters of the five points. Then the course moves from what God did outside us to his first step into us: calling and regeneration, and the question of which comes first, the new birth or faith. Listen for Lydia by the river.

THE LECTURE, SECTION BY SECTION

1. The new problem substitution created

The question, for whom did Christ die, only bites because of the view the course just adopted. On the governmental theory a token payment can stand for anyone; nothing was exactly anyone's. But if Christ bore exact, personal sins, then either he bore everyone's, or he bore his people's. Two positions have divided the church's Protestant wing: limited atonement, that Christ died only for the sins of the elect, which its friends prefer to call particular redemption, since the point is not a limit but an accomplishment; and unlimited or universal atonement, that Christ died for the sins of all people, the view of Arminians and of some Reformed Protestants, including, the teachers note, most of the faculty of Dallas Theological Seminary.

2. The case for particular redemption

The defense unfolds in steps the class itself helps build. First, the logic of payment: if Christ paid for everyone's sins, everyone's sins are paid for, and paid-for sins with wrath satisfied is the very definition of salvation; the position proves too much or it proves universalism. Second, the intentionality of the texts: this is the Father's will, that of all he has given me I lose nothing; he will save his people from their sins; the church of God purchased with his own blood; Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her; and in the upper room, I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those you have given me. Third, the shape of the whole order of salvation: election, calling, justification, and glorification are all particular and all accomplish their purpose; why would the atonement alone go broad and fall short of its aim? The substitution is personal, who loved me and gave himself for me, and a God who knowingly paid for the sins of people he had not elected would be punishing the same sins twice, double jeopardy, and unjust to send to hell those whose debt was paid.

3. The case for unlimited atonement

The other side concedes the logic is formidable and answers with texts. He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but for the whole world, 1 John 2. God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, 2 Corinthians 5. Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, John 1. One mediator, who gave himself as a ransom for all, 1 Timothy 2. By the grace of God he tasted death for everyone, Hebrews 2. And hardest of all, 2 Peter 2: false teachers denying the Master who bought them, the purchase word used of Christians applied to men headed for destruction. John 3:16 grounds the sending itself in love for the world. The limited side must read world as all peoples rather than every individual, and the unlimited side asks by what right. The teachers pause over Barth's universalism as the road these texts tempt some to take, a nice thought, Patton admits, that the understanding of sin and the rest of Scripture close off.

4. Patton's four and three quarters

Patton then does something rare in a theology class: he shows his work without finishing it. He cannot say Christ paid for everybody's sins, because paid-for sins mean salvation and he will not redefine salvation. But he can say Christ died for all people potentially, and he reaches for the old formula, sufficient for all, efficient only for the elect, while admitting he likes it better some days than others. His resting place is a distinction: for whom did Christ die? All people. Whose sins did Christ pay for? Only the elect. The class's airplane illustration helps: the ticket may be bought, but not until you board is the ride actually taken. Faith itself has no redeeming value; it is not the payment but the response to a payment, the first evidence that God has opened a heart. And 2 Peter 2 remains, he confesses, his hardest text. He calls himself a four-and-three-quarters Calvinist, and means the fraction seriously: wherever you land, he tells the class, you fall within the evangelical tradition, and what you are really discovering is how little any of us know.

5. The two calls

From the atonement accomplished, the course turns to its application: God's first personal step into a life. Can we say no to the gospel? Two callings must be distinguished. The general call is God's message going out to all, elect and non-elect, through the preaching of the gospel, through creation, through conscience, all of it common grace, and it is a serious call, a real summons to repent. The effectual call is the Holy Spirit's call going out through that same gospel to the elect, and it accomplishes what it announces. The Spirit does not work apart from the preached word; Romans 10 asks how they will believe without hearing. There is no second, private gospel; the effectual call rides inside the general one.

6. Why two calls at all

Dyke presses the class to remember why the distinction exists: original sin. If people are truly dead in sin, unable to choose righteousness, then hearing alone cannot explain believing; the same sermon falls on two hearers and one believes. Something beyond the hearing must make the difference, and the difference is the Spirit's effectual work. The doctrine is not an invention of Calvin; it is the shape the doctrine of sin forces on the doctrine of grace.

7. The effectual call in the texts

Romans 8:29 and 30 again, now read for the call: those he predestined he called, and those he called he justified, not some of those he called. The chain has no leaks; every called one is justified, so this call cannot be the general call, which many refuse. Matthew 22:14 supplies the other side: many are called, few are chosen, the invitation of the banquet going wide while the chosen are drawn from within it. John 6 speaks with the same certainty: all the Father gives will come; no one can come unless the Father draws him, a word used elsewhere of hauling in nets; no one can come unless it is granted. Irresistible grace, the I of the acronym, is defined against its caricature: not God dragging the unwilling, but God opening the heart of the dead so that, seeing Christ truly, they cannot help but come, compelled from within by what they now see. Nobody, once awakened, says no thank you.

8. What it means to be born again

The next term the world wears smooth: born again. Patton's friend, the convert who hates jargon, demands it be retired; the class instead fills it. Death in Scripture is always separation, never extinction; the day Adam ate he died, separated from God while his body went on. Regeneration is God awakening that dead spirit, reestablishing the relationship that died in the garden and restoring the ability to respond to him. Nicodemus heard it first: unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom, and that includes everyone in every age; Old Testament saints were regenerated too, or they could not have entered the kingdom. Born of water and the Spirit, on Patton's reading of the parallel with flesh and spirit, means the natural birth and the spiritual one, not baptism.

9. Regeneration precedes faith

Now the question the assigned paper posed: was I born again before I believed? Monergistic regeneration says new birth is God's act alone; synergistic says God and man cooperate. Patton argues the monergistic case. John 1: born not of the will of man, but of God. Ephesians 2: you were dead, and God made you alive; dead people do not contribute to their resurrections. As a baby does not cry before it is born, so no one cries out in faith before being born again; faith is the first breath of the new life, the first evidence, not the cause. 1 Peter 1: God caused us to be born again, through a seed imperishable. And decisively, 1 Corinthians 2:14: the natural man cannot accept the things of the Spirit of God, they are foolishness to him; if he cannot accept the things of the Spirit, he cannot accept the most spiritual thing of all, the gospel, until God changes him. The one who never seeks God will not, unchanged, seek him.

10. Lydia, and the comfort of monergism

Acts 16 gives the doctrine a face: Lydia, a worshiper of God, listening to Paul by the river, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to what was said. Already religious, already listening, and still the opening had to come from outside her. A student notes she was a God-fearer already; Patton grants it and holds the point: until God opened, she could not respond. Regeneration is not resisted or accepted; it is the sovereign act that ends resistance, and there is no progressive regeneration, though there may be a progressive calling as God arranges a life toward the moment. The session closes on why the doctrine comforts rather than threatens: monergistic regeneration leaves nothing for us, and that is its glory. Every part of your salvation, from election to the opening of your own heart, was God's doing, and the God who began it is not experimenting; he will perfect it to the day of Christ Jesus. Even the one thing that felt like yours, the believing, was the gift of a heart he had already made alive.

SCRIPTURE IN THIS LECTURE

1 Corinthians 2 · 1 John 2 · 1 Peter 1 · 1 Timothy 2 · 2 Corinthians 5 · 2 Peter 2 · Acts 16 · Acts 20 · Ephesians 2 · Ephesians 5 · Hebrews 2 · John 1 · John 17 · John 3 · John 6 · Matthew 22 · Romans 8

KEY TERMS

Limited atonement

The belief that Christ died only for the sins of the elect; its friends prefer particular redemption, since the point is not a limit but an atonement that accomplishes exactly what it intends.

Unlimited atonement

The belief that Christ died for the sins of all people, making salvation possible for all; held by Arminians and by some Reformed Protestants, including most of the Dallas Seminary faculty of the teachers' day.

Sufficient for all, efficient for the elect

The old mediating formula Patton both uses and eyes warily: Christ's death is sufficient for every person, but actually pays for the sins of the elect alone. His resting distinction: he died for all; he paid for the elect.

Double jeopardy

The particular-redemption argument that God would be unjust to punish in hell sins already punished in Christ; a paid debt cannot be demanded twice.

General call

God's summons going out to all people, elect and non-elect, through gospel preaching, creation, and conscience: common grace, and a serious call to repent.

Effectual call

The Holy Spirit's call, riding within the general call, going to the elect and accomplishing what it announces: special grace. Every effectually called person is justified; the chain of Romans 8 has no leaks.

Irresistible grace

Not God dragging the unwilling, but God opening dead hearts so that, seeing Christ truly, they cannot help but come. Once wakened, nobody says no thank you.

Regeneration

God's awakening of a dead spirit: the reestablishing of the relationship that died in the garden and the restoring of the ability to respond to him. Death is separation, never extinction, so new birth is reunion.

Monergistic regeneration

New birth as the act of God alone, preceding faith: born not of the will of man but of God, made alive while dead, so that faith is the first breath of the new life rather than its cause.

COMPREHENSION CHECK

Seventeen questions from the lecture. Circle your answers, then check them against the key at the bottom.

1. Why does penal substitution create the extent-of-the-atonement problem?

- A. Because it denies the resurrection
- B. Because a token payment cannot stand for anyone
- C. If Christ bore exact, personal sins, he bore either everyone's or his people's; the other theories, carrying no one's actual sins, never face the question
- D. Because it was invented after the question was settled

2. Why do its friends prefer the name particular redemption?

- A. Because it sounds older
- B. Because the point is not a limit but an accomplishment: the atonement achieves exactly what it intends
- C. Because limited appears nowhere in their writings
- D. Because it avoids the acronym

3. What is the payment argument for particular redemption?

- A. If Christ paid for everyone's sins, everyone's sins are paid for and wrath is satisfied, which is the definition of salvation; so universal payment proves universalism
- B. That payment language never appears in Scripture
- C. That only large debts can be forgiven
- D. That Christ paid Satan for the elect alone

4. How does the shape of the order of salvation argue for particularity?
 - A. The order of salvation is silent on the question
 - B. Every other link is universal, so the atonement should be too
 - C. The order shows salvation is by works
 - D. Election, calling, justification, and glorification are all particular and all succeed; why would the atonement alone go broad and fall short of its aim?
5. Which text does Patton call his hardest?
 - A. John 3:16
 - B. Hebrews 2:9
 - C. 2 Peter 2:1, where false teachers headed for destruction are said to deny the Master who bought them, the purchase word used of Christians
 - D. 1 Timothy 2:6
6. What is Patton's resting distinction on the extent of the atonement?
 - A. Christ neither died for nor paid for anyone in particular
 - B. For whom did Christ die? All people. Whose sins did Christ pay for? Only the elect.
 - C. Christ died for the elect but paid for all
 - D. The question is meaningless and should be retired
7. What role does faith play in redemption, on the lecture's account?
 - A. Faith completes the payment Christ began
 - B. Faith is the human half of the ransom
 - C. Faith replaces the atonement for those who never heard
 - D. Faith has no redeeming value at all; it is the response to the payment and the first evidence that God has opened a heart
8. What are the two calls, and how do they relate?
 - A. The general call to all through gospel, creation, and conscience, and the effectual call of the Spirit to the elect, riding within the general call and accomplishing what it announces
 - B. A public call through preaching and a private call apart from any preaching
 - C. A call to Israel and a separate call to the church
 - D. An old covenant call and a new covenant call
9. Why does the doctrine of sin force the two-call distinction?
 - A. Because preaching is usually done badly
 - B. Because the dead in sin cannot account for their own believing; the same sermon falls on two hearers and one believes, so the difference must be the Spirit's work
 - C. Because Scripture never describes a general call
 - D. Because Calvin required it of his students
10. Why can the call of Romans 8:30 not be the general call?
 - A. Because the general call had not yet begun in Paul's day
 - B. Because it is addressed to angels
 - C. Because every called one in the chain is justified, and many refuse the general call; this call has no leaks
 - D. Because the verse is disputed in the manuscripts

11. How is irresistible grace defined against its caricature?
 - A. God overpowers the unwilling and drags them in
 - B. Grace merely improves the odds of believing
 - C. Grace is irresistible only for the apostles
 - D. God opens the heart of the dead so that, seeing Christ truly, they cannot help but come; once awakened, nobody says no thank you
12. What does death mean in Scripture, and why does it matter for the new birth?
 - A. Extinction, so regeneration is creation from nothing
 - B. Separation, never extinction; so regeneration is God reestablishing the relationship that died in the garden
 - C. Sleep, so regeneration is waking naturally
 - D. A metaphor with no fixed meaning
13. Were Old Testament saints born again?
 - A. No; regeneration began at Pentecost
 - B. Only the prophets were
 - C. Yes; no one sees the kingdom without new birth, so they too were regenerated, however differently it was revealed
 - D. Scripture does not say
14. What does 1 Corinthians 2:14 contribute to the order of regeneration and faith?
 - A. The natural man cannot accept the things of the Spirit, so he cannot accept the gospel, the most spiritual thing of all, until God changes him; regeneration must precede faith
 - B. It teaches that faith produces regeneration
 - C. It concerns spiritual gifts only
 - D. It describes believers, not the natural man
15. What does the baby illustration teach?
 - A. That infants are born believing
 - B. That regeneration is a long process
 - C. That faith precedes new birth as crying precedes birth
 - D. As a baby does not cry before it is born, no one cries out in faith before being born again; faith is the first breath of the new life
16. What happened to Lydia in Acts 16, and why is it the doctrine's face?
 - A. She believed and was then regenerated as a reward
 - B. Already religious and already listening, she still could not respond until the Lord opened her heart; the opening came from outside her
 - C. She resisted the call successfully
 - D. She was converted without hearing any preaching
17. Why does Patton say monergistic regeneration comforts rather than threatens?
 - A. Because it guarantees no one is lost
 - B. Because it removes the need for evangelism
 - C. Because it leaves nothing for us: every part of salvation, even the opening of our own heart, was God's doing, and what he began he will perfect
 - D. Because it makes faith unnecessary

Answer key (fold under before you begin): 1 C · 2 B · 3 A · 4 D · 5 C · 6 B · 7 D · 8 A · 9 B · 10 C · 11 D · 12 B · 13 C · 14 A · 15 D · 16 B · 17 C

TALK IT OVER

1. Patton lands at four and three quarters and tells the class that wherever they land, they fall within the evangelical tradition. What do you make of a teacher counting himself in fractions? Where does honest unresolvedness end and evasion begin, and which is this?
2. Think back over your conversion with Lydia's story open. Who was preaching, who arranged your hearing, and what would you say the Lord opened? Thank God this week for the specific pieces of your own effectual call, including the people he used.
3. If faith is the first breath of the new life rather than its cause, how should that change the way you pray for someone who has heard the gospel many times and remains unmoved? What exactly are you asking God to do?

ONE VERSE TO CARRY

Jesus promises in John 6 that everyone the Father gives him will come to him, and the one who comes he will never cast out, for it is the Father's will that he lose nothing of all he has been given.

GO FURTHER

The week's assigned paper, *Was I Born Again Before I Believed?*, frames the session's second half; reread it with Lydia in mind. The teachers leave the extent of the atonement deliberately unfinished, an honest tension inside the evangelical family, and turn next to the human side of the same moment: conversion, what faith is, what repentance is, and the debate over what a person must do to be saved.