

**The Gospel of John (8);
The Prelude to the Public Ministry of Jesus (1:19-51) (part 3)**

Introduction:

We are presently addressing the prelude to the public ministry of Jesus as related to us through the hand of John the Apostle, whom we have referred to as the Evangelist. Last week we completed our attention to the Evangelist's emphasis of John the Baptist and "the Jews" (1:19-28). Today we will give more consideration to the witness of John the Baptist which he rendered directly to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (1:29-34).

Here, again, is the outline of John 1 that we have been using, which I have modified slightly to reflect today's emphasis:

- I. The Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18)
- II. The Prelude to the Public Ministry of Jesus (1:19-51)
 - A. The Witness of John the Baptist (1:19-34)
 - 1. John and "the Jews" (1:19-28)
 - 2. John and Jesus (1:29-34)**
 - a. John revealed the identity of Jesus as the Promised Savior of the world (1:29-31)**
 - b. John bore witness of Jesus the Messiah Whom God identified to him (1:32-34)
 - B. The First Disciples (1:35-51)
 - 1. Andrew and Peter (1:35-42)
 - 2. Philip and Nathaniel (1:43-51)

Today we will begin to address the subject, John and Jesus, which is the subject of verses 29-34. However, we will only be able to address half of this subject today, which is verses 29 through 31. But here is the portion of John 1 in which we read of the Baptist's testimony of Jesus:

²⁹The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰This is He of whom I said, 'After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.' ³¹I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water."

³²And John bore witness, saying, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. ³³I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God." (John 1:29-34)

Our New King James Version sets forth these verses in two paragraphs, verses 29 through 31, and verses 32 through 34, with each paragraph set forth in three sentences each.¹ We may posit this more detailed outline:

¹ We should remember that the original Greek text had no paragraph divisions, and actually there were very few punctuation marks (and they were not consistently used), in fact, there were no spaces between words. The paragraph divisions in our Bibles are imposed by English translators. The section under study today (1:29-34) is set forth in 2 paragraphs in both the New King James Version (NKJV) and the New International Version (NIV), but they are set forth in only one paragraph in the English Standard Version (ESV), the New American Standard Version (NASV), and The (modern) Greek New Testament (UB) [Kurt Aland, et. al., The Greek New Testament, 3rd ed. (United Bible Societies, 1966, 1968, 1975)].

I. John revealed the identity of Jesus as the Promised Savior of the world (1:29-31)

- A. John identified Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God (v. 29)
- B. John identified Jesus as the One He had previously declared was coming (v. 30)
- C. John declared his calling to reveal Jesus to Israel (v. 31)

II. John bore witness of Jesus the Messiah Whom God identified to him (1:32-34)

- A. John bore witness of the Holy Spirit coming upon Jesus (v. 32)
- B. John tells how God identified to him that Jesus was the Messiah (v. 33)
- C. John testified that he had fulfilled his mission to reveal the Son of God to the people (v. 34)

Let us work through these verses following our outline.

I. John revealed the identity of Jesus as the promised Savior of the world (1:29-31)

God had called John to be a witness of the preincarnate Son of God in the Man Jesus Christ. We see first, that...

A. John identified Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God (v. 29)

We read in verse 29, *“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* John declared this forthrightly on “the next day.” This is in reference to the day following the inquiry of “the Jews” in Jerusalem who had sent representatives to Jesus. This group included “priests and Levites” (v. 19) and also “Pharisees” (v. 24).” John had borne witness to them that he was not the Messiah, he was not Elijah that many expected to literally come, and he was not *the* Prophet that Moses had foretold would arise. John declared that he was “the voice” of Isaiah 40, who was to declare the imminent arrival of the Messiah who would inaugurate the long-awaited kingdom of God and the salvation it would bring for His people. Verse 19 accentuates John’s declarative ministry, in which he announced before all that Jesus was the Promised Savior.

We read that John the Baptist saw “Jesus coming toward Him.” As we attempted to explain last week, this was not the occasion when Jesus came to be baptized by John. That event is related in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 3:13ff; Mark 1:9ff; Luke 3:21ff). This event recorded in John 1 is at least 40 days after Jesus had been baptized. “Some weeks had probably elapsed since Jesus received baptism at John’s hands; he had been away since then, but now he is back, and John draws the crowd’s attention to him.”² It may be that John made this announcement as our Lord was returning from “the wilderness” after having remained faithful to His Father while tempted of the devil. The reason this must be the case is because here in John’s Gospel we read that immediately after this event, it is not said that Jesus went into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil, but that Jesus called several of His disciples to follow Him and then they left shortly thereafter to begin His ministry in Galilee.

It seems probable, as before observed, that our Lord came back to John after His temptation in the wilderness. The Spirit took Him into the wilderness “immediately” after His baptism (Mark 1:12), and it was upon His return, at the end of forty days, that John the Baptist saw Him again.³

John announced and declared before all who were in his hearing, *“Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* “John’s witness before the Jewish leadership has broadened to a witness before all Israel.”⁴ Let us consider this most important declaration very carefully.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1983), p. 51.

³ J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 60.

⁴ Edward W. Klink, III, *John*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 132.

1. The initial word of John the Baptist is significant. He declared, “Behold!” The Evangelist who penned this Gospel used this word to precede his statements more than all of the other writers of the New Testament combined.⁵ One wrote of John’s use of this term:

First, John begins the witness with the particle of explanation, “Behold.” The conventional particle is used in Greek to draw attention to what follows. When used before a verb, it serves as a “promoter of attention,” but when used before a noun, as in this case, it serves as a “marker of strong emphasis.” The Fourth Gospel uses it in this latter sense when there is a challenge to perceive with the mind a truth not outwardly evident to human eyes. For example, it is used as a marker of strong emphasis in 19:14 when Pilate says to the Jews, “Behold, your king.” Thus, the particle sets the tone regarding the importance of the person being emphatically introduced.⁶

John identified Jesus as “*The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” Jesus as the Lamb of God is one of the most common descriptions that Christians apply to Jesus. He is the “Lamb of God.” Interestingly, however, besides verse 36 later in this chapter, this is the only place in the Bible in which Jesus is specifically declared to be the “Lamb of God.” Now Jesus is depicted as the “Lamb” elsewhere in the Bible⁷, but only here do we see the expression, “the Lamb of God.”

2. That Jesus is the “**Lamb**” suggests several ideas regarding our Lord’s person and ministry. A lamb is a young sheep, which is commonly perceived as rather docile and non-threatening.⁸ A lamb is certainly not a danger to anything about it. A lamb conveys the idea of purity and innocence. A lamb is vulnerable to abuse and is a rather helpless creature, which may be slaughtered with little defense or even resistance. A lamb is easily slain and consumed by most every kind of carnivore it encounters. Yes, we read of paradoxical descriptions of “the Lamb” in that one day there will be unleashed “the wrath of the Lamb.” Revelation 6:15f read,

And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from *the wrath of the Lamb!*”

Here, the incongruent nature of a lamb manifesting great wrath that will strike terror in “the great men” of the earth, serves to accentuate both the surprise and the terrible terror that will strike the hearts of those whom His wrath will be unleashed.

3. John identified Jesus to be “the Lamb *of God.*” This qualifier could mean that He is the Lamb “provided by God”, or perhaps “belonging to God”, or even “who comes from God.” The Lamb is God’s provision for sinners. God provided for Himself a sacrifice for sinners.⁹

4. To what does “**the Lamb**” point to specifically? What Old Testament event or sacrifice was John alluding to when he declared Jesus to be “the Lamb of God”? There is wide-ranging opinion as to what John was referring. Here are nine proposals¹⁰ that have been suggested by various biblical scholars:

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 143.

⁶ Edward W. Klink, III, *John*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Zondervan, 2016), p. 133.

⁷ Jesus is referred to as a “lamb” in Acts 8:32, 1 Peter 1:19, and 24 times in the Book of Revelation, but only in the Gospel of John and the Revelation is “the Lamb” set forth as a title of Christ.

⁸ Charles Spurgeon in his characteristic clever humor and profundity once wrote, “I would rather be attacked by wolves than sheep”, referring to being attacked by the Lord’s sheep—Christians.

⁹ See Genesis 22:8.

¹⁰ From Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (William B. Eerdmans, 1971), p. 144-7.

- (1) The Passover Lamb.
- (2) The “lamb that is led to the slaughter” (Isa. 53:7).
- (3) The Servant of the Lord, which is set forth in all of the Fourth Servant Song of Isaiah 52:13-53:12.
- (4) The lamb of the daily sacrifices offered morning and evening in the temple.
- (5) The “gentle lamb” of Jeremiah 11:19.
- (6) The “scape goat” on the Day of Atonement. What is attractive of this proposal is that the scape-goat *took away* the sin of Israel into the wilderness. The problem with this position, however, is that the sacrifice was a goat, not a lamb.
- (7) The triumphant Lamb of the Revelation.
- (8) The God-provided Lamb of Genesis 22:8.
- (9) A guilt-offering, since sometimes this was a lamb.

Probably the way to address this meaning of “the Lamb of God” is as follows:

If the writer really had in mind an allusion to one particular offering we are not able any longer to detect it with certainty. But it seems more probable that of set purpose he used an expression which cannot be confined to any one view. He is making a general allusion to sacrifice. The lamb figure may well be intended to be composite, evoking memories of several, perhaps all, of the suggestions we have canvassed. All that the ancient sacrifices foreshadowed was perfectly fulfilled in the sacrifice of Christ.¹¹

I suppose if I were to express a preference, it would be the first one listed. Because of John’s emphasis that the Lord Jesus die during the feast of the Passover, Jesus would seem to be the antitype of the Passover Lamb slain and consumed, by which the people of God escape His wrath upon them for their sin.

5. Again, John the Baptist identified Jesus as “The Lamb of God *who takes away* the sin of the world!” This is a present tense verb, which stresses continuous action. Jesus as the Lamb of God is continuously taking away the sin of the world. This is what He is doing in history. He is taking away the sin of His people by way of expiation, removing sin from His people. We might consider **Psalm 103:12** in this respect:

As far as the east is from the west,
So far has He removed our transgressions from us.

Transgressions are our sins which are violations of God’s laws. This is what sin is by definition—transgression of God’s law. “Whosoever committeth sin transgresses also the law: *for sin is the transgression of the law*” (1 John 3:4). But thankfully, Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

But in addition, Jesus Christ is also taking away all sin out of the world through the exercise of His judgment. Those who refuse to repent of their sins and believe on Him as their Savior, He gives time for them to consider their ways, time to turn from their sins. But if they refuse, then He removes them from this world upon their death. He will see to it that no one but those who have come to Him in repentance

¹¹ Ibid, p. 148.

and have believed on Him as Savior and Lord, will be permitted to continue with Him and His people unto eternity. One wrote of Christ having come as a Saviour of His people:

Christ is a Saviour. He did not come on earth to be a Conqueror, or a philosopher, or a mere teacher of morality. He came to save sinners. He came to do that which man could never do himself,--to do that which money and learning could never obtain,--to do that which is essential to man's real happiness: He came to "take away sin."

Christ is a complete Saviour. He "taketh away sin." He did not merely make vague proclamations of pardon, mercy, and forgiveness. He "took" our sins upon Himself, and carried them away. He allowed them to be laid upon Himself, and "bore them in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24). The sins of every one that believes on Jesus are made as though they never had sinned at all. The Lamb of God has taken them away.

Christ is an almighty Saviour, and a Saviour for all mankind. He "taketh away the sin of the world." He did not die for the Jews only, but for the Gentiles as well as the Jew. He did not suffer for a few persons only, but for all mankind. The payment that He made on the cross was more than enough to make satisfaction for the debts of all. The blood that He shed was precious enough to wash away the sins of all. His atonement on the cross was sufficient for all mankind, though efficient only for them that believe.¹²

6. John the Baptist identified Jesus as "The Lamb of God who takes away the sin *of the world!*"

We mentioned earlier in our study of John 1 that the word, "world" is used many times by our writer--a total of 70 times in this Gospel. This is the fifth occasion that this word is used. It is not an easy term to decipher, for the word will change its nuance of definition depending on the context in which it is found. Consider these words of **Duane Spencer**, who was a very good reformed Presbyterian pastor of the mid-20th century:

Much of what we think about the atoning death of Christ will be tempered by what we understand the simple word "world" to mean. In the Gospel of John this word has special significance in that it may have any one of seven different meanings:

- (1) the classical sense, i.e., the orderly universe,
- (2) the earth itself,
- (3) the human inhabitants of earth, by metonymy,
- (4) mankind under the Creator's judgment, alienated from His Life, in the ethical sense,
- (5) the public who were about Christ, Jews in particular,
- (6) the kingdom of evil forces, angelic as well as human, as related to the earth, and
- (7) men out of every tribe and nation, but not all tribes and nations as a whole.

In other words the term "world" may refer to all that God has created, or to the earthen sphere upon which mankind dwells, or to mankind as a whole, or to the Palestinian contemporaries of our Lord, the Jew in particular, or to all evil forces related to the earth and in rebellion against God, or to persons selected out of every tribe and nation upon the face of the earth. Wherever the word appears it must be dealt with in context in much the same way that the word "all" must be examined. For example, the Scripture records the Pharisees as saying: "Behold! The world is gone after Him!" (John 12:19). Now it is obvious from the context that not all of humanity was following Jesus, for the speakers themselves refused to do so. Furthermore, we may be assured that not every human being on the face of the earth was following the Saviour. On that occasion "the world" includes only those

¹². J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 1 (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987, orig. 1869), p. 57f.

persons, whether Jew or Gentile, who were drawn enthusiastically to follow our Lord (for they had heard that He had raised Lazarus from among the dead).¹³

Now with the expression, “the sin of the world”, it presses upon us the need to address the nature and extent of *the atonement of Jesus Christ*. In other words, the question needs to be answered, **for whom did Jesus Christ die?** Among the differences between Calvinists¹⁴ (i.e. we who are reformed) and Arminians¹⁵ (who espouse the doctrines of Jacobus Arminius), the extent of the atonement of Jesus Christ is a major matter of disagreement and debate. Arminians argue that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He paid for all the sins of all the people that have ever lived in this world. They teach that God is trying to save everybody, and that Jesus’ death paid for everyone’s sins. They believe in what is commonly referred to as a *universal* or *general atonement*. They would argue from this verse, “See, the Lord Jesus is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the entire world.” Those who are Reformed, however, disagree with Arminians. We teach that when Jesus Christ died on the cross, He provided an atonement for the sins of the elect only. In other words, we assert that the Bible teaches Christ’s *particular atonement*, that He died to atone for the redeemed only. This understanding of the atonement is also commonly referred to as Christ’s *limited atonement* or *definite atonement*. This has often been the defining distinction between Baptists in history. During the 17th and 18th centuries, Arminian Baptists were known as General Baptists, who believed in a

¹³ Duane Spencer, *TULIP; The Five Points of Calvinism in the Light of Scripture* (Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 35, 36.

¹⁴ Calvinists espouse *the five doctrines of grace*, which were first set forth at the Synod of Dort (1618-19). The doctrines of grace are commonly known by the acrostic, TULIP. Each letter represents an important doctrine of God’s grace. The “T” represents the *total depravity* of all mankind. Because of sin, no one has the desire or ability to turn from sin and believe on Jesus Christ for salvation. God must work to save sinners by His sovereign grace, or they will remain damned in their sin. The “U” stands for *unconditional election*. God chose a specific people before creation that He purposed to save from their sin through Jesus Christ. There was nothing about them that moved God to choose them. His grace toward them was unconditional; He loved them solely due to His sovereign grace, because He purposed to love them in spite of who they are, not because of who they are. The “L” stands for *limited atonement*, or better, *definite* or *particular atonement*, in that Jesus Christ died only on behalf of the elect in order to atone for their sins only. The “I” speaks of God’s *irresistible grace*. When God determines to save one of His elect, He always is successful in bringing them to repent from sin and believe on Jesus Christ the Lord. And lastly, the “P” represents *the perseverance of the saints*. God will see to it that everyone He brings to repent of sin and place faith in Christ, will continue in that faith through His power unto their everlasting salvation.

¹⁵ Arminians espouse the doctrines set forth by **Jacobus Arminius** (1560-1609). He promoted five doctrines that the Reformed churches of Europe met at the Synod of Dort to consider and examine in the light of the Holy Scriptures. The five doctrines of grace, which were the conclusions of the Reformed Synod of Dort, repudiated and corrected the five errant doctrines of Arminius. The five doctrines of Arminianism which the united Reformed churches of Europe found and declared to be unbiblical, were these: (1) the *free will* of fallen man, in that the sinner has the ability to choose God and salvation. Faith is seen as something the sinner gives to God which results in the new birth (regeneration), rather than faith due to regeneration that God gives to sinners through His sovereign grace. (2) The *conditional election* of God of sinners unto salvation. God foresaw who would believe the Gospel, and therefore chose (elected) them to salvation. This means that the ultimate cause of salvation is due to the sinner’s faith, not God’s sovereign grace. (3) The *universal atonement* of Christ, in that His death atoned for all the sins of all humanity who have ever lived. In other words, Christ’s death secured the salvation of no one, but that He only made possible the salvation of everyone. This doctrine teaches that it is the sinners’ faith that makes the atonement of Christ effectual. It is the coupling of faith and Christ’s death that results in salvation, not Christ’s death alone. Christ’s redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it. (4) *Resistible grace*, in that man is the final determiner of his salvation; the sinner can resist and defeat God’s desire and efforts to save him. God has done all He can do to save sinners, but it is ultimately up to the sinner to save himself through faith. The Holy Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until the sinner first believes. (5) The true Christian can *fall from grace*, in other words, although having been truly saved, through his own failure he can lose his salvation. In conclusion, Arminianism teaches that salvation is accomplished through the combined work of God and man. Man’s response is what determines who will be saved. God is trying to save everyone, but His efforts are only successful when sinners of their own free will choose to accept Jesus.

general atonement for all mankind, and Particular Baptists, who believed in the atonement of Jesus Christ for the elect only.¹⁶

Here are some verses that underscore the understanding of Particular Baptists:

Matthew 1:21. “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save *His people* from their sins.”

John 10:14, 15. “I am the good shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me, and I know the Father; and *I lay down My life for the sheep.*”

John 15:13. “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life *for his friends.*”

John 17:2. “...even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that *to all whom You have given Him,* He should give eternal life.”

Romans 8:31-33. “What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up *for us all*, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things? Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's *elect*? It is God that justifieth...”

Ephesians 5:23, 25, 26, 27. “For the husband is the head of the wife, and Christ also is the head of the church, being Himself the Saviour of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives also be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, even as *Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it*; that He might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the church to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”

Revelation 5:9. “And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for *You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood* out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.’”

We might consider a **rational defense of this doctrine**. First, if one considers the matter rightly, he will see that every position on the atonement is “limited” in one way or another. Either Christ provided a “limited” atonement in that He secured a salvation only for His people, or He provided a “limited” atonement in that He did not secure anyone’s salvation, having only made possible salvation for everybody. Second, if Christ intended to die equally for everybody and He paid the same price for everybody, then there are souls in hell who have their sins paid for twice. And third, if Christ intended to die equally for everybody, then you have a divided Godhead, for Christ then atoned for more people than the Father intended to give to Him. This is a violation of the unity of our one Godhead.

Here is the classical argument of **John Owen** in defense of limited atonement, an argument that has never been refuted logically or biblically by Arminians:

I may add this dilemma to our Universalists:-God imposed his wrath due unto, and Christ underwent the pains of hell for, either all the sins of all men, or all the sins of some men, or 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 are not all freed from the punishment of all their sins?

¹⁶ Interestingly, many of the General Baptists of the 17th century, became the Universalists within a generation or two. In other words, they came to believe all people will be saved from their sin, that there is no hell, after all “Jesus paid for the sins of all the world when He died on the cross.” That is what belief in a general atonement will lead people to eventually embrace as true. Arminian Baptists later became both Universalists and Unitarians, who deny the trinity.

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 it, or not. If so, then why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which he died? ...If he did not, then he did not die for all their sins. Let them choose which part they will.¹⁷

How do Reformed people deal with what appears to be a universal atonement of John 1:29, in which John declared, “**Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!**”? They do it in one of two ways. First, there are those who are Reformed who argue that John’s use of the term, “world”, is used to depict Christians not of Jews only, but of Gentiles also, people from all over the world. **William Hendriksen** takes this approach. He wrote:

According to the Baptist it is the sin *of the world* (men from every tribe and people, by nature lost in sin, cf. 11:51, 52) which the Lamb is taking away, not merely the sin of a particular nation (e.g. the Jewish)... The passage does not teach a universal atonement.¹⁸

Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) seemed to hold this view as well. He wrote:

This was an extraordinary truth to John. It took a miracle of grace to make a Jew see, “The Lamb, which taketh away the sin of the world.” The Jew thought that the sacrifice of God must be for his chosen people only; but John saw beyond all bounds of nationality and restrictions of race, and clearly perceived in Jesus “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”¹⁹

In another sermon **Spurgeon** commented on the same text, making an appeal for sinners to come to Christ in repentance and faith:

But whose sin does he take away? The text saith, “the sin of the world.” By this expression, I believe is intended the sin, not of the Jews only, but of Jews and Gentiles alike; — the sin, not of a few sinners only, but of all sinners in the whole world who come to Jesus, and put their trust in him. He has so taken away “the sin of the world” that every sinner in the world who will come to him, and trust in him, shall have all his sins put away for ever. Whether he be Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, Barbarian or Scythian, bond or foe, if he truly believes in Jesus, it is certain that Christ took all his sins away. Whether he was born eighteen hundred years ago, or whether he shall be born in the ages that are yet to come, does not make any difference to this fact, — Christ hath born his sins if he trusts in Jesus as his own Savior. This is the sign and token by which he may assuredly know that he hath a saving and eternal interest in the precious blood of Jesus: “He that believeth on him is not condemned.” The gate of grace is set very wide open in our text; if it were not some poor sinners would be afraid to enter. “Oh!” asks one, “is this mercy for me? Is it for me?” Well, friend, I will ask thee a question, — wilt thou trust Christ? Wilt thou come to him this very moment, and take the mercy that he freely presents to all who will accept it? If so, I am sure that it is thine, as sure as I am, that it, is mine.²⁰

John Gill (1697-1771) was an English Baptist pastor, who was the pastor of the church that Charles Spurgeon would pastor 100 years after him. He wrote a book in defence of God’s sovereign grace in which he dealt with every disputable passage of Scripture showing that the reformed faith is the biblical faith. In addressing **John 1:29** he wrote these words:

¹⁷ John Owen, *The Death of Death*, (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), p. 34.

¹⁸ William Hendriksen, *John*, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 99.

¹⁹ Charles Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 33, sermon #1987 (Pilgrim Publishers).

²⁰ *Ibid*, vol. 56, sermon #3222.

John 1:29, "*The Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world!*" By the *world* cannot be meant every individual of mankind; for it is true, it is not fact, the Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, takes away the sins of every individual man, since there are some who *die* in their *sins*, whose *sins go beforehand to judgment*, and *others follow after*, for which they will be righteously and everlastingly condemned; which can never be, if Christ has taken away their sin.²¹

But there are other Reformed men, who, although believe in the limited atonement of Christ, do not limit the number of people referred to in John's use of "the world." They do not believe that Jesus died to atone for the sins of all people, but rather *they emphasize that the value of Christ's death was sufficient to atone for all the sins of all people of all the world, but that God intended Christ's death to atone only for the sins of the elect*. J. C. Ryle held this view. Here is his larger discussion of "the world" in John 1:29:

It is almost needless to say that there are two views of this expression. Some say that it only means that Christ takes away the sin of Gentiles as well as Jews, and that it does not mean the sin of any but the elect. --Others say that it really means that Christ "taketh away" the sin of all mankind; that is, that He made an atonement sufficient for all, and that all are *salvable*, though not all saved, in consequence of His death.

I decidedly prefer the latter of these two views. I hold as strongly as any one, that Christ's death is profitable to none but to the elect who believe in His name. But I dare not limit and pare down such expressions as the one before us. I dare not say that no atonement has been made, in any sense, except for the elect. I believe it is possible to be more systematic than the Bible in our statements. When I read that the wicked who are lost, "deny the Lord that bought them" (2 Peter 2:1), and that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19), I dare not confine the intention of redemption to the saints alone. Christ is for every man.

Ryle's view as stated is not Arminian, but Calvinistic. He argued for the sufficiency of Christ's death to save any sinner anywhere, even while he held strongly that God intended Christ's death to atone only for the elect. The point is this, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross was of infinite value. His death is not only capable of saving every human being in this world, but it is capable of saving all people in 10,000 worlds, if there were such. Let us suppose the number of the elect were double what they are, would Christ have had to suffer more than He did? Of course not. His death was of infinite value. But the intention of God was not to save all mankind, but to save those whom God the Father chose (elected) unto salvation, those whom He gave to His Son to redeem from their sin.²²

There is actually another view of Christ's atonement, which is quite common among evangelicals. They refer to themselves as "**Four-point Calvinists**." They reject the "limited atonement" of Christ (the "L" in TULIP), in that they promote a modified universal atonement of Christ. This view of Christ's atonement is called **Ameraldianism**. They are also known as **Ameraldians**, because they espouse the doctrine of the atonement first promoted by **Moses Amyraut** (1596-1664), a French theologian. He agreed with four of the five points of Calvinism, or the doctrines of grace, but rather than a limited atonement in that Jesus Christ died only for the elect, Amyraut taught that Christ atoned for all the sins of all humanity, but it is only through faith that His atonement becomes effective in saving the sinner.

Ameraldianism is common among Southern Baptist churches, Evangelical Free churches, the dispensationalists in independent Bible churches and Baptist churches. **R. C. Sproul** had written against this doctrine as errant because it is wrong to think that Christ died for all the people of the world if all the people of the world are not as a result saved.²³ Ameraldianism is not biblical. The Bible clearly teaches that God intended that the death of Jesus Christ to atone only for the sins of His chosen people. And yet we

²¹ John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Baker Book House, 980, orig. 1855 edition), p. 64.

²² See John 17:1-4.

²³ R. C. Sproul, *The Truth of the Cross* (Reformation Trust, 2007), pp. 140-42.

would certainly declare that the death of Jesus Christ was of infinite worth, and that His death is capable of saving any sinner that comes to Him in repentance and faith.²⁴

But aside from the atonement of Jesus Christ on His cross in that He takes away the sin of His people, Jesus Christ also takes away from this world all those in sin who do not repent of sin and believe on Him as their Savior. When the history of this world concludes, after Jesus Christ returns, and He executes judgment upon the world, when His people enter into everlasting life and the lost into everlasting damnation, it will then be the case that there will be no longer any sin in the world. What or who removed this sin of the world? “Behold, the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world.”

B. John identified Jesus as the One He had previously declared was coming (v. 30)

Verse 30 reads, “*This is He of whom I said, ‘After me comes a Man who is preferred before me, for He was before me.’*” Here we see John the Baptist again bearing witness of Jesus Christ, particularly with view to His preincarnate second Person of the Holy Trinity. We have already seen this witness of John earlier in this chapter. We read in John 1:15, “John bore witness of Him and cried out, saying, ‘This was He of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me *is preferred before me, for He was before me.*’”” And then it is stated again in John 1:26f, “John answered them, saying, ‘I baptize with water, but there stands One among you whom you do not know. It is He who, coming after me, *is preferred before me*, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose.’” And we have it here expressed for the third time in verse 30.

The Evangelist does not, however, record that Jesus came from Nazareth nor that He came in order to be baptized (Matthew). His purpose is to emphasize the heavenly rather than the Galilean origin of Jesus (7:27, 8:14, 19:9) and to record the witness of John rather than the fact of His baptism. This does not mean that either Galilee (2:1) or the Baptism (1 John 5:6) is unimportant: both are assumed.²⁵

But there is a different emphasis in this statement of verse 30 than what we read earlier. In verse 30 there is more than just a recital of what the Evangelist already recorded. Here he gives emphasis to the *humanity* of the preincarnate Son of God. John declared, “*After me comes a Man...*”

This statement from the Baptist echoes his previous statement as recorded in the prologue (see comments on 1:15). The verbal differences are merely a change in perspective. The perspectival change, however, allow as v. 30 to highlight the humanity of Jesus. The eternal Word became “a man.” With these words the Baptist calls our attention to the fulfillment of his own prophecy. The prophetic witness of the Baptist has moved Jesus from the background to the immediate foreground, allowing for himself to be removed from the foreground and placed in the background.²⁶

Or as another put it, “While the Christology of this Gospel is of the highest the writer never loses sight of Jesus’ genuine manhood.”²⁷

C. John declared his calling to reveal Jesus to Israel (v. 31)

We continue to read the words of John the Baptist in verse 31, “*I did not know Him; but that He should be revealed to Israel, therefore I came baptizing with water.*”

²⁴ Of course only the elect will do so due to the grace of God working in and upon them.

²⁵ Edwyn Clement Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (Faber and Faber Limited, 1947), p. 175.

²⁶ Klink, *John*. p. 134.

²⁷ Morris, *John*, p. 150.

John first testified that he did not know Jesus to be the Messiah. This is somewhat of a mystery, in that Jesus was John's cousin by natural birth, and that John had even "known" Jesus when he was in his mother's womb (Luke 1:41). But much had transpired. Thirty years later John did not know that Jesus was the Messiah, until God signified to him that Jesus was the Christ, when the Holy Spirit came upon Jesus at His baptism by John.

John declared that his entire ministry of baptizing was for the purpose of revealing Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah to Israel. John needed to call the people to repentance and for them to be baptized with view to the forgiveness of sins because the Promised King was about to appear before them. And then John would need to baptize Jesus, because in that event God would reveal to him the identity of the Promised Messiah.

One might of thought that John's baptism was concerned largely with leading men to repent. But this was not John's final purpose. John baptized in view of the coming of the Messiah. He baptized in order that the Messiah would be "made manifest to Israel."²⁸

We will close with this consideration, of how each of us should avail ourselves of the free and full, and glorious promise that God will take away all our sin through Jesus Christ.

When he says, "The sin if the world," he extends this favor indiscriminately to the whole human race, hat the Jews might not think that He had been sent to them alone. Hence we infer that the whole world is involved in the same condemnation; and that as all men, without exception, are guilty of unrighteousness before God, they need to be reconciled to Him. John the Baptist, by speaking generally of the sin of the world, intended to impress upon us the conviction of our own misery, and to exhort us to seek the remedy. Now our duty is to embrace the benefit which is offered to all, that each of us may be convinced that *there is nothing to hinder* him from obtaining reconciliation in Christ, provided that he comes to Him by the guidance of faith.²⁹

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,
so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. (Rom. 15:13)

²⁸ Ibid, p. 151.

²⁹ Ryle, p. 63.