

# THE EFFICACY OF THE CROSS AND LIMITED ATONEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*This article critiques a key argument of the doctrine of limited atonement—that the atonement possesses an intrinsic universal efficacy and therefore is offered only for the elect. This argument is examined and found to be lacking because it does not take all the biblical data into account, it inches into contradiction, and at times it misunderstands “hypothetical.” The article concludes by noting a theological parallel with effectual calling. An efficacious atonement would not necessarily establish limited atonement any more than an effectual calling would rule out a general call.*

THE CONSENSUS AMONG REFORMED THINKERS today is that Jesus died only for the elect. Every family has black sheep, however, and the Reformed tradition is no different. Amyraldians and various other hypothetical universalists have demurred from the consensus, holding that the extent of the atonement is universal in principle but not in point of actual application.<sup>1</sup> This article engages this inner-Calvinistic dialogue.

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<sup>1</sup> Followers of Moïse Amyraut attempted to establish a Calvinistic version of universal atonement by arguing that God’s decree to provide salvation through Christ preceded his decree to grant saving faith to the elect; therefore, the atonement included all of humanity in its scope. Thus, Amyraldianism is a particular type of universalism. Oliver D. Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Fortress, 2014), 175–211; Donald Macleod, “Definite Atonement and the Divine Decree,” in *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson (Crossway, 2013), 423; and Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Eerdmans, 2007). For Amyraut’s biography and theology, see Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 71–269.

Reformed thinkers who support limited or definite atonement (hereafter L/DA) have marshaled various arguments from the realms of systematic theology and philosophical theology to make their case. This article evaluates various versions of one key argument for L/DA: the argument from “the efficacy of the cross.”<sup>2</sup> Specifically, since the atonement is effectual, then it must be limited to the elect or all would be saved.<sup>3</sup> Before we examine this argument in detail, however, we must ask: What does efficacy mean when applied to the atonement?

#### WHAT DOES EFFICACY MEAN?

In the twelfth century Lombard made a distinction that set the tone for theological discussion of the atonement ever since.<sup>4</sup> He distinguished between atonement’s *sufficiency* and its *efficiency*. By sufficiency Lombard is typically understood to be referring to the value of the atonement. Since Christ’s life is of infinite value and his death of infinite worth, the value of the atonement was more than sufficient for the sins of every person. But for Lombard, the atonement’s efficiency was a matter of actually achieving salvation. This is a benefit enjoyed only by the elect, those saved by the cross. Theologians thereafter referred to the atonement as *sufficient for all, efficient for the elect*—a formula widely supported across many theological traditions, whether Calvinist or otherwise.<sup>5</sup>

If efficacy is about actual salvation, how should it be conceived? There are several different ways that the efficacy of the

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<sup>2</sup> David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, “Sacred Theology and the Reading of the Divine Word: Mapping the Doctrine of Definite Atonement,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 48.

<sup>3</sup> John H. Gerstner, “A Primer on the Atonement,” in *Primitive Theology: The Collected Primers of John H. Gerstner*, ed. Don Kistler (Soli Deo Gloria, 1996), 338; and Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Zondervan, 2000), 594–95.

<sup>4</sup> 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 (IVP Academic, 2004), 311.

<sup>5</sup> G. Michael Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus (1536–1675)*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Wipf & Stock, 2007), 30; Raymond A. Blacketer, “Blaming Beza: The Development of Definite Atonement in the Reformed Tradition,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 140; and Gary L. Shultz Jr., *A Multi-Intentioned View of the Extent of the Atonement* (Wipf & Stock, 2013), 18. David L. Allen has challenged this typical understanding of Lombard. *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (B&H Academic, 2016), 27–31.

cross could work in relation to salvation, so before we examine an argument for L/DA based on efficacy, we must clarify what a person may mean when saying that the cross is efficient.<sup>6</sup>

To say that the cross is efficient could mean automatic efficacy. Something is automatically efficient if it immediately produces results without meeting any additional conditions or circumstances.<sup>7</sup> The key to something being automatically efficacious is that there is no time lag between the action and the result and no further conditions necessary for the result to come about. The result occurs immediately and automatically. This is the strongest sense of the word “efficacy.”

Many proponents of L/DA speak about the atonement in a way that seems to point to automatic efficacy.<sup>8</sup> However, if the atonement were efficacious in this sense, then salvation would be automatic and immediate. There would be no condition of faith required for its application. The elect would be born saved, and no one would have to believe in Christ for the atonement to take effect. Most proponents of L/DA recognize that the effects of the atonement are not obtained immediately or automatically and that there is a condition of faith. They do not feel that any of this counts against the atonement’s efficacy, however, because the atonement produces the conditions necessary for its application.<sup>9</sup>

The atonement has a second kind of efficacy—what we might call self-applying efficacy.<sup>10</sup> With self-applying efficacy, the results

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<sup>6</sup> Grant R. Osborne would “define *efficacious* differently” than the five-point Calvinist. “General Atonement View,” in *Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: Three Views*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Mark A. Snoberger (B&H Academic, 2015), 97 (italics original). Although Osborne does not explicitly spell out his definition of “efficacious,” it seems he would feel at home with the view we will call efficacy when applied. Thomas H. McCall and Grant R. Osborne, “Response [to Definite Atonement View] by Thomas H. McCall with Grant R. Osborne,” in Naselli and Snoberger, *Perspectives on the Extent*, 69. Cf. Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*, 145, 147.

<sup>7</sup> Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 216–20; cf. J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Baker Book House, 1987), 42.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Baxter’s complaint with John Owen’s exposition of L/DA was precisely the perceived implication of automatic salvation. Carl R. Trueman, “Atonement and the Covenant of Redemption: John Owen on the Nature of Christ’s Satisfaction,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 203, 206–11.

<sup>9</sup> David L. Allen, “The Atonement: Limited or Universal?,” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve Lemke (B&H Academic, 2010), 89; and Jonathan Gibson, “The Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work of God in Christ: Definite Atonement in Paul’s Theology of Salvation,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 339, 341.

<sup>10</sup> While “self-applying efficacy” is not standard terminology in this discussion, I

are not necessarily immediate. Other circumstances may be needed to achieve the final result. But the event with self-applying efficacy triggers a cascade of events that necessarily and inexorably culminates in a given result. Despite language that appears to treat the atonement in terms of automatic efficacy, self-applying efficacy is the real sense most advocates of L/DA give to the term. The work of Christ has within itself all the necessary means for its eventual application.<sup>11</sup> As Trueman states of the servant in Isaiah 53, “His death is what has both gained the effects of redemption and applied them to those whom the Lord has given him.”<sup>12</sup> The atonement applies itself.

There is a third sense of efficacy worth considering: efficacy when applied.<sup>13</sup> In this understanding of efficacy, something outside the thing under consideration must take action to apply it. This is arguably the normal sense the term efficacy carries. For example, for a stain lifter to be effective means it is effective when applied. The fact that the stain lifter does not apply itself does not take away from this efficacy.

In discussions of the atonement, efficacy when applied is often caricatured as adding to the work of Christ. This has been a long-standing concern of five-point Calvinists. Nicole alludes to faith as “a human ingredient . . . superadded to the work of Christ” if L/DA is not true.<sup>14</sup> Trueman contests that faith does indeed constitute a work if it is understood as either “autonomous” or “cooperative.”<sup>15</sup> Blocher argues that if the gift of faith is not packaged within the atonement, then it is added to the work of Christ by definition—even if God is the one who adds it!<sup>16</sup>

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have coined this phrase to capture the essence of this view and place it parallel to other concepts of efficacy.

<sup>11</sup> J. Alec Motyer, “‘Stricken for the Transgression of My People’: The Atoning Work of Isaiah’s Suffering Servant,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 261–62.

<sup>12</sup> Carl R. Trueman, “Definite Atonement View,” in Naselli and Snoeberger, *Perspectives on the Extent*, 50.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*, 112, 137, 202.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Nicole, “The Case for Definite Atonement,” *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 10.4 (1967): 201, summarized in Osborne, “General Atonement View,” 95.

<sup>15</sup> Carl R. Trueman, “Response [to General Atonement View] by Carl R. Trueman,” in Naselli and Snoeberger, *Perspectives on the Extent*, 129. Four-point Calvinism would be immune to this critique since it would likewise link faith to irresistible grace.

<sup>16</sup> Henri A. G. Blocher, “Jesus Christ the Man: Toward a Systematic Theology of Definite Atonement,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 573; cf. Piper, “My Glory

But this does not necessarily follow. Returning to the idea of a stain lifter for a moment, one does not need to add anything to an effective stain lifter for it to work. The user does something with it, but that does not mean he has added anything. If he needed to add something for it to work, then it would be an ineffective product because it would not do the job even when applied. So if one needed to add human merit in the form of good works to the death of Jesus for it to be effective for salvation, then the charge of adding to the work of Christ would be justified.

One could, however, object that the user must do something with the stain remover before it is effective, namely adding their *labor* to the stain remover. This impression arises from the limitations of the analogy, however. The actual theological situation would be closer to a technician showing up at the user's home and asking permission to apply the stain remover. The consumer responds affirmatively, the technician applies the solution, and the stain is lifted. If the user told his friends that he had helped the technician remove the stain, it would simply be untrue. His affirmative answer—entrusting himself to the technician—was not in any way a participation in the actual work of removing the stain. The same problem would be involved in classifying faith as a “work,” “merit,” or “participation” in one's own salvation.<sup>17</sup>

How do all of these various understandings of efficacy map onto the theological terrain? L/DA requires either automatic efficacy or, at the very least, a robust form of self-applying efficacy. Four-point Calvinists are free to either adopt a limited form of self-applying efficacy (so that the cross applies itself to the elect but not to anyone else for whom Jesus died) or opt along with Arminians for efficacy when applied. A four-point Calvinist who holds to efficacy when applied would still maintain that God irresistibly applies the atonement to the elect through a special, saving gift of faith given by the Holy Spirit,<sup>18</sup> whereas an Arminian would see humans cooperating with God in the application of the atonement as God makes enabling grace available to all, which people are then free to receive or resist.<sup>19</sup>

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I Will Not Give to Another': Preaching the Fullness of Definite Atonement to the Glory of God,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 643n9, 665. Since the Spirit plays a role in application (an action distinct from the cross however it may be related to it), Blocher's objection appears to be dashed on its own premise.

<sup>17</sup> This is widely recognized. See, e.g., G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 1962), 268–70.

<sup>18</sup> Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 213.

<sup>19</sup> Osborne, “General Atonement View,” 122, 124–25.

Table 1. Atonement and Efficacy: A Summary of the Options<sup>20</sup>

Theological School	Definition of Efficacy	Mode of Application
Five-point Calvinism	Automatic efficacy or self-applying efficacy	No application is necessary, or the atonement applies itself.
Four-point Calvinism	Self-applying efficacy or efficacy when applied	The atonement applies itself (for the elect only), or God applies the atonement irresistibly.
Arminianism	Efficacy when applied	Individual cooperates in the application of the atonement.

With these various categories, distinctions, and clarifications in mind, we will now examine whether L/DA can be established via an argument from “the effectual nature of the atonement.”<sup>21</sup> This type of argument typically takes one of two forms:

1. Intrinsic Universal Efficacy: The atonement possesses an intrinsic universal efficacy;<sup>22</sup> therefore, it must be offered only for the elect or universalism follows.<sup>23</sup>
2. Divine Failure: If the atonement does not possess an intrinsic universal efficacy, it would constitute a divine failure.

The remainder of this article will evaluate the intrinsic universal efficacy argument to see if it can establish L/DA.

<sup>20</sup> The preceding summary and this table were formulated in reflection on Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 194–95.

<sup>21</sup> Trueman, “Response [to General Atonement],” 133; cf. Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, xxvii.

<sup>22</sup> Theologians have expressed this in various ways. See, e.g., Robert Letham, “The Triune God, Incarnation, and Definite Atonement,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 439–40 (“intrinsically efficacious”); Shultz, *Multi-Intentioned View*, 5 (“absolutely efficacious”); and John S. Hammett, “Multiple-Intentions View of the Atonement,” in Naselli and Snoeberger, *Perspectives on the Extent*, 162 (“inherently efficacious”).

<sup>23</sup> Letham, “Triune God,” 456.

## EXAMPLES OF THE INTRINSIC UNIVERSAL EFFICACY ARGUMENT

This argument is well represented by supporters of L/DA. In his classic treatment of L/DA, Owen argued the case this way: "If the blood of Jesus Christ 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*."<sup>24</sup> This is what the cross does: It washes and purges. If this was Christ's only goal, and we should not ascribe failure to him, then "surely he came for no more than towards whom that effect is procured."<sup>25</sup> He wisely owns this as an "inference"<sup>26</sup> yet confidently concludes, "Thus full, clear, and evident are the expressions in the Scripture concerning the *ends* and *effects* of the death of Christ, that a man would think every one might run and read."<sup>27</sup>

Gibson, writing about Romans 8, offers a more recent expression of the view: "What Paul presents here is the *efficacy* of Christ's atoning work . . . : it cannot *but* produce its intended effect. Put another way, all those for whom Christ died cannot but be given all things in order to reach final glorification."<sup>28</sup> Gibson sees this as the essence of the atonement itself. "The *nature* of the atonement is in Paul's purview here, and its nature is one of ultimate efficacy: those for whom Christ died *will* make it to glory."<sup>29</sup>

Proponents of L/DA, therefore, argue that there is an efficacy in Christ's death such that it is impossible for him to have died for someone who does not ultimately benefit from that work.<sup>30</sup> This is considered to be an intrinsic efficacy: The atonement as the atonement produces these results. It is considered universal as well because it will produce these results in any and every case. But how do proponents of L/DA know that the atonement possesses this intrinsic universal efficacy?

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<sup>24</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647; repr., Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), 138 (italics original).

<sup>25</sup> Owen, 97.

<sup>26</sup> Owen, 102.

<sup>27</sup> Owen, 47.

<sup>28</sup> J. Gibson, "Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work," 341–42.

<sup>29</sup> J. Gibson, 342n32 (italics original).

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1871; repr., Hendrickson; 1999), 2:549–51; Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Eerdmans, 1941), 394–95; and Piper, "My Glory," 638, 640, 664–65.

## NECESSARY ACTUALITY

A proponent of L/DA might say that the way Scripture describes the atonement makes the actuality of its results necessary.<sup>31</sup> The terminology used for Jesus's work on the cross (atoning, reconciling, propitiating) does not make much sense when left at a merely hypothetical level. These terms demand actuality.<sup>32</sup> Snoeberger aptly summarizes such terms as "the language of efficacy."<sup>33</sup> This goes beyond observing the limited effects of the atonement and then making an inference back to its nature. It speaks directly to its nature and, therefore, by implication its extent.<sup>34</sup>

Proponents of L/DA offer this line of argument as well. For example, Williams writes, "Paul suggests that Jesus' death both actually (not hypothetically) atoned for the sins of all Jews and Gentiles within the Christian community and that his death actually accomplished soteriological benefits for those for whom he died."<sup>35</sup> Trueman argues that the matter-of-fact indicative verbs used in passages such as Romans 5:18–19 present the salvific results of Christ's work as a settled fact, an objective reality.<sup>36</sup> As Paul says, "One act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men" (v. 18).<sup>37</sup> Paul and other biblical writers presented an actual salvation, not one that hangs in the balance.<sup>38</sup> Trueman concludes: "If the mediation merely makes these things possible, then how can Paul or the writer to the Hebrews talk in such terms? Their lan-

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<sup>31</sup> Garry J. Williams, "The Definite Intent of Penal Substitutionary Atonement," in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 471–72.

<sup>32</sup> Owen, *Death of Death*, 46–47, 70, 146–52; Nicole, "Case for Definite Atonement," 201; Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*, 234; Mark A. Snoeberger, "Introduction," in Naselli and Snoeberger, *Perspectives on the Extent*, 10; Hammett, "Multiple-Intentions View," 163n62; and Trueman, "Definite Atonement View," 40–55.

<sup>33</sup> Snoeberger, "Introduction," 10.

<sup>34</sup> Trueman, "Definite Atonement View," 21–23, 60; cf. Gibson and Gibson, "Sacred Theology," 47–48, 51; and J. Gibson, "Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work," 342n32.

<sup>35</sup> Jarvis J. Williams, *For Whom Did Christ Die? The Extent of the Atonement in Paul's Theology* (Paternoster, 2012), 188.

<sup>36</sup> Trueman, "Definite Atonement View," 39, 42, 51–54, 61. Proponents of L/DA frequently speak of the atonement as being objective. See, e.g., Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 373.

<sup>37</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the ESV.

<sup>38</sup> Owen, *Death of Death*, 96–97; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 594, 596n36, 598; and Thomas R. Schreiner, "'Problematic Texts' for Definite Atonement in the Pastoral and General Epistles," in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 379, 395–97.



guage would have to be conditional because the objective state of affairs Christ's work achieved would fall far short of the indicative statements these writers make."<sup>39</sup> This appears to be a powerful argument. If the cross provides actual, objective salvation, then must it not necessarily be limited to those actually saved (by definition)? When this reasoning is examined more closely, however, three weaknesses become apparent.

First, this argument does not account for all the biblical data on the atonement. It narrows the theological playing field in a way that ignores other salient features of New Testament theology. It brackets out other things that Paul, for example, said about the atonement and then reads what are essentially theological summary statements, such as Romans 5:18–19, as if they represent the entire story.<sup>40</sup> Paul does in fact use conditional language concerning the atonement in certain places. In 3:25 he added the somewhat awkward construction διὰ τῆς πίστεως (“by faith” or “through faith”) as a modifier to the noun ἱλαστήριον (“propitiation” or “atonement”).<sup>41</sup> The Septuagint frequently employed the related verb form ἐξιάσκειν for the Hebrew verb כָּפַר, which referred to covering or expiating sin. From this verb came the noun כַּפֶּרֶת, which was a gold surface (frequently rendered in English as “mercy seat”) resting over the ark of the covenant where the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement. The Septuagint frequently brought this word into Greek with the term ἱλαστήριον, a word that means “that which expiates”—the same word Paul applied to the sacrifice of the cross in 3:25. In essence Jesus becomes the “mercy seat” in the new covenant.<sup>42</sup> Thus this verse holds the heart of Paul's understanding of the atonement. And in this place he deems fit to mention faith.

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<sup>39</sup> Trueman, “Definite Atonement View,” 53.

<sup>40</sup> See Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 203; and John S. Hammett, “Response [to Definite Atonement View] by John S. Hammett,” in Naselli and Snoberger, *Perspectives on the Extent*, 77–78.

<sup>41</sup> D. A. Carson, “Atonement in Romans 3:21–26,” in Hill and James, *Glory of the Atonement*, 135–36; and Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 2nd ed., NICNT (Eerdmans, 2018), 257.

<sup>42</sup> Johannes Herrmann, “ἱάσκειν,” in *TDNT*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1966), 3:302–10, 318–19; Friedrich Büchsel, “ἱλαστήριον,” in Kittel, *TDNT*, 3:319–23; H.-G. Link and C. Brown, “ἱάσκειν,” in *NIDNTT*, ed. Collin Brown (Zondervan, 1978), 3:148–66; and Daniel P. Bailey, “Jesus as the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul's Use of *Hilasterion* in Romans 3:25,” *TynBul* 51.1 (2000): 156–58.

The KJV translates 3:25 as “a propitiation through faith in his blood,” and the NASB, “a propitiation in His blood through faith.” The idea is not that Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice in faith but rather that faith is necessary to appropriate his sacrifice.<sup>43</sup> Several translations supply the thought in English that is left unspecified in Greek; so the NIV and ESV translate the phrase “to be received by faith,” and the NRSV renders it “effective through faith.”<sup>44</sup> When Paul explicitly discusses the dynamics of the atonement itself, he intentionally mentions the role that faith plays in the appropriation of the benefits of the atonement.<sup>45</sup> The atonement is not instantaneously effective. Rather faith is necessary to appropriate and apply its benefits.<sup>46</sup>

In chapter 4 Paul elaborated on justification by faith, and in 5:1 he transitioned from believers’ justification by faith to the resulting peace with God. Therefore, when Paul said in verse 18 that “one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men,” the reader should not forget everything he previously said about justification by faith. Having laid the groundwork, Paul did not need to repeat every concept each time. Rather in verses 18–19 and other similar passages, he employed a theological shorthand of sorts, expecting readers to understand that this act of righteousness leads to justification for those who appropriate it by faith, as he previously explained in 4:1–8 and 5:1. Only by ignoring the broader context of such indicative statements can they be pressed into the service of L/DA.

Second, the argument inches into the realm of contradiction.<sup>47</sup> Proponents of L/DA see the elect as possessing objective salvation once Jesus died on the cross. However, it is difficult to see what they could mean by “objective.” Given the time lag between the death of Jesus and the application of that death to the elect, “objective” does not and cannot mean that an elect person is literally saved the moment Jesus died on the cross, not unless proponents of

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<sup>43</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 269; Carson, “Atonement in Romans,” 127, 135–36; and Jarvis J. Williams, “Penal Substitution in Romans 3:25–26?,” *Princeton Theological Review* 13.2 (2007): 75–80.

<sup>44</sup> Büchsel, “ἰλαστήριον,” 3:321; and Link and Brown, “ἰλάσκομαι,” 3:163–64.

<sup>45</sup> Verse 25 is the only use of the term ἰλαστήριον in Paul’s entire corpus. Williams, “Penal Substitution,” 76.

<sup>46</sup> Carson, “Atonement in Romans,” 127, 135–36; and Moo, *Letter to the Romans*, 257.

<sup>47</sup> Shultz, *Multi-Intentioned View*, 96.

L/DA wish to argue that the cross possesses automatic efficacy.<sup>48</sup> No, the elect person is still lost until the moment of placing faith in Jesus. Then the cross is applied and they are saved. The natural question becomes, What does it mean to say that someone has “objective salvation” if they are not, in fact, at that moment saved?<sup>49</sup> L/DA tends to collapse the results of the atonement into the definition of atonement itself, leading to this inconsistency.<sup>50</sup>

Both five-point and four-point Calvinists are willing to speak of the work of Christ in “objective” terms, but they mean something different. Five-point Calvinists say that actual salvation was objective at the moment of the cross. Four-point Calvinists say imputation of sin was objective at the cross (what Hammett calls “objective provision”).<sup>51</sup> The fact that the elect are not immediately or automatically saved at the moment of Jesus’s death makes the five-point understanding somewhat strained.<sup>52</sup> Five-point Calvinists have to affirm the uncomfortable proposition that salvation was an actual reality for a person in a moment before it was a reality. Those who are objectively saved are not (yet) objectively saved. If they wish to modify and qualify the term “objective” as it is applied to the period between the cross and the actual salvation of the elect so that “objective” means something different than literally saved, then they would seem to be moving in the direction of four-point Calvinism’s “objective provision.” So this approach to defending L/DA leads to a dilemma. It can affirm a virtual contradiction, or it can define its terms in such a way that it avoids the contradiction but also begins to lose this particular argument for L/DA.

A third problem with this argument follows from the first two; namely, this approach at times misunderstands and misuses the term “hypothetical.” Four-point Calvinists do not see the atonement as hypothetical. The reality of the existence of a condition

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<sup>48</sup> Hammett, “Response [to Definite Atonement],” 77; and Hammett, “Multiple-Intentions View,” 174.

<sup>49</sup> Trueman, “Atonement and the Covenant,” 203, 206–7, 210; and McCall and Osborne, “Response [to Definite Atonement],” 68–69.

<sup>50</sup> Though some advocates of L/DA maintain the temporal distinction between these. See, e.g., J. Gibson, “Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work,” 344, 357; and Shultz, *Multi-Intentioned View*, 84–85.

<sup>51</sup> On imputation, see Allen, “Atonement,” 62n1, 63–67, 89–90, 91n93; and Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, xxii, xxiv–xxv. Hammett rightly distinguishes “objective provision” from “subjective application.” “Response [to Definite Atonement],” 77; and Hammett, “Multiple-Intentions View,” 162; cf. Shultz, *Multi-Intentioned View*, 20, 37, 51, 84–88, 154.

<sup>52</sup> See Allen, “Atonement,” 88.

means that Christ may have “actually (not hypothetically)”<sup>53</sup> accomplished something for a person without it taking effect because the requisite condition has not been met.<sup>54</sup>

Imagine that every person’s sins were imputed to Christ. An objective substitution has taken place, and therefore his work is indeed objective—a thing already accomplished.<sup>55</sup> He *really* does something for all people.<sup>56</sup> But if there is an inherent conditionality in the arrangement, the mere fact of that objective substitution does not guarantee that anyone will escape punishment.<sup>57</sup> If that is the case (and the New Testament seems to suppose that it is), then we can easily see how Christ may truly perform an objective action for a person, and yet that person does not experience immediately—or ever—the benefits.

But that does not mean Christ only hypothetically bore their sins. He really did bear their sins! It was imputed to him when he suffered on the cross. As he suffered on Calvary, God the Father treated him as if he had committed their particular sins. Now their enjoyment of the benefits may well be a future hypothetical at this point, but a *real atonement* has been offered that has their name on it, so to speak, and is not hypothetical. It is something truly accomplished.<sup>58</sup>

This answers the objection of those Reformed thinkers who would, in the words of Thomas, “ask how a conditional atonement can be regarded as an accomplished event and, indeed, how a past act can be described as conditional upon a future response.”<sup>59</sup> A truly hypothetical atonement would be one in which the condition was on the front rather than the back.<sup>60</sup> Suppose that Christ would

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<sup>53</sup> Williams, *For Whom Did Christ Die*, 188.

<sup>54</sup> Shultz, *Multi-Intentioned View*, 53, 82; and Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, xxii–xxiii.

<sup>55</sup> Daniel Strange, “Slain for the World? The ‘Uncomfortability’ of the ‘Unevangelized’ for a Universal Atonement,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 591.

<sup>56</sup> Lee Gatiss, “The Synod of Dort and Definite Atonement,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 153.

<sup>57</sup> Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*, 180, 192–93, 201–2, 214, 240; Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 193–95; Strange, “Slain for the World,” 591; and Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, xxiii, 38n9.

<sup>58</sup> Shultz, *Multi-Intentioned View*, 38n140, 44, 53, 82.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*, 202.

<sup>60</sup> See the thoughts of John Davenant in Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 189–90, 199–200.

come and bear our sins only if we first exercised faith.<sup>61</sup> This is a very different scenario from the first, where Christ objectively substituted for sinners before the condition ever came into play.

#### THE CONDITION OF FAITH

At the heart of the L/DA argument from efficacy rests a particular understanding of the relationship of faith to the cross, because the New Testament does not present the atoning work of Christ as something that automatically saves people<sup>62</sup> but as something that saves them once they have met a particular condition: faith. Proponents of L/DA must argue that the atonement itself produces or triggers faith. Packer contends that atonement's "saving power is such that faith flows from it."<sup>63</sup> Piper concurs: Faith "is a gift of God. It was purchased for us by Christ."<sup>64</sup> In other words, in addition to providing forgiveness of sins, the atonement also functions as the trigger in some way for the eventual application of that forgiveness.<sup>65</sup> It possesses self-applying efficacy.

This step is crucial for the efficacy argument because it allows five-point Calvinists to relieve tension within their system. They must affirm that the cross *by itself* is enough to save<sup>66</sup> while also maintaining the apparently contradictory premise that application requires additional action by the Holy Spirit before salvation takes effect.<sup>67</sup> The solution is to see the atonement as the cause of the Spirit's application in such a way that there remains an unbreakable causal chain in salvation stretching back to the moment of the atonement.<sup>68</sup> If one could assume that the atonement "set off a

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<sup>61</sup> Something like this scenario is precisely the striking misunderstanding argued for by Owen, *Death of Death*, 123, 131.

<sup>62</sup> J. Gibson, "Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work," 337–38.

<sup>63</sup> J. I. Packer, "'Saved by His Precious Blood': An Introduction to John Owen's *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*," in *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Crossway, 1990), 134.

<sup>64</sup> Piper, "My Glory," 643.

<sup>65</sup> Allen, "Atonement," 89; cf. Motyer, "Stricken for the Transgression," 261–62; and J. Gibson, "Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work," 339, 341.

<sup>66</sup> Trueman, "Definite Atonement View," 50; and Shultz, *Multi-Intentioned View*, 37n137, 86.

<sup>67</sup> McCall and Osborne, "Response [to Definite Atonement]," 68–69; Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 225; and Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant," 206, 208.

<sup>68</sup> J. Gibson, "Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work," 338–39, 341; Macleod, "Definite Atonement," 406, 408; and Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 101,

causal chain” of events much like dominoes and required no additional action of any party between the cross and the salvation of the elect, then the time lag and the need for application of the atonement by faith would be mitigated as rejoinders to the argument from efficacy.<sup>69</sup> Something may, after all, possess self-applying efficacy without producing its results right away.

Such a causal connection would not prove L/DA, since it is possible (as many four-point Calvinists have affirmed) that the causal connection is there for the elect but not for the nonelect—a possibility explored below. But if the atonement does not apply itself in such a way, then the argument from efficacy fails because it requires this sort of causal connection.<sup>70</sup> To evaluate this argument we must also explore the nature of the causal connection between the atonement and its application.

#### ATONEMENT, APPLICATION, AND CAUSATION

A strong biblical case can be made that the atonement is the *grounding* and *basis* of the release of the Spirit and the granting of the gift of faith.<sup>71</sup> Faith is granted to the elect on behalf of Christ (Phil 1:29); the Spirit is poured out after Jesus’s death and resurrection (John 7:39; Acts 1:3–5); and the ultimate result of Jesus being lifted up is the drawing of all men to him (John 12:32).<sup>72</sup> This biblical data is impressive, but for the argument from efficacy to work, the cross must be the *sole sufficient* cause of these things,<sup>73</sup>

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181. This chain would reach back past the cross all the way to election. J. Gibson, “Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work,” 348. Salvation would stand in the same kind of causal relationship to election as it does to the cross. Should we not, therefore, by the same logic, treat election as the actual moment our salvation was secured with nothing necessary beyond that?

<sup>69</sup> Douglas Kutach, *Causation* (Polity, 2014), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Carl R. Trueman contends that an “immediate causal connection” exists. “Response [to Multiple-Intentions View of the Atonement] by Carl R. Trueman,” in Naselli and Snoeberger, *Perspectives on the Extent*, 206.

<sup>71</sup> Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 196–97; and Shultz, *Multi-Intentioned View*, 123, 138, 154. Hammett believes the cross and the work of the Spirit are “so tightly linked” that the Spirit’s work is actually an aspect of the atonement. “Multiple-Intentions View,” 174. This view could easily collapse into five-point Calvinism.

<sup>72</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 395; Paul R. Williamson, “‘Because He Loved Your Forefathers’: Election, Atonement, and Intercession in the Pentateuch,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 241; and Matthew S. Harmon, “For the Glory of the Father and the Salvation of His People: Definite Atonement in the Synoptics and Johannine Literature,” in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 272n16.

<sup>73</sup> Owen, *Death of Death*, 140–41.

or at least it must be the sole sufficient cause of the next step in the causal chain, which then is the sole sufficient cause of the step after that, until the salvation of each of the elect. When the biblical evidence is examined more closely, however, this does not appear to be the case. The Spirit was not released at the moment of Christ's death. Rather, the Spirit was poured out only when the ascended Jesus asked the Father (John 14:16; Acts 2:33). God the Son took action after the cross to release the Holy Spirit. Though frequently overlooked, this means that although Jesus procured the right to grant the Spirit at the cross, the cross was not the sole sufficient cause of the giving of the Spirit. If it were, the Spirit would have been given immediately at the moment of Jesus's death with no further action required on Christ's part.<sup>74</sup>

Owen, however, provided a trenchant objection. He rightly argued that there are different kinds of causes and each of these can be the "sole cause" of something in its own unique sense. For example, faith is the instrumental cause of justification—and even the *sole* instrumental cause of justification—without displacing the work of Christ as the sole grounds of our justification in a different sense. Owen continued the argument with the following analogy:

A man is detained captive by his enemy, and one goes to him that detains him, and pays a ransom for his delivery; who thereupon grants a warrant to the keepers of the prison that they shall knock off his shackles, take away his rags, let him have new clothes, according to the agreement, saying, "Deliver him, for I have found a ransom." Because the jailer knocks off his shackles, and the warrant of the judge is brought for his discharge, shall he or we say that the price and ransom which was paid was not the cause, yes, the sole cause of his delivery?<sup>75</sup>

Indeed, it would certainly appear to be. There is, however, something missing from Owen's analogy. Suppose that in addition to paying the ransom for his friend, this kind benefactor must obtain permission from his friend before the release takes effect. The benefactor has the power to open his friend's mind and heart to receive the gift he is offering, and he purposes to do so. He pays the ransom, the warrant of release is issued, and the benefactor enters the jail cell. He touches his friend's heart and mind, thus convincing him to allow himself to be set free. The shackles are broken off, and

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<sup>74</sup> Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 216–20, 226–32; cf. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 198; Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant," 206, 208; and Blocher, "Jesus Christ the Man," 573–75.

<sup>75</sup> Owen, *Death of Death*, 140.



the friend is released. Can we say the act of persuasion was caused by the ransom? In a certain sense, yes. The ransom set up the whole scenario apart from which there would have been no act of persuasion. Can we say the ransom was the cause of the release? Again, in a certain sense, yes. But given the two-step process involving the benefactor in ransoming and then persuading, we would be hard-pressed in this scenario to say that the ransom was the sole sufficient cause of the release.

In this analogy the ransom is the ultimate cause of the man's release. But there are other factors that are harder to connect to the ransom itself. It will not do to claim that the atonement is the cause of application *in just any sense* we give to the term "cause." The idea of causation is complex, and there are many forms it can take.<sup>76</sup> The atonement must be the kind of cause that *by itself* guarantees results for the L/DA argument to work. Given the nature of the intervening steps between atonement and application as presented in Scripture, it is difficult to see how that is the case. Proponents of L/DA assume this, stating it frequently and forcefully. But there does not seem to be unambiguous scriptural support for this "inexorable link."<sup>77</sup>

This distinction holds in the case of the atonement and its application. Even if Jesus purchased faith for the elect on the cross, the way that faith is distributed and applied does not have the type of causal connection necessary to truly say that the atonement is self-applying. The atonement is not applied in a *mechanical* way, as if one were to knock down a series of dominoes with the only necessary action being to topple the first domino in the series. Rather it is applied in a *personal* way, as if one were to win a large sum of money and then distribute it to family and friends. The distribution would certainly be based on and made possible by the winning, but it would not be right to say that the winning was the sole sufficient cause of the distribution. The winning and the dis-

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<sup>76</sup> Kutach differentiates causes: "single causation" versus "general causation," "background and foreground causes," "proximal" versus "distal causes," "enabling" versus "activating causes," and "contributing cause[s]." *Causation*, 3–5, 135–36. We could realistically say that the atonement is a "background cause," a "contributing cause," or a "causal factor" in its application. Trueman classifies it as a "meritorious cause," which he then calls "a moral cause." "Atonement and the Covenant," 220; following Owen, *Death of Death*, 140. The question becomes whether these types of causal connections actually tie the atonement to its application in the way L/DA would require.

<sup>77</sup> Shultz, *Multi-Intentioned View*, 20, 31, 37n137, 51.



tribution would remain distinct acts.<sup>78</sup> In the same way, the application of salvation is personal rather than mechanical.<sup>79</sup> The atonement does not apply itself; God applies it (1 Cor 1:30).

But perhaps we have the wrong kind of cause and effect in mind. Maybe the atonement is personally rather than mechanically applied, but the nature of the relationship is such that the personal action of the Son on the cross in some way necessitates the later action of the Spirit in applying the atonement. The atonement still would not exactly be self-applying, but the obligation it would create for its later application might just provide a strong enough link for the argument from efficacy to work.

So once the atonement is made, is God obligated in some way to apply it?<sup>80</sup> A negative response to this line of reasoning emerges, surprisingly, from within five-point Calvinism itself. In attempting to square the time lag between the moment of the atonement and the salvation of the elect, five-point Calvinists sometimes appeal to the distinction between a pecuniary payment and one that is forensic. A pecuniary payment is financial in nature, and the payment itself is the only thing required for it to take effect. As soon as the payment is made, the debt is discharged. This clearly will not work as a model for the atonement given the time gap between atonement and application. So five-point Calvinists prefer to think of the atonement in terms of a forensic payment. In a forensic payment some flexibility exists when it comes to application. The payment could be applied immediately, but it does not have to be.<sup>81</sup> Owen expressed it this way:

Hence it is that the discharge of the debtor doth not immediately follow the payment of the debt by Christ; not because that payment is refusable, but because in that very covenant and compact from whence it is that the death of Christ is a payment, God reserveth to

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<sup>78</sup> See Thomas's summary of John Cameron's distinction "between satisfaction and its fruit." *Extent of the Atonement*, 178. Shultz contends that L/DA combines atonement and application in a way that ignores "the strong distinction" between them. *Multi-Intentioned View*, 84–85.

<sup>79</sup> J. Gibson, "Glorious, Indivisible, Trinitarian Work," 356n76; Macleod, "Definite Atonement," 417; Letham, "Triune God," 451; and Link and Brown, "ἰλάσκομαι," 3:155, 157, 162; and Michael Lynch, "Quid Pro Quo Satisfaction? An Analysis and Response to Garry Williams on Penal Substitutionary Atonement and Definite Atonement," *EvQ* 89.1 (2018): 65.

<sup>80</sup> Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 125; and Allen, "Atonement," 83.

<sup>81</sup> Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 224–25, 193; Allen, "Atonement," 88–89; Trueman, "Atonement and the Covenant," 206–11; Garry J. Williams, "Punishment God Cannot Twice Inflict: The Double Payment Argument *Redivivus*," in Gibson and Gibson, *From Heaven*, 484–86, 495, 510–11; and Blocher, "Jesus Christ the Man," 571–72.

himself this right and liberty to discharge the debtor when and how he pleaseth.<sup>82</sup>

In a forensic model, God remains sovereign over the application of the atonement.<sup>83</sup>

This is a larger concession, however, than most five-point Calvinists realize. God remains sovereign over “when and how” the atonement is applied, but there is just one short step between “when and how” the atonement is applied in any given case and “whether” the atonement is applied in any given case. In fact, one might reasonably argue that the difference between “when and how” and “whether” is one of degree rather than kind. To one person the atonement is applied after having spent six years of life under the just judgment and condemnation of God (even though Jesus died for this one). To another the atonement is applied after having spent ninety-six years of life under the just judgment and condemnation of God (even though Jesus died for this one too). If it is logically possible for such a state of affairs to exist for six years or ninety-six years, then there seems to be no solid reason that such a state of affairs could not persist indefinitely.<sup>84</sup>

The atonement does not apply itself in quite the right way for the argument from efficacy to work, nor is God somehow obligated to take additional action to apply it. By making faith one of the blessings of the atonement, L/DA misunderstands the nature of faith that is in reality a God-given point of contact with the atonement rather than a blessing infallibly flowing from it. It is only by coming into contact with the atonement that we receive its blessings. To say that we receive one of its blessings (namely, faith) apart from faith is to say that we can receive one of the blessings of the atonement before we are connected to it—a transparently unbiblical proposition.

#### A THEOLOGICAL PARALLEL WITH EFFECTUAL CALLING

If Scripture does not present the atonement as possessing self-applying efficacy, the argument from efficacy for L/DA fails. Many

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<sup>82</sup> John Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, in vol. 10 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh, 1852; repr., Banner of Truth, 1967), 458, quoted in Piper, “My Glory,” 651n18; cf. Trueman, “Atonement and the Covenant,” 212, 220.

<sup>83</sup> Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 195, 197–98; Allen, “Atonement,” 83; Motyer, “Stricken for the Transgression,” 263; and Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 225.

<sup>84</sup> Modifying an argument of Erwin W. Lutzer, *One Minute After You Die* (Moody, 2015), 114.

four-point Calvinists, however, are willing to grant self-applying efficacy to the atonement in the case of the elect.<sup>85</sup> This theological move demonstrates that even if one were to grant a certain kind of self-applying efficacy to the cross, this would not *of necessity* lead to L/DA because the atonement may well apply itself only to the elect. This may sound to many five-point Calvinists like an attempt to dodge the implications of the efficacy of the cross. But there is a surprising theological parallel here that most five-point Calvinists accept: the general versus the effectual call of the gospel.

Romans 8:30 includes the gospel call as one of the soteriological blessings given to the elect: “And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” This call is effectual.<sup>86</sup> Those who receive it will respond. But herein lies the parallel and the problem. It is illegitimate to argue that because the call of the gospel is efficacious for the elect, there is, therefore, no general call of the gospel. The proper conclusion would not be that the call of the gospel is limited to the elect, but rather that only the elect are called *in this way*. If the same hermeneutic were applied to the effectual call of the gospel that proponents of L/DA wish to apply to the atonement, then the result would be that there is not and could not be a general call of the gospel. In other words, the reasoning behind the argument for efficacy in favor of L/DA does not go far enough. If consistently applied, it could, would, and should eliminate both general atonement and the general call of the gospel. Despite the logic, however, there is simply too much biblical evidence for a general call of the gospel.

The call of the gospel may well be efficacious for the elect, but that does not necessitate that it is limited to the elect (as most Reformed thinkers are willing to concede). But if there can be a general call even though the elect receive an effectual call, why could there not be a general atonement even though the atonement is effectual for the elect?<sup>87</sup> Proponents of L/DA will recognize the general-effectual distinction with regard to the call of the gospel but countenance no such distinction with regard to the atonement: Ef-

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<sup>85</sup> See, e.g., Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*, 134–35, 146; D. Broughton Knox, “Some Aspects of the Atonement,” in *The Doctrine of God*, vol. 1 of *D. Broughton Knox, Selected Works*, ed. Tony Payne (Matthias Media, 2000), 262; and Shultz, *Multi-Intentioned View*, 84–85, 142, 144.

<sup>86</sup> Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation: Unconditional, Individual, and Infralapsarian,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Broadman & Holman, 2006), 16–17.

<sup>87</sup> Knox, “Some Aspects,” 262.

fectual calling does not rule out a general call, but effectual atonement does rule out a general atonement. There is an exegetical inconsistency at play. If an effectual atonement rules out a general atonement, then an effectual call rules out a general call. Affirming both L/DA and a general call leads to logical inconsistency.<sup>88</sup>

Supporters of L/DA might respond, however, that in a sense the general call of the gospel is not for unbelievers. Rather it is intended as the means God uses to get the gospel to the elect:<sup>89</sup>

There is no contradiction, biblical or logical, in saying that Christ died for a particular group of people while at the same time affirming that this good news is to be preached to all without distinction. . . . God has ordained that the means by which the elect will believe in Christ is the indiscriminate preaching of the gospel.<sup>90</sup>

The general call then would be the context in which the effectual call takes place. This move does not resolve the problem for L/DA, however, since the identical move is available in reference to the atonement. Knox takes this theological step: “In intending to reconcile the elect only, the method God has chosen has been to make all men reconcilable.”<sup>91</sup> He continues, “The method by which the elect are saved is that they and the non-elect alike are made savable by Christ’s death for mankind.”<sup>92</sup> In other words general atonement is the context in which an effectual atonement for the elect takes place. If the general call is the nexus in which the effectual call takes place, why could there not be a general atonement

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<sup>88</sup> Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*, 249; and Blacketer, “Blaming Beza,” 127.

<sup>89</sup> Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*, 149, 228; and Gerstner, “Primer on the Atonement,” 352–55.

<sup>90</sup> Harmon, “For the Glory,” 280; cf. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 48, 51–52. Blacketer claims “that the external call of the gospel is not *universal*, but rather, *indefinite*. There are many who never hear the gospel.” “Blaming Beza,” 137 (italics original). It is not clear, however, that this fully answers the objection presented here since that indefinite number includes both elect and nonelect and is, therefore, still general. Furthermore, Acts 17:30 states that God “commands all people everywhere to repent.” The fact that this command does not reach every person does not mean the command itself is not universal.

<sup>91</sup> Knox, “Some Aspects,” 261. This approach has a long history. See Allen, “Atonement,” 73–74; and Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 160, 178, 191.

<sup>92</sup> Knox, “Some Aspects,” 262. This approach cuts through the false dilemma sometimes presented by advocates of L/DA. For example, James White asks, “Does He accomplish His purpose? Does He actually save, or only make savable?” “Particular Redemption: True Atonement, True Substitution,” in *Debating Calvinism: Five Points, Two Views*, Dave Hunt and James White (Multnomah, 2004), 176. The problem with White’s formulation is the word “only.” Christ may actually save *and* make savable.

that serves as the nexus in which the particular atonement of the elect takes place? To countenance the former while dismissing the latter remains a theological inconsistency.

All of this is particularly troublesome for the argument from efficacy for L/DA. In terms of the meanings and definitions of efficacy outlined above, the effectual call of the gospel falls into the category of automatic efficacy. When someone receives this type of call from God, they come immediately. There is no time lag. There are no intervening steps. If someone is not yet a believer—even if they are mulling over the gospel invitation that they received earlier that evening—they may well be elect but have not yet received an effectual call. In that moment when they receive such a call, they will come. If an effectual call possessing automatic efficacy that succeeds immediately in every case does not rule out a general call, then one is hard-pressed to rule out general atonement by appealing to the cross's efficacy for the elect.

So the efficiency of the atonement for the elect in no way guarantees the atonement *must* have these particular effects in all cases any more than a genuinely effectual call guarantees the call *must* have this effect in all cases. Like the call of the gospel, one could affirm with rigorous logical consistency that the atonement possesses an efficacy that causes the salvation of the elect but not necessarily the salvation of everyone for whom Christ died. They could concede that the atonement is indeed efficacious (for the elect) and still deny that it is *universally* efficacious.<sup>93</sup> This would be limited intrinsic efficacy rather than universal intrinsic efficacy.

Several signatories at the Synod of Dort held to such a position, enabling them to sign Dort's affirmation that "it was God's will that Christ through the blood of the cross . . . should effectively redeem from every people, tribe, nation, and language all those and only those who were chosen from eternity to salvation."<sup>94</sup> Dort is usually considered a bald statement of L/DA,<sup>95</sup> but these Reformed signatories correctly understood that the mere fact that the atonement is effectual for the elect would not logically necessitate that it is limited to the elect.<sup>96</sup> The certain salvation of the elect follows,

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<sup>93</sup> Blacketer, "Blaming Beza," 139; and Trueman, "Definite Atonement View," 61.

<sup>94</sup> Canons of Dort 2.8, in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions*, ed. Christian Reformed Church (CRC Publications, 1988), 130–31, quoted in Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 180.

<sup>95</sup> Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 157; Gatiss, "Synod of Dort," 143; Williams, *For Whom Did Christ Die*, 22–23; and Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 149.

<sup>96</sup> Knox, "Some Aspects," 262–64; Allen, "Atonement," 67; Gatiss, "Synod of Dort,"

but not necessarily L/DA. This conclusion is rooted in the same logic that five-point Calvinists apply to the call of the gospel.

#### CONCLUSION

A noble impulse drives the argument from intrinsic universal efficacy.<sup>97</sup> Proponents of this view desire to ascribe to the cross the maximum amount of power possible without falling into universalism. Universalism, however, is not the only biblical parameter in the discussion. One's understanding of the nature and power of the atonement must be set within the entire biblical framework and take all of the biblical data into account. The arguments used to defend it must be logically consistent and lead to acceptable conclusions. This article has shown how the argument from intrinsic universal efficacy does not pass these tests and therefore does not succeed in establishing limited atonement.

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157, 162–63; Macleod, “Definite Atonement,” 423–24; Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism*, 179–81, 211; and Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, xxvi, 3, 149–57.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas, *Extent of the Atonement*, 135; Gibson and Gibson, “Sacred Theology,” 52–53; and Piper, “My Glory,” 633–34, 667.