

# **A Ransom for All?**

**Reconciling Universal Language with  
a Particular Atonement**

Sundays in July | Grace Community Church

Mike Riccardi



# The Point of Particular Redemption

- **Not:** To celebrate the **exclusion** of some from the saving will of God.
- **But:** To **safeguard** the atonement from being robbed of what makes it precious.



# The Point of Particular Redemption

- To **safeguard** the atonement from being robbed of what makes it precious.

There are popular ways of thinking  
and speaking about the cross  
that fundamentally **undermine**  
the **nature** of the atonement.



# The Point of Particular Redemption

- There are popular ways of thinking and speaking about the cross that fundamentally undermine the nature of the atonement.

If you universalize the extent of the **atonement** without universalizing the extent of **salvation**, you make **something other than Christ's death** The decisive and determinative **cause of salvation**.



# Particular Redemption

- **Everyone** for whom Christ dies is **infallibly assured** to be saved from sin and brought home to heaven.
- The cross **does not need** faith added to it to give it its saving power.
- The atonement **purchases the very faith** that unites us to Christ and the blessings of salvation in Him.



# The Case for Particular Redemption

- “Invincible Atonement” (SIJ ‘17)
  - [www.gracechurch.org/sermons/13303](http://www.gracechurch.org/sermons/13303)
- “O Perfect Redemption!”
  - [www.thegracelifepulpit.com/sermons.aspx?code=MR-CDA11](http://www.thegracelifepulpit.com/sermons.aspx?code=MR-CDA11)



# The Case for Particular Redemption

1. Maintains the **unity of the Trinity** in salvation
2. Fits with an atonement **designed to save**, rather than merely provide or make possible
3. Upholds the atonement as **efficacious** rather than provisional
4. Best explains the atonement as a work of Christ's **high priestly** ministry
5. Fits best with the inherently **particularistic metaphors** for atonement



# The Defense of Particular Redemption

Scripture **also** casts the scope of Christ's death in **universalistic** terms.

- 1 Timothy 2:6 – “...who gave Himself as **a ransom for all**...”
- 1 John 2:2 – “...and He Himself is **the propitiation** for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.”

It must be shown that these kinds of texts **don't contradict** particular redemption.



# The Defense of Particular Redemption

It must be shown that these kinds of texts **don't contradict** particular redemption.

If it can be shown that,  
when terms like “**all**” and “**world**”  
are interpreted in their contexts,  
they do **not** refer to **all people without exception**,  
universal atonement is disproven  
and **particular redemption is vindicated**.



# A Caveat

- Please **don't** hear me trying to “**explain away**” passages of Scripture
- Today's message must be **taken in the context** of the positive **biblical argumentation** for particular redemption
- I'm aiming to show how passages that **sound contradictory** only sound that way because they are being read **superficially**, rather than in context and according to the author's intent.



# All Means All?

- Genesis 6:13 – Then God said to Noah, “The end of **all flesh** has come before Me.”
- Acts 2:17 – “I will pour forth of My Spirit on **all mankind**” (lit., “upon **all flesh**”)
- Romans 5:18 – ...even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to **all men**.
- Romans 14:2 – One person has faith that he may eat **all things**...
- Matthew 10:22 – You will be **hated by all** because of My name...
- 1 Corinthians 1:5 – ...you were enriched in Him, in **all speech** and **all knowledge**...



# All Means All?

- Luke 11:42 – But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and **every kind of** garden herb [lit., “**every** herb”], and yet disregard justice...
- Acts 10:12 – ...and there were in it **all kinds of** four-footed animals [lit., “**all** the four-footed animals”]...
- 1 Timothy 6:10 – For the love of money is a root of **all sorts of** evil [lit., “**all** the evils”]...



# “All” is Not Self-Interpreting

- Like anything else, universal language must be properly interpreted according to its **context** and **consistently** with the rest of scriptural teaching.
- There are times when “all” does mean “all without exception,” but much more often it means “**all without distinction,**” or “**all kinds.**”



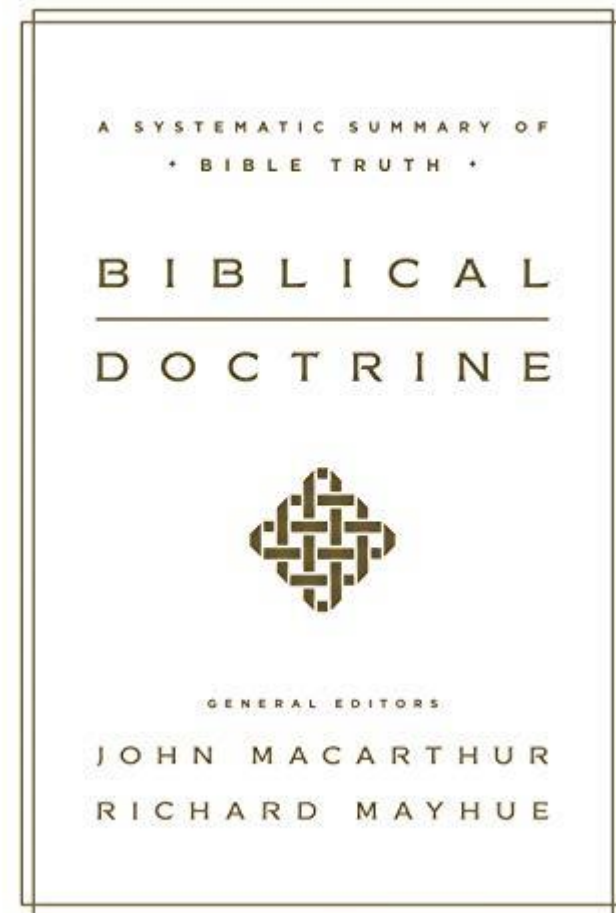
# Exception vs. Distinction

- All without Exception
  - 1 Cor. 15:27 – “For He has put **all things** in subjection under his feet. But when He says, ‘**All things** are put in subjection,’ it is evident that **He is excepted** who put all things in subjection to Him.”
- All without Distinction
  - Rom. 3:22–23 – “...even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for **all** those who believe; for there is **no distinction**; for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (cf. 3:29–30).
  - Rom. 10:11–12 – “For the Scripture says, ‘**All** those believing in Him will not be disappointed.’ For there is **no distinction** between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of **all**.”



# “All” is Not Self-Interpreting

“‘All’ is not a self-defining expression. While it may legitimately be understood to speak of every person who has ever lived (i.e., all without exception), it may also legitimately be understood to speak of all kinds of people throughout the world (i.e., all without distinction)” (555).



# I. John 12:32

“And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all men** to Myself.”

- Scripture never speaks of an ineffectual universal drawing, but only the effectual calling of regeneration.
  - John 6:37a – “**All** that the Father gives Me **will** come to Me...”
- Context favors “all without distinction”
  - John 12:20–21 – “**Now there were some Greeks** among those who were going up to worship at the feast; these...began to ask him, saying, ‘Sir, we wish to see Jesus.’”



## II. 2 Corinthians 5:14–15

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might **no longer live for themselves**, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

- Christ’s death for “all” effects the death of those for whom He died.
- In what sense have they died as a result of His death for them?
  - Col 2:20 – “...died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world.”
  - Col 3:3 – “You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.”
  - Rom 6:1–3 – “...we who have died to sin...”

Christ’s death effects His people’s  
spiritual death to sin and self in union with Him



## II. 2 Corinthians 5:14–15

“For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might **no longer live for themselves**, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.”

- Christ’s death for His people effects their spiritual death to sin and self in union with Him.
  - This does not describe all without exception.
- Christ not only died for, but was raised on behalf of, His people.
  - Rom 6:5 – “For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection...”
  - This does not describe all without exception



# III. 1 Timothy 2:3–6

“God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, **who gave Himself as a ransom for all**, the testimony given at the proper time.”



# III. 1 Timothy 2:3–6

“...the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all...”

Context of 1 Timothy

- 1:3 – “...so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines...”
- 1:6 – “Some men...have turned aside to fruitless discussion...”
- 1:7 – “...wanting to be teachers of the Law...”
- 1:4 – “...nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies...”
- 4:1–3 – “...men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods...”

→ An exclusive Jewish elitism



# III. 1 Timothy 2:3–6

“...the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all...”

Context of 1 Timothy: An Exclusive Jewish Elitism

- All without distinction: Gentiles as well as Jews
- I. Howard Marshall: “The universalistic thrust is most probably a corrective response to an exclusive elitist understanding of salvation connected with the false teaching. ... The context shows that the inclusion of Gentiles alongside Jews in salvation is the primary issue here” (*Pastoral Epistles*, ICC, 420, 427).

The benefits of Christ’s atonement are not restricted to an elitist sect. They are enjoyed by all kinds of people throughout the whole world.



# III. 1 Timothy 2:3–6

“...the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all...”

Context of 1 Timothy 2: Prayer for All

- 2:1 – “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of **all men**...”
  - Not: Every single individual who has ever lived without exception
  - But: All kinds of people: “...all men, for kings and all who are in authority” (2:2)
- “All” ought to be interpreted consistently across 2:1–6: **All Kinds**



# IV. Titus 2:11

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men...”

Context of Titus 2: All Classes of People

- Older men (2:2)
- Older women (2:3)
- Young women (2:4)
- Young men (2:6)
- Slaves (2:9)



# V. 1 Timothy 4:10

“For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, especially of believers.”

- Nearest antecedent of “Savior” is “the living God,” which often refers to the Father (1 Tim 3:15)
  - The Son is distinguished from “the living God” in Matt 16:16 and 26:63
  - Nowhere unambiguously used of the Son



# V. 1 Timothy 4:10

“For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, especially of believers.”

- The nearest antecedent of “Savior” is “the living God,” which often refers to the Father, and no mention of atonement in 1 Timothy 4.
- Reads “potentiality” or “provision” into the text where it is not.
- Fundamentally changes the atonement from an accomplishment to a provision.
- It is gratuitous to call God the Savior of people who are never in fact saved.



# V. 1 Timothy 4:10

“For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, especially of believers.”

- The death of Christ is held out as a universal provision that makes salvation possible for all without exception, on the condition that they believe.
- But for so many, God in His providence never sends a word either (a) of the Gospel which they must believe to be saved, or (b) of the Savior in whom they must trust to be saved.
- What does it mean to provide salvation to people upon the fulfillment of a condition, when the One who *must* act for them to fulfill that condition refuses to do so?



# V. 1 Timothy 4:10

“For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, especially of believers.”

- It's only reasonable to interpret the term “**Savior**” in the only other sense in which the Father is a Savior: He is the **rescuer** and **preserver of life** for all His creatures.
  - Gives life to all things (1 Tim 6:13; cf. Acts 17:25)
  - Is good to all; His mercies are over all His works (Ps 145:9)
  - Brings sun and rain on the evil and the good (Matt 5:45)
  - Delays judgment for the reprobate (cf. 2 Pet 2:4)



# V. 1 Timothy 4:10

“For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, especially of believers.”

- Especially of believers
  - He not only rescues believers from **temporal** dangers like He does for all people. He extends that rescue and deliverance all the way into **eternity** by blessing them with spiritual salvation from sin.
  - Homer Kent: “As applied to unbelievers [God being their Savior] includes preservation and deliverance from various evils and the bestowal of many blessings during this life. To believers, however, this salvation does not end with earthly life but goes on for all eternity” (*Pastoral Epistles*, 154).



# V. 1 Timothy 4:10

“For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, especially of believers.”

- Context supports this temporal/eternal view
  - 1 Tim 4:7–8 – “But have nothing to do with **worldly** fables fit only for old women, but discipline yourself for the purpose of **godliness**; for **bodily** discipline is only of little profit, but **godliness** is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the **present life** and also for the **life to come**.”
- God saves “all men” in a **temporal** sense and “believers” in an **eternal** sense.



# V. 1 Timothy 4:10

“For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is **the Savior of all men**, especially of believers.”

- Not: Christ has potentially atoned for all men but only believers benefit.
- Rather: The Father whose beneficence extends to **all people** in His **providential preservation** and care for them through **temporal** dangers  
is the Father whose beneficence extends to **His chosen people** even into **eternity** via their **spiritual salvation** from sin.



# VI. 2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord...is patient toward **you**, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

- 2 Pet 3:8 – “...But do not let this one fact escape your notice, **beloved**...”
- 2 Pet 1:1 – “To those who have received **a faith of the same kind as ours**...”
- 2 Pet 3:1 – “This is now...the **second letter** I am writing to you”
- 1 Pet 1:1 – “...who are **chosen** according to the foreknowledge of God...”



# VI. 2 Peter 3:9

“The Lord...is patient toward **you**, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”

- Jesus delays His return because He is patient toward those who are His—those whom the Father has given Him (cf. John 17:2), and for whom He has died to save but who have not yet come to faith (cf. John 10:16).
- God desires the repentance of all those He has given to the Son, for whom the Son has died to save, and who therefore must come to faith before God judges the earth and casts unbelievers into eternal punishment.



# World is Not Self-Interpreting

At least **seven senses** of κόσμος in Johannine literature:

1. The created order, or the universe at large (John 1:10b; cf. 1:3)
2. The inhabitable earth (John 1:10a)
3. Every\* individual who has ever lived on the earth (Rom. 3:19)
4. An indistinct large number of people (John 12:19)
5. Mankind as hostile to God (John 15:18–19; 17:9; 1 John 3:1)
6. The world system (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; 1 John 2:15–17; 4:5; 5:19)
7. Gentiles in contrast to Jews (John 3:16–17; 4:40–42; 1 John 2:1–2; cf. Rom. 1:8; Col. 1:6)



# World Means World?

- John 1:10 – “...**and the world** did not know Him.”
  - But some did: John 1:12.
- John 8:26 – “...**the things which I heard from Him, these I speak to the world.**”
  - Not to every individual alive in the world at the time, but openly to many in Israel.
- John 12:19 – “...**the world** has gone after Him.”
  - Not everyone who ever lived, nor even everyone alive at the time.
- John 15:18–19 – “**but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.**”
  - In this sense, the world is distinct from Christ’s people and cannot include them.
- 1 John 5:19 – “**We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.**”
  - Not John and the believers he’s writing to, who have overcome the world (1 John 5:4) and whom the evil one does not touch (1 John 5:18).



## VII. John 3:16

“For God so loved **the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

- God’s love is not mere fond affection, or a powerless wish to see the beloved benefited.
- Divine love consists in the determinative act of God’s will to accomplish the benefit of His beloved.
- Divine love always sees its intended aim brought to fruition.



## VII. John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him **shall not perish, but have eternal life.**”

- The intended benefit of God’s love of the world is nothing other than salvation itself.
- If divine love always accomplishes its purpose, then none are the objects of this love except those who finally receive its intended benefit—namely, salvation.



## VII. John 3:16

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him shall not perish**, but have eternal life.”

- Gk. *pas ho pisteuōn eis auton*
- Lit. “**all the believing in Him**”
- Gloss: “everyone believing in Him”
  
- Who believes? → Only those to whom God grants faith (cf. Eph 2:8–9; Phil 1:27).



## VII. John 3:16

“For God so loved **the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

How can it be an act of God's love to the **reprobate**  
to send Christ into the world to bring eternal life  
to all the **believing** ones?



## VII. John 3:16

“For God so loved **the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

How can it be an act of God's love  
to those who **will never believe**  
to send Christ to accomplish the salvation  
of **only** those who **will believe**?



## VII. John 3:16

“For God so loved **the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

- How can it be an act of God’s love to those who **will never believe** to send Christ to accomplish the salvation of **only** those who **will believe**?
- That would be to say, “God so loved **all** in such a way that **only some** of them will enjoy the benefits of His love.”



# “All” is Not Self-Interpreting

“Strange! that the Lord should so love men as to give his only-begotten Son for them, and yet not once by any means signify this love to them, as to innumerable he doth not!—that he should love them, and yet order things so...that this love should be altogether vain and fruitless!—...”



John Owen, *Death of Death*, 328



# “All” is Not Self-Interpreting

“...love them, and yet  
determine that they shall  
receive no good by his love,  
although his love indeed be a  
willing of the greatest good to  
them!”



John Owen, *Death of Death*, 328



# VII. John 3:16

“For God so loved **the world**, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

- 3:1 – “Now there was a man of the **Pharisees**, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the **Jews**...”
- God’s love terminates not only on Israel but also on men and women throughout the whole world—Gentiles as well as Jews who believe in Jesus.
- “World,” here, means not “all persons without exception,” but “all peoples without distinction.”



## VIII. 1 John 2:2

“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.”

- Propitiation: The efficacious satisfaction of divine wrath (e.g., Num 25:1–13).
- Not all without exception will escape the wrath of God (Matt 7:13; 25:46; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 21:8).
- Thus, Christ is in fact not the propitiation for the sins of all without exception.



# VIII. 1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.

## Two Options

A. Interpret the **substance** of the atonement in light of its **scope**

- “Whole world” = all without exception, elect and reprobate
- “Propitiation” = potential propitiation
  - Lake: Christ’s atonement has a “universal **potentiality**.”
  - Shultz: Sins are made “**forgivable** on the basis of the atonement.”
  - Kruse: The death of Christ is “sufficient to deal with the sins of the whole world, but . . . his sacrifice does **not** become **effective** until people believe in him.”



# VIII. 1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.

## Two Options

A. Interpret the **substance** of the atonement in light of its **scope**

- “Whole world” = all without exception, elect and reprobate
- “Propitiation” = potential propitiation

B. Interpret the **scope** of the atonement in light of its **substance**

- “Propitiation” = efficacious satisfaction of divine wrath
- “Whole world” = those who never experience divine wrath; i.e., the elect of God, scattered throughout the whole world, without distinction.



# VIII. 1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.

John is saying: Christ efficaciously satisfied the wrath of God (“propitiation”) against the sins of the believers to whom he’s presently writing (“ours”), and (a) the believers in other areas of the world who were alive at that time, as well as (b) the elect who would become believers as time progressed (“the whole world”).

- John 10:16 – “I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also...”
- John 17:20 – “I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word.”



# VIII. 1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.

## 1. Contextual

- John writes to safeguard the church from proto-Gnostic false teachers
  - Sinless perfectionism (1:6, 8, 10)
  - Denial of Christ coming in the flesh (4:2; cf. 2 John 7)
  - Indifferent to obedience (2:3–6; 3:4–9)
  - Elite access to secret knowledge (2:20, 27; cf. 4:1)

So, John encourages believers who are tempted to despair because they find themselves not to be sinless as these false teachers claim to be. Therefore, he repudiates all vestiges of exclusivism and speaks of Christ's atonement in the broadest terms.



# VIII. 1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.

## Ours Only

Proto-Gnostic elites

Churches in Asia Minor

Believers alive in that day

vs.

## The Whole World

common Christians

vs.

believers throughout the whole world

vs.

those who would eventually come to faith

The reason for the universalistic language isn't to teach that Christ died for all without exception, but rather that He died for all without distinction—all kinds and classes of people throughout the whole world, contrary to claims of the false teachers.



# VIII. 1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.

## 2. Lexical

- This is a legitimate sense of the term *kosmos*, even with “whole” added.
- Rom 1:8 – “...**your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world**”
  - Gk. *en holō tō kosmō*; literally, “in the whole world”
  - Not every individual alive had heard of the Romans’ faith



# VIII. 1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.

## 2. Lexical

- 1 John 5:19 – “...**the whole world** lies in the power of the evil one.”
- Does this include the Apostle John and the believers he was writing to?
- No: 1 John 5:18 – “**We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps him, and the evil one does not touch him.**”

“Whole world” excludes believers in 5:19. Therefore, it is exegetically sound to seek another interpretation for the phrase in 1 John 2:2, where it would conflict with the biblical definition of propitiation.



# VIII. 1 John 2:2

And [1] He Himself is the **propitiation** [2] **FOR** [3] **our sins**; [4] and not for ours only, but also [5] for those of the **whole world**.

## 3. Syntactical

1. A comment concerning Christ's **atonement**
2. **FOR**
3. **A particular group (X)**
4. “and not for X only, but also...”
5. **A larger group**



# VIII. 1 John 2:2

## 3. Syntactically

1. A comment concerning Christ's **atonement**
2. **FOR**
3. **A particular group (X)**
4. “and not for X only, but also...”
5. **A larger group**

And [1] He Himself is the **propitiation** [2] **FOR** [3] **our sins**; [4] and not for ours only, but also [5] for those of the **whole world**.

John 11:51–52 – “...he prophesied that [1] Jesus was going to **die** [2] **FOR** [3] **the nation**, [4] and not for the nation only, but in order that He might also gather together into one [5] **the children of God who are scattered abroad**.”



# VIII. 1 John 2:2

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.

## 4. Principal

- Interpreting “whole world” as “all without exception” undoes the point of John’s argument in this passage.
- John writes to comfort believers discouraged about their sin in the face of perfectionist false teaching.
  - 2:1 – “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”
- But if Christ is the propitiation for the sins of all without exception, even those who perish in hell, what comfort would that be to them?



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And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of **the whole world**.

## 4. Principal

- But if Christ is the propitiation for the sins of all without exception, even those who perish in hell, what comfort would that be to them?
- It makes no sense to console sinning believers on the ground of a propitiation that Christ has also made for those who will suffer God's wrath for eternity.
- Owen: “Will that be any refreshment unto me which is common unto me with them that perish eternally? Is not this rather a pumice-stone than a breast of consolation?” (*Death of Death*, 333).



# **A Ransom for All?**

**Reconciling Universal Language with  
a Particular Atonement**

Sundays in July | Grace Community Church

Mike Riccardi

