



R. T. Kendall's Exposé: Calvin Taught Unlimited Atonement; Examples from Calvin's Commentaries on Isaiah & John: Isa 53:12c; John 1:28; 3:16; 17:2

6. Those who subscribe to limited atonement are identified by many titles. We will go with Hyper-Calvinism. I do so because *hyper* means "to be excessive." It is transliterated into the English from the Greek word **ὑπέρ**, *huper* which means "over and above," or "above and beyond."
7. Those who subscribe to Unlimited Atonement are often called Moderate Calvinists. The two terms "hyper-" and "moderate" are general and unless we need to be more specific these are the ones we will use in our study.
8. For the record, John Calvin was a French theologian who was among the reformers of the Protestant Reformation. He lived between 1509 and 1564. He established a theocratic government in Geneva in 1541 and it served as the focal point for defending Protestant theology throughout Europe. His writings established the first systematic theology for Protestantism.
9. The question we will address is whether John Calvin was a "hyper-Calvinist" or a "moderate Calvinist." If he established the principles of Limited Atonement than he must be regarded as the source for present-day hyper-Calvinism. If he established the principles for Unlimited Atonement then he must be regarded as the source for present-day moderate Calvinism.
10. To determine which his personal belief was, we simply consult his writings and his commentaries in particular. In Calvin's commentaries we find sufficient documentation to claim with confidence that Calvin taught the doctrine of unlimited atonement. Our first reference is:

Kendall, R. T. "Bible Commentaries by John Calvin." Appendix 1 in *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*. New ed. (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), 214-226 *passim*:

Isaiah 53:12c - (KJV) ... He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bore the sin of the many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

He bore the sin of many. I approve of the ordinary reading, that He alone bore the punishment of many, because on Him was **laid the guilt of the whole world**. It is evident from other passages, and especially from the fifth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, that 'many' sometimes denotes 'all'. (Calvin, *Isaiah*. See Kendall, p. 214.)

Indeed, our Lord Jesus **was offered to all the world**. For it is not speaking of three or four when it says: 'God so loved the world, that he spared not His only Son.' But yet we must notice what the Evangelist adds in this passage:

'That whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but obtain eternal life.' Our Lord Jesus **suffered for all** and there is neither great nor small who is not inexcusable today, for we can obtain salvation in Him. Unbelievers who turn away from Him and who deprive themselves of Him by their malice are today doubly culpable. For how will they excuse their ingratitude in not receiving the blessing in which they could share by faith? (Calvin, *Isaiah*. See Kendall, pp. 225-26.)

John 1:28 - (KJV) The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.



And when he says *the sin of the world* he extends this kindness **indiscriminately to the whole human race**, that the Jews might not think the Redeemer has been sent to them alone. From this we infer that the whole world is bound in the same condemnation; and that since all men without exception are guilty of unrighteousness before God, they have need of reconciliation. John, therefore, by speaking of the sin of the world in general, wanted to make us feel our own misery and exhort us to seek the remedy. Now it is for us to **embrace the blessing offered to all**, that each may make up his mind that there is nothing to hinder him from finding reconciliation in Christ if only, led by faith, he comes to Him. (Calvin, *John*. See Kendall, p. 216.)

John 3:16 - (KJV) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should nor perish, but have everlasting life.

That whosoever believeth on him should not perish. The outstanding thing about faith is that it delivers us from eternal destruction. For He especially wanted to say that although we seem to have been born for death sure deliverance is offered to us by the faith of Christ so that we must not fear the death which otherwise threatens us. And He has used a general term, both to **invite indiscriminately all to share in life** and to cut off every excuse from unbelievers. Such is also the significance of the term 'world' which He had used before. For although there is nothing in the world deserving of God's favour, He nevertheless shows He is **favourable to the whole world** when He calls **all without exception to the faith of Christ**, which is indeed an entry into life. (Calvin, *John*. See Kendall, p. 217.)

John 17:2 - (KJV) As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

Christ does not say that He has been placed in command of the whole world to bestow life indiscriminately. But He restricts this grace to those given to Him. But how were they given? For the Father has also subjected to Him the reprobate. I reply: Only the elect belong to His own flock, which He guards as a shepherd. Hence, the kingdom of Christ **extends to all men**, but it is **saving only to the elect** who follow the Shepherd's voice **with willing obedience**. (Calvin *John*. See Kendall, p. 219.)