



By

Mark McGee

The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review (B&H Academic, 2016) is an excellent reference book for your library. At 848 pages this is a powerful tool for preachers and teachers and other serious students of the Bible.

The author, Dr. David L. Allen, is the distinguished professor and director of the Center for Biblical Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, so he understands what preachers and teachers need for sermon and lesson preparation.

Dr. Allen helps readers understand his position on the giant subject of Atonement –

“The extent of the atonement and its entailments are vital to me as a theologian and preacher. The issue touches very near the heart of the gospel. What one believes about this subject has serious ramifications for both theology and praxes in the church. The necessity of getting the gospel right is basal in my thinking.” Preface

Allen also addresses the issue of differences among Christians on the topic –

“The question of the extent of the atonement is controversial and often engenders strong emotion. Some people on either side of the fence tenaciously cling to their view and anathematize opponents. Perhaps one reason for this visceral reaction is the fact that a via media on the extent question is not possible. There are only two options: either Jesus substituted for the sins of all people, or he substituted for the sins of only some people. The subject is delicate but important and must be considered.” Preface

Dr. Allen does address the differences in the Introduction in an interesting and personal way.

The Extent of the Atonement is divided into three sections –

1. The Extent of the Atonement in Church History
2. The Extent of the Atonement in the Baptist Tradition
3. The Extent of the Atonement: A Critical Review

Dr. Allen begins with the “Early Church” views on the subject of the Atonement (e.g. Irenaeus, Mathetes, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Cyprian of Carthage, Eusebius, Athanasius, Jerome, Augustine), then moves into the “Medieval Era” (e.g. Gottschalk, Peter Lombard, Johannes Wollebius, Thomas Aquinas).

The Reformation Era was a time of great challenges concerning the subject of the Atonement. Dr. Allen included the views of many Christian leaders during the Reformation era to aid our understanding of how the theology of the Atonement developed during that pivotal time (e.g. Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Wolfgang Musculus, Heinrich Bullinger, John Calvin, Theodore Beza).

Calvin receives in-depth treatment in *The Extent of the Atonement* pulling from the Reformer’s sermons and writings. Dr. Allen also included a fascinating contemporary analysis of Calvin’s thought about the extent of the Atonement.

Dr. Allen also addresses some of the “Early English Reformers” (e.g. John Wycliffe, Hugh Latimer, Miles Coverdale, William Tyndale).

Jacob Arminius and the Synod of Dort receives extended coverage in the chapter about The Post-Reformation Era and The Extent of the Atonement.

Dr. Allen also looks at the views of Anglicans, Puritans and the impact of Westminster on the discussions concerning the Atonement.

The Modern Era and the Extent of the Atonement is one of the longer chapters and begins with 18th century through the year 2015.

Page 457 begins the second section of *The Extent of the Atonement* by looking at The Extent of the Atonement in the Baptist Tradition. Dr. Alen begins with English General and Particular Baptists through the end of the 19th century, then turns to North American Baptist from 1800 – 2015, followed by what Southern Baptists have said about the “extent question” from 1845 – 2015.

The third section of the book is Dr. Allen's critical review of *From Heaven He Came And Sought Her*. "The book has been touted by some as the 'definitive' scholarly word on definite (limited) atonement." (Author)

I highly recommend *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* to students, teachers and preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Publisher's Description

“The extent of Christ’s atoning work on the cross is one of the most divisive issues in evangelical Christianity. In *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review*, David L. Allen makes a biblical, historical, theological, and practical case for a universal atonement. Through a comprehensive historical survey, Allen contends that universal atonement has always been the majority view of Christians, and that even among Calvinist theologians there is a considerable range of views. Marshalling evidence from Scripture and history, and critiquing arguments for a limited atonement, Allen affirms that an unlimited atonement is the best understanding of Christ’s saving work. He concludes by showing that an unlimited atonement provides the best foundation for evangelism, missions, and preaching.”

Endorsements

“The issue of limited atonement has proved a controversial matter for many years and one that is unlikely to disappear at any time in the near future. One of the reasons for this is that the question it seeks to answer is one which developed over time and has a number of subtle and sophisticated facets. Like other doctrines such as the Trinity, an understanding of the history of the doctrine of atonement is thus key to the matter. While David Allen and I disagree on the matter, this work is an irenic and learned contribution to the topic which carries the historical, and thus doctrinal, discussion forward in an extremely helpful way. I am thus happy to recommend this work of a friendly critic. It deserves wide readership and careful engagement.” —Carl R. Trueman, Paul Woolley Chair of Church History and professor of church history, Westminster Theological Seminary

“The Extent of the Atonement is among the most controversial questions in Reformed theology. It is probably also the most confusing and misunderstood. Is limited atonement the only Reformed position? What did John Calvin himself believe? For whom did Christ die? How do we preach the saving message of the cross to unbelievers? Does God love the world or not? Enter David Allen’s monumental book, an absolute tour de force. The Extent of the Atonement leaves no stone unturned in tracing the history of the doctrine, critiques every view and proponent with penetrating insight, and is written with a persuasive cogency throughout. The book is an education in how to do theology responsibly and how to read the Bible faithfully. To top it off, Allen writes with the heart of a pastor and the wit and wisdom of a seasoned preacher. A must read for anyone interested in the question of what the cross achieves.” —Brian Rosner, principal, Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia

“In this comprehensive historiography, David Allen clarifies the views of Christian thinkers on the extent of the atonement. He argues convincingly from primary sources that unlimited atonement has been the dominant view in the history of the church, even among many Calvinists. Allen challenges readers to discern at which point precisely the atonement was limited—in its intent, extent, or application. Because of the implications for evangelism, he gives special attention to treatments of this doctrine in the Baptist tradition. Allen’s study will benefit anyone interested in the question, ‘For whom did Christ die?’” —Adam Harwood, McFarland Chair of Theology, associate professor of theology, and director of the Baptist Center for Theology & Ministry, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

“Baptists have been debating the intent and extent of the atonement since almost the beginning of our movement. The recent popularity of Calvinism among conservative evangelicals—including many Southern Baptists—has helped make this historic debate a current family discussion. To my knowledge, David Allen’s *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* is the most extensive treatment of this topic that has been written—certainly by a Baptist. I confess I don’t agree with everything he argues in this book. However, I strongly agree with Allen that both the Reformed tradition and more Calvinistic Baptist movements have historically included advocates of both limited and universal atonement—a fact too often unrecognized in contemporary discussions about this topic. I’m confident this book will inspire renewed interest in what Baptists and others have believed about the atonement. I’m prayerful it will also encourage Southern Baptists to engage in brotherly dialogue, refine our respective views of what we ought to believe, and better partner together in proclaiming the gospel to this world that God so loves.” —Nathan A. Finn, dean of the School of

Theology and Missions and professor of Christian thought and tradition, Union University

“The Extent of the Atonement offers a penetrating and perceptive treatment of a thorny, divisive theological issue. David Allen’s command of the subject, as well as his ability to lay out clearly and fairly the competing theories and arguments, is masterful. I found his critique of the doctrine of limited atonement fully persuasive. This book is must reading for all who want to understand better the Calvinism debate.” —Craig A. Evans, dean of the School of Christian Thought and John Bisagno Distinguished Professor of Christian Origins, Houston Baptist University

“This volume represents the fruit of years of careful research and writing, all with a view toward aiding and helping anyone who has wrestled deeply or has had a conversation about the extent of the atonement. David L. Allen has served his readers well by assembling *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review*. I believe it will soon take its place among the library of volumes one must consult in any discussion related to the work of

Christ.” —Jason G. Duesing, provost and associate professor of historical theology, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“This book is encyclopedic. There is nothing like it in depth and scope. One does not have to hold the author’s perspective (though I do) to benefit from his massive research. No one interested in the extent of the atonement can ignore Allen’s important contribution.” —Daniel L. Akin, president, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

“David Allen’s *The Extent of the Atonement* is a tremendous accomplishment. He has given us a treasure trove of information on the doctrine of the extent of the atonement, tracing it in detail and providing incisive interaction with the exegetical and theological arguments for and against limited atonement that have been put forth, especially since the Reformation and by Calvinistic authors. As if this were not enough, he also treats us to an extensive and definitive critique of *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*, which has been touted as the definitive modern work in support of limited atonement. Allen’s tome is now the book to own on

the extent of the atonement and the place to turn for support of unlimited atonement and refutation of limited atonement.” —Brian Abasciano, adjunct professor of New Testament, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary; pastor, Faith Community Church; president, The Society of Evangelical Arminians

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