To the Editor:

The article by Patrick Donahue in the October 2017 issue titled *Why are there so many different interpretations of the bible?* raised many salient points, and it is certainly true that many believers are more loyal to a system than to God. I do not, however, agree with the example Mr. Donahue gives. “[Calvinists], he writes, will stubbornly hold to all five of their TULIP points of doctrine rather than accept the very plain meaning of some verses. For example, a first grader can see the truth of Hebrews 2:9 (‘that he by the grace of God should taste death for **every man**’), but Calvinists continue to teach that Jesus only died for a few (for the saved/elect), because if they accept the General Atonement, they know their whole Calvinistic system fails.”

There are a couple of problems with the above statement; first, I am not aware of any Calvinists that teach that Christ died for only “a few” men. Generally we are taught that the atonement was for a “multitude which no man could number,” Revelation 7:9. Secondly, is it possible that Mr. Donahue’s interpretation of the text in question originates from a failure to heed his own advice in the section of his article immediately prior to the one we are at present discussing? In that section, he takes those to task who fail to consider all passages that speak on a given topic. So then, on the subject of atonement, how could our hypothetical first grader interpret the following verses? “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for **the sheep**, (John 10:11). “Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved **the church** and gave himself up **for her**,” (Ephesians 5:25). In Acts 20:28 we are told that is was “**the church of God** which he hath purchased with his own blood.” My guess is that a first grader would be able to see that in these verses the atonement is set forth as limited, and particular.

But, moreover, consider even the verse cited (Hebrews 2:9) by Mr. Donahue. A first grader might not know that the word *man* is not in the original text; that the phrase is better rendered *for the whole*, and remembering the rule that a text without a context is a pretext, we are able to see that the *whole* for whom Christ died are called sons in verse 10, brethren in verses 11 and 12, the church in verse 12, the children whom God hath given me in verse 13, and the seed of Abraham in verse 16. It might also be pointed out that even if the words *every man* were in the text it would not necessarily mean every man without exception. The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish converts who still viewed gentiles as outsiders. In this case the writer could be simply saying that Christ died for *all men*, for **gentiles** as well as for Jews.

Anyone wishing to study this subject in more depth should read the puritan John Owen’s masterpiece *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (available on open library), a work that, as far as I know, has never been answered.

Respectfully,

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