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An ancient testimony of belief in Limited Atonement

The following is extra-biblical documentary evidence that the first century church did not hold to a notion of Universal Atonement (i.e. that Christ died for all mankind). This is the same church, that is spoken of in the reference following. It is fascinating to see a letter, written by members of the Church at Smyrna, to sister churches in their region concerning the recent martyrdom of their pastor, Polycarp. Polycarp was a son in the ministry to the Apostle John, just as Timothy and Titus were to the Apostle Paul. In this small extract, we get a clear insight into their beliefs concerning the extent of the atonement of Christ, that they held to the Limited Atonement doctrine. This is how the brethren at Smyrna, a first century apostolic church, would have answered the question, “For whom did Christ die?”. One simply cannot get to the Universal Atonement position from the statement that the church at Smyrna made: “Neither can we ever forsake Christ, him who suffered for the salvation of the world of them that are saved, nor worship any other.” We also see their clear recognition of the words that had been penned to them not long before in the book of Revelation and that they had received strength and encouragement in their time of trials from those words.

[Rev 2:8-11 KJV] 8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; 9 I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and [I know] the blasphemy of

them which say they are Jews, and are not, but [are] the synagogue of Satan. 10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast [some] of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. 11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

From the appendix of The Death of Death in the Death of Christ, pg 284 in PDF edition, by John Owen (1647)

Some few testimonies of the ancients.

I. The confession of the holy Church of Smyrna, a little after the commendation given it by the Holy Ghost, Rev. ii. 9, upon the martyrdom of Polycarpus:— Ὅτι οὔτε τὸν Χριστὸν ποτε καταλείπειν δυνησόμεθα τὸν ὑπὲρ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου τῶν σωζομένων σωτηρίας παθόντα, οὔτε ἕτερον τιμῆ σέβειν. — Euseb. Hist. Eccles., lib. iv. cap. 15. —

“Neither can we ever forsake

Christ, him who suffered for the salvation of the world of them that are saved, nor worship any other.” [It is an extract from a letter of the church of Smyrna to the churches of Pontus, giving an account of the martyrdom of Polycarp.]