

world; and the only reason it does not fully satisfy God's justice for the sins of every man in the world is that all men do not of their own free will, receive the benefits of Christ's atonement by receiving the Savior freely offered to them in the gospel. The objector infers that his understanding of this text does not comport with the doctrine of an unconditional election, since the unconditional character of the election conflicts both with the idea of free will and the idea of an atonement intended for all men without discrimination.

There have been a number of interesting interpretations of this text by those who do hold to an unconditional election. Some have suggested that the epistle is written for a Jewish audience; thus John is asserting that Christ is the propitiation not for the sins of Jews only, but also for the sins of Gentiles. Others have suggested that the "world" spoken of is the world viewed collectively, not distributively, and that John is stating that Christ's atonement is the propitiation for the sins of mankind collectively. As such, Christ's death saved the world. Still others have suggested that the "world" spoken of is a reference to the elect, the members of Christ's Church, who are found scattered here and there throughout the inhabited earth; i.e., the "world" of the elect. Still others have pointed to the fact that the word "sins" is not actually found in the last part of the verse (it must be inserted as part of an ellipsis to get it into the text); and that therefore the text is really saying that Christ is the satisfaction, not only for the sins of the elect, but also for the curse which came through sin under which the world presently groans. Thus Christ's atonement is the basis for the reconciliation of the whole world physically, as well as for the reconciliation of individuals spiritually, so that eschatologically the entire world will be saved (the new world and those righteous persons who dwell in it).

An alternative proposal which also comports with the doctrine of an unconditional election is that, in its value Christ's atonement is a sufficient satisfaction (propitiation) for the sins of the whole world, both collectively and distributively ("not for ours only" John and those believers' to whom John was writing); in its design Christ's atonement is an accomplished satisfaction (propitiation) for the sins of all the elect (not only those elect persons in Asia Minor in the first century to whom John was writing this epistle, but those elect persons everywhere in all time periods).

As applied to this text, this proposal would understand John to be asserting that Christ's atonement is of such great value that it is a sufficient satisfaction for the sins of the whole world, and not for those of a small group only. It would then not be speaking of the design of the atonement, in terms of its relationship to God's purpose in election, but only of its value in terms of the worth of the Person who makes the atonement infinitely satisfying. Along with this conception, it should also be remembered that if the atonement is viewed as a penal satisfaction instead of a commercial satisfaction (the penalty required for sin is death, whether for one person or for one trillion persons; instead of a measured amount of suffering for a specific number of sins of a certain number of persons), then this emphasis upon the value of Christ's atonement would also "fit" with other aspects of the system of doctrine.