John 1:29, 'takes away the sin of the world'

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The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the ***sin of the world!*** (John 1:29 ESV)

(For a better and more recent defense see here.)

Those who advocate the doctrine of Unlimited Atonement obviously take "world" everyone who has lived or will live, all without exception. Not world in the sense of many people, not world in the sense of from every "tribe and language and people and nation" as Revelation 5:9 would put it

Here is what the **ESV MacArthur Study Bible** says: [1]

John 1:29 The next day. This phrase probably refers to the day after John's response to the Jerusalem delegation. It also initiates a sequence of days (v. 43; 2:1) that culminated in the miracle at Cana (2:1–11). **the Lamb of God.** The use of a lamb for sacrifice was very familiar to Jews. A lamb was used as a sacrifice during Passover (Ex. 12:1–36); a lamb was led to the slaughter in the prophecies of Isaiah (Isa. 53:7); a lamb was offered in the daily sacrifices of Israel (Lev. 14:12–21; cf. Heb. 10:5–7). John the Baptist used this expression as a reference to the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to atone for the sins of the world, a theme which John the apostle carries throughout his writings (John 19:36; cf. Rev. 5:1–6; 7:17; 17:14) and that appears in other NT writings (e.g., 1 Pet. 1:19). **sin of the world!** *See note on John 1:9*; cf. 3:16; 6:33, 51. In this context "world" has the connotation of humanity in general, not specifically every person. The use of the singular "sin" in conjunction with "of the world" indicates that Jesus' sacrifice for sin potentially reaches all human beings without distinction (cf. 1 John 2:2). John makes clear, however, that its efficacious effect is only for those who receive Christ (John 1:11–12). For discussion of the relation of Christ's death to the world, *see note on 2 Cor. 5:19.*

The following is said by **John Gill**:[2]

- **and saith, behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world**: he calls him a "lamb", either with respect to any lamb in common, for his harmlessness and innocence; for his meekness and humility; for his patience; and for his usefulness, both for food and clothing, in a spiritual sense; as well as for his being to be a sacrifice for the sins of his people: or else with respect to the lambs that were offered in sacrifice, under the legal dispensation; and that either to the passover lamb, or rather to the lambs of the daily sacrifice, that were offered morning and evening; since the account of them best agrees with what is said of this Lamb of God, who was slain in type, in the morning of the world, or

from the foundation of the world; and actually in the evening of the world, or in the end of it; and who has a continued virtue to take away the sins of his people, from the beginning, to the end of the world; and their sins, both of the day and night, or which are committed every day: for as they are daily committed, there is need of the daily application of the blood and sacrifice of Christ, to remove them; or of continual looking unto him by faith, whose blood has a continual virtue, to cleanse from all sin: the Jewish doctors say {d}, that

- "the morning daily sacrifice made atonement for the iniquities done in the night; and the evening sacrifice made atonement for the iniquities that were by day:''
- and in various things they were typical of Christ, as that they were lambs of the first year, which may denote the weakness of the human nature of Christ, which had all the sinless infirmities of it; they, were also without spot, signifying the purity of Christ's human nature, who was holy and harmless, a lamb without spot and blemish; these were offered as a sacrifice, and for the children of Israel only, as Christ has given himself an offering and a sacrifice to God, both in soul and body, for the sins of the mystical Israel of God, the Israel whom God has chosen for himself, whether Jews or Gentiles; for Christ is the propitiation for the sins of both: and these were offered daily, morning and evening; and though Christ was but once offered, otherwise he must have often suffered; yet as he has by one offering put away sin for ever, so there is a perpetual virtue in his sacrifice to take it away, and there is a constant application of it for that purpose; to which may be added, that these lambs were offered with fine flour, oil and wine, for a sweet savour to the Lord; denoting the acceptableness of the sacrifice of Christ to his Father, to whom it is for a sweet smelling savour, Eph 5:2. And Christ is styled the Lamb "of God", in allusion to the same, whom the Cabalistic Jews {e} call the secret of the mystery, and □□□□□ □□□□, "the Lambs of God"; because God has a special property in him; he is his own Son; and because he is of his providing and appointing, as a sacrifice for sin, and is acceptable to him as such; and to distinguish him from all other lambs; and to give him the preference, since he does that which they could not do, "taketh away the sin of the world": by the "sin of the world", is not meant the sin, or sins of every individual person in the world; for some die in their sins, and their sins go before hand to judgment, and they go into everlasting punishment for them; which could not be, if Christ took them away: rather, the sin which is common to the whole world, namely: original sin; but then it must be observed, that this is not the only sin Christ takes away; for he also takes away actual sins; and the Arabic and Ethiopic versions read in the plural, "the sins of the world"; and also that this he takes away, only with respect the elect; wherefore they are the persons intended by the world, as in Joh 6:33, whose sin, or sins, Christ takes away: and a peculiar regard seems to be had to the elect among the Gentiles, who are called the world, in distinction from the Jews, as in Joh 3:16, and the rather, since the lambs of the daily sacrifice, to which the allusion is, were only offered for the sins of the Jews: but John here signifies, that the Lamb of God he pointed at, and which was the antitype of these lambs, not only took away the sins of God's people among the Jews, but the sins of such of them also as were among the Gentiles; and this seems to me to be the true sense of the passage. The phrase "taking away sin", signifies a taking it up, as Christ did; he took it voluntarily upon himself, and became responsible to divine justice for it; and also a bearing and carrying it, for taking it upon himself, he bore it in his own body on the tree, and carried it away, as the scape goat did under the law; and so likewise a taking it quite away: Christ has removed it as far as the east is from the west, out of sight, so as never to be seen any more; he has destroyed, abolished, and made an utter end of it: and this is expressed in the present tense, "taketh away": to denote the continued virtue of Christ's sacrifice to take away sin, and the constant efficacy of his blood to cleanse from it, and the daily application of it to the consciences of his people; and which is owing to the dignity of his person, as the Son of God; and to his continual and powerful mediation and intercession: this must be a great relief to minds afflicted with the continual ebullitions of

sin, which is taken away by the Lamb of God, as fast as it rises; and who, for that purpose, are called to "behold", and wonder at, the love and grace of Christ, in taking up, bearing, and taking away sin; and to look to him by faith continually, for everlasting salvation; and love him, and give him the honour of it, and glorify him for it.

I think it is also helpful to note **Mathew Henry's** words concerning John 1:29:[3]

- I. Here is his testimony to Christ on the first day that he saw him coming from the wilderness; and here four things are witnessed by him concerning Christ, when he had him before his eyes:--
- 1. That he is the *Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world*, v. 29. Let us learn here,
- (1.) That Jesus Christ is the *Lamb of God*, which bespeaks him the great sacrifice, by which atonement is made for sin, and man reconciled to God. Of all the legal sacrifices he chooses to allude to the *lambs* that were offered, not only because a lamb is an emblem of meekness, and Christ must be led as a *lamb to the slaughter* (Isa. liii. 7), but with a special reference, [1.] To the *daily sacrifice*, which was offered every morning and evening continually, and that was always a lamb (Exod. xxix. 38), which was a type of Christ, as the everlasting propitiation, whose blood continually speaks. [2.] To the paschal lamb, the blood of which, being sprinkled upon the door-posts, secured the Israelites from the stroke of the destroying angel. Christ is *our passover*, 1 Cor. v. 7. He is the *Lamb of God*; he is appointed by *him* (Rom. iii. 25), he was devoted to him (ch. xvii. 19), and he was accepted with him; in him he was well pleased. The lot which fell on the goat that was to be offered for a sin-offering was called the *Lord's lot* (Lev 16:8; Lev 16:9); so Christ, who was to make atonement for sin, is called the *Lamb of God*.
- (2.) That Jesus Christ, as the *Lamb of God, takes away the sin of the world*. This was his undertaking; he appeared, to *put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*, Heb. ix. 26. John Baptist had called people to repent of their sins, in order to the remission of them. Now here he shows how and by whom that remission was to be expected, what ground of hope we have that our sins shall be pardoned upon our repentance, though our repentance makes no satisfaction for them. This ground of hope we have--Jesus Christ is *the Lamb of God*. [1.] *He takes away sin*. He, being Mediator between God and man, takes away that which is, above any thing, offensive to the *holiness* of God, and destructive to the *happiness* of man. He came, *First*, To take away the guilt of sin by the merit of his death, to vacate the judgment, and reverse the attainder, which mankind lay under, by an act of indemnity, of which all penitent obedient believers may claim the benefit. *Secondly*, To take away the power of sin by the Spirit of his grace, so that it shall not have dominion, Rom. vi. 14. Christ, as the Lamb of God, washes us from our sins in his own blood; that is, he both *justifies* and *sanctifies* us: he *takes away sin*. He is ***ho airon*** *--he is taking away* the sin of the world, which denotes it not a single but a continued act; it is his constant work and office to take *away sin*, which is such a *work of time* that it will never be completed till time shall be no more. He is always *taking away* sin, by the continual intercession of his blood in heaven, and the continual influence of his grace on earth. [2.] He takes away the *sin of the world*; purchases pardon for all those that repent, and believe the gospel, of what country, nation, or language, soever they be. The legal sacrifices had reference only to the sins of Israel, to make atonement for them; but the Lamb of God was offered to be a propitiation for the *sin of the whole world*; see 1 John ii. 2. This is encouraging to our faith; if Christ takes away the sin of the world, then why not my sin? Christ levelled his force at the main body of sin's army, struck at the root, and aimed at the overthrow, of that *wickedness* which the *whole world lay in*. God was in him reconciling the world to himself. [3.] He does this by *taking it upon himself.* He is the Lamb of God, that *bears the sin of the world*; so the margin

reads it. He bore sin *for us*, and so bears it *from us*; *he bore the sin of many*, as the scape-goat had the sins of Israel put upon his head, Lev. xvi. 21. God could have taken away the sin by taking away the sinner, as he took away the sin of the old world; but he has found out a way of abolishing the sin, and yet sparing the sinner, by making his Son *sin for us.*

- (3.) That it is our duty, with an eye of faith, to *behold* the Lamb of God thus taking away the *sin of the world*. See him taking away sin, and let that increase our hatred of sin, and resolutions against it. Let not us hold that fast which the Lamb of God came to take away: for Christ will either take our sins away or take us away. Let it increase our love to Christ, *who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*, Rev. i. 5. Whatever God is pleased to take away from us, if withal he take away our sins, we have reason to be thankful, and no reason to complain.

This content is taken from this document

[1] John MacArthur, The MacArthur Study Bible 2010, Crossway. Taken from the online version at www.esvbible.org

[2] John Gill, Exposition of the Entire Bible. Taken from the Bible software The Word. See "Resources."

[3] Matthew Henry, Whole Bible Commentary on John 1:29-36. Taken from the Bible software The Word. See "Resources."