CHAPTER 9

HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DOCTRINE OF ATONEMENT

Denis Fortin

The book of Revelation gives a glimpse of a scene in the heavenly courtroom in which the entire host of heaven sing praises to Christ.

> Now when He [the Lamb] had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:8–10, NKJV)

The reason given for this magnificent worship of the Lamb is because He was slain and thus has redeemed God's people. At the core of the message of salvation is this belief that Christ died on the cross to redeem humanity, that His death is the catalyst that makes salvation possible. Without His death there would be no salvation.

The doctrine of atonement seeks to explain the reasons why the divine pre-existent Son of God became a human being and why Christ's death redeems humanity. This doctrine is closely dependent on what is explained in the doctrines of Christ (Christology) and salvation (soteriology). This chapter will explain some of the theories theologians have proposed to explain Christ's death on the cross.

NO SIMPLE EXPLANATION

In the eleventh century, Anselm (1033–1109), archbishop of Canterbury, asked: "Why did God become man? For what purpose did Christ come down from heaven?"[1] Before Anselm's time and since then, numerous theologians have pondered the same questions and have come up with multiple reasons to explain both the incarnation and the death of Christ. Hence books on this topic are legion and there seem to be almost as many theories on atonement as there are authors. Anglican theologian Leon Morris notes,

> It is an interesting fact that through the centuries the Church has agreed that the cross is at the very heart of the faith, but it has never come to an agreed conclusion as to how the cross saves men. Some Christians have thought of it as the means of God's winning a great victory. Some have seen in it a revelation of divine love. Some have regarded it as the payment of the debt that sinners owed. And we could go on. The theories are many, and the Church has never officially declared her mind on the matter.[2]

One reason for this, Morris observes, is the complexity of the subject and limited human understanding of sin is part of the complexity. Sin can be understood from many angles: all at once it is a transgression of God's law, a debt, an incurring of guilt, a coming under the power of some evil, and much more. "Obviously anything that is able to deal effectively with all the aspects of all the sins of all men will itself be exceedingly complex. . . . And when a thing is necessarily complex there is bound to be a certain amount of disagreement as to what it means essentially."[3] Thus for Morris, and for many theologians,

> a recognition that the atonement is many-sided is a first essential if we are to make progress in the subject. A good deal of harm has been caused by well-meaning people who have had such a firm grasp of one aspect of the subject that they have proceeded to maintain that all else is immaterial. There is a well-known saying that "Theories of the atonement are right in what they affirm and wrong in what they deny." . . . Since the atonement is

1. The Latin title of the book is *Cur Deus Homo? Ad quid Christus descendebat?*

2. Leon Morris, *Glory in the Cross: A Study in Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1966), 58.

3. Ibid., 58–59.

> God's perfect provision for man's need it is necessarily many-sided. And since man's perception is at best partial each of us can perceive part of the truth only. . . . We must always bear in mind that this subject is a large one, and that there are many ways of looking at it.[4]

THEORIES OF ATONEMENT

Over the centuries various explanations of the doctrine of atonement have been proposed. All of them sought to answer the question of why Jesus died on the cross. When Jesus said, "It is finished" (John 19:30)—what was finished? Of the various theories offered, the five most prominent ones will be reviewed in the order they were developed.[5]

The Ransom Theory: Atonement as Victory over the Forces of Sin and Evil

In the first two centuries, redemption was a fact rather than a doctrine and few attempts were made to clarify the reasons for Jesus's death on the cross. In fact, the Apostles' Creed, one of the earliest confessions of faith, simply stated about Christ that He "suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended into hell, the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, the Father almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead." Nothing is said about the reasons for Jesus's death.

But the Apostle Paul in the New Testament offered two initial perspectives. One identified Christ's death on the cross as the dramatic moment of a cosmic victory over the forces of evil and the means of a reconciliation between God and His estranged world (Col. 1:20; 2:15). Additionally, Christ's death also provided the price for the redemption of all humanity (1 Cor. 6:20; Col. 1:13, 14; see also Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). These two aspects of atonement—victory and ransom—provided the biblical framework to understand the death of Christ.

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4. Ibid., 59–60.

5. Millard J. Erickson provides a good summary of the various theories of atonement presented in this chapter. See *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 798–817.

It is only after the second century that tangible attempts at formulating a theory of atonement began to be constructed. When the subject of atonement was discussed, it was simply believed that a transaction between God and the devil had occurred, and on the cross Jesus had paid the price for the redemption of humanity.

This ransom (or bargain) theory was the dominant view for about nine centuries until the time of Anselm of Canterbury. The first suggestion of this theory among early church fathers appears in Irenaeus (d. 202) in his treatise *Against Heresies*. Origen (184–253) left no doubt about his belief in the ransom theory.

> If then we were "bought with a price," as also Paul asserts, we were doubtless bought from one whose servants we were, who also named what price he would for releasing those whom he held from his power. Now it was the devil that held us, to whose side we had been drawn away by our sins. He asked, therefore, as our price the blood of Christ.[6]

In the twentieth century, this view of atonement was revived by Gustaf Aulén (1879–1977), a Swedish Lutheran theologian.[7]

This view builds on the biblical imagery of ransom and redemption (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). Origen, for example, makes much of Paul words in 1 Corinthians 6:20, "You were bought at a price." If Christ bought humanity, it must certainly have been from the one whose servants humans were, namely, the devil. Logically, the ransom could not have been paid to God, but it was determined by, paid to, and accepted by Satan.

Taking this metaphor too far has led to all kinds of speculations. If the price for the ransom demanded by the devil was Christ's soul, did the devil know that Jesus was divine and that His soul could not remain in the devil's possession even after Christ died? There has been also a lot of discussion as to whether God used some kind of deception to trick the devil into accepting the soul of Jesus as the price for redeeming humanity, while knowing that Jesus's soul could not remain in hell since He was sinless.

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6. *Commentary on Romans* 2.13, quoted in L. W. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1920), 37.

7. See *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement* (New York: Macmillan, 1951), 26–27.

In many ways, Ellen White also affirmed the classical theory of atonement that Calvary was the sign of Christ's ultimate victory over the powers of evil and Satan. In her small brochure on the "The Sufferings of Christ," first published in 1869,[8] she wrote, "He [Christ] was about to ransom His people with His own blood. . . . This was the means through which an end was to be finally made of sin and Satan, and his host to be vanquished."[9] At the cross, "Satan was then defeated. He knew that his kingdom was lost."[10] White devoted an entire chapter to this theme in the *Desire of Ages*. In this chapter, she affirmed unequivocally that Christ's death on the cross was God's appointed means to gain the victory over the forces of evil and Satan. "Christ did not yield up His life till He had accomplished the work which He came to do, and with His parting breath He exclaimed, 'It is finished.' . . . The battle had been won. . . . All heaven triumphed in the Saviour's victory. Satan was defeated."[11]

The Satisfaction Theory: Atonement as Compensation to the Father

The most objective of all the theories of atonement is the satisfaction theory. While some Latin Fathers had anticipated this theory of the atonement (for example, Augustine and Gregory the Great),[12] it was Anselm of Canterbury who articulated it in the Middle Ages. His book *Cur Deus Homo* has become a classic on the subject.

In this theory, Christ died to satisfy a principle in the very nature of God the Father. Inspired by the medieval feudal system, Anselm argued that God is like a feudal lord who needs to maintain his honor and that there must be adequate satisfaction for any encroachment upon it. In this setting, sin is understood to be a failure to render God His due. Thus sinners dishonor God.

In response, God must act to preserve His own honor. He cannot merely forgive or remit sin without punishing it. Sin left unpunished would leave God's

8. "The Sufferings of Christ" has been published in Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 2:200–215.

9. White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 2:209.

10. Ibid., 211.

11. Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898, 1940), 758.

12. See Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement,* 120–121.

economy out of order. God's violated honor can be put right again either by His punishing sinners or by accepting satisfaction made in their behalf. This satisfaction, however, could not possibly be rendered by a human being because humanity is sinful. To set things right in the economy of God's kingdom, something had to be done for human beings by someone qualified to represent them.

To be effective the satisfaction rendered had to be greater than what all created human beings are capable of doing. Thus only God could make satisfaction. However, if it was to restore humanity's relationship with God, it had to be made by a human being. Therefore, the satisfaction had to be rendered by someone who is both God and human and, consequently, the incarnation of the Son of God became a necessity. Christ, being both God and sinless human, did not deserve death. Thus, the sacrifice of His life to God on behalf of the human race went beyond what was required of Him. And thus His substitutionary death satisfied God's honor and justice.

The logic of this view is remarkable, and many texts of Scripture support its key elements. In Romans, Paul is clear in his description of God's wrath toward sinners; God is offended by sin (1:18–32). Jesus's death is described as a propitiatory sacrifice for humanity (Isa. 53:4–6; Rom. 3:23–26; 1 John 2:2) and as a substitutionary ransom (1 Tim. 2:6).

Notwithstanding the biblical support, this view is not without its challenges. Of all the views on atonement, this one is the most readily rejected because of the portrayal of God as a vengeful god, as having a gripe with humanity and intent on its destruction. God needs the atonement to appease His wrath. Many theologians object to the violence this view requires. Why would God require the violent death of His Son in order to forgive sinners?[13]

However, as a partial response to these objections, John 3:16 teaches that atonement is also an act of love from the Father. Jesus's death did not cause the Father to love humanity. God's wrath and His love need to be kept in balance. He hates sin, but He loves humanity.

For Ellen White, Christ's death was a substitutionary sacrifice; Christ suffered our penalty for sins, died our death, and bore our sins. "Christ consented to die in the sinner's stead, that man, by a life of obedience, might escape the penalty of the law of God."[14] At Calvary, "The glorious

13. An example of a recent publication addressing this issue is John Sanders, ed., *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006).

14. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 2:200–201.

Redeemer of a lost world was suffering the penalty of man's transgression of the Father's law."[15]

White argued as well that Christ's substitutionary sacrificial death is the means by which sinners can be justified by faith. Without this substitutionary atonement, there can be no justification of sinners. Her classic statement in *The Desire of Ages* is clear: "Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. 'With His stripes we are healed.'"[16]

White also clarified her understanding of how Jesus bore the wrath of God on the cross. "Through Jesus, God's mercy was manifested to men; but mercy does not set aside justice. The law reveals the attributes of God's character, and not a jot or tittle of it could be changed to meet man in his fallen condition. God did not change His law, but He sacrificed Himself, in Christ, for man's redemption. 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself.'"[17] In White's understanding of this concept of propitiation, there is no dichotomy or irreconcilable chasm between God's love and God's justice. She does not believe that on the cross Jesus attempted to make God love humanity; in fact, in this context she never uses the verb *to appease.* God does not need to be appeased. Rather, it is a self-renouncing God who is sacrificing Himself to redeem a lost humanity. Jesus Himself bears the wrath of God.

The Moral-Influence Theory: Atonement as a Demonstration of God's Love

In contrast to the satisfaction theory that is strictly focused on God benefiting from the atonement, the moral influence theory speaks only of the benefits that Christ's death achieved for humanity. This theory emphasizes the divine dimension of Christ's death as a demonstration of God's love. This view was first developed by Peter Abelard (1079–1142) in response to Anselm's satisfaction theory.

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15. Ibid., 209.

16. White, *Desire of Ages,* 25.

17. Ibid., 762.

The moral-influence theory emphasizes the primacy of God's love and insists that Christ did not make some sort of sacrificial payment to the Father to satisfy His offended dignity. Rather, Jesus demonstrated to human beings the full extent of the love of God for them. It was humanity's fear and ignorance of God that needed to be rectified. This was accomplished by Christ's death. So the major effect of Christ's death was for the benefit of humanity rather than for God.

Among other aspects of the atonement, Abelard emphasized the moral influence aspect of the atonement. In his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, he presented "the Cross as the manifestation of the love of God, and to the thought of this love he continually returns."[18] The justification of humanity is in the kindling of this divine love in their hearts in the presence of the Cross. To love is to be free from the slavery of sin, to attain to the true liberty of the children of God. The justification and the reconciliation of human beings to God consist in the grace shown to humanity in the incarnation of Christ and in the endurance of Christ in teaching by word and by example, even unto death.

This view of atonement understands that God is essentially love. Other aspects of God's character are minimized (e.g., justice, holiness, and righteousness). Therefore, human beings need not fear God's justice and punishment. Humanity's problem is not that they have violated God's law and God will punish them. Rather, their problem is that their own attitudes keep them apart from God.

Sin is perceived as a type of sickness from which humanity must be healed. It is to correct this defect in humanity that Christ came. Sin manifests itself by fear of God, separation and alienation from Him. Human nature is essentially free from the effects of sin. In a Pelagian fashion an individual can accept salvation and turn from sin after receiving a revelation of the love of God.

Jesus's death is a demonstration of divine love. His death was only one of the modes in which His love was expressed. It was not the purpose of His coming; rather, it was a consequence of His coming. The healing of sin-sick souls is the real work of Jesus. As Horace Bushnell states,

> Only to have seen one perfect life, to have heard the words and received the pure conceptions of one sinless spirit, to have felt the working of his charities,

18. Grensted, *A Short History of the Doctrine of the Atonement*, 104.

> and witnessed the offering of his sinless obedience, would have been to receive the seeds of a moral revolution that must ultimately affect the whole race. This was true even of a Socrates. Our world is not the same world that it was before he lived in it. Much less the same, since the sinless Jesus lived and suffered in it. Such a character has, of necessity, an organific power.[19]

By His death on the cross, Jesus fulfilled three most basic human needs. The first is humanity's need for openness to God, an inclination to respond to Him. Human beings are naturally fearful of God. Christ understands humanity's situation, and He came to open the way, to show the love of God by dying the most cruel death, obliterating humanity's fear of God.

A second human need satisfied by the cross is a genuine and deep conviction of personal sin and a resultant repentance. By His death Jesus accomplishes this need in humanity. When individuals seek Him whom they have pierced by their sin, then they are softened. And they repent and turn to Jesus in love.

Thirdly, humanity's need for inspiration to live a holy life is fulfilled in the cross. In Jesus human beings see the practical and personal exposition of real holiness in a person's life. Thus Jesus's death on the cross exerts a moral influence on the lives of people in every generation. When people see Jesus God's love, God's suffering, and God's holiness in the man Jesus, they are morally influenced to abide by God's Word.

One can argue that the most basic aspect of Ellen White's theology of atonement centers on the death of Christ as a demonstration of the love of God for lost humanity. "Who can comprehend the love here displayed! . . . All this in consequence of sin! Nothing could have induced Christ to leave His honor and majesty in heaven, and come to a sinful world, to be neglected, despised, and rejected by those He came to save, and finally to suffer upon the cross, but eternal, redeeming love, which will ever remain a mystery."[20] Moreover, she also affirms that such a demonstration of the love of God exerts a powerful moral influence on humanity. She writes that reflecting on the events of Calvary will "awaken tender, sacred, and lively emotions in the Christian's heart" and remove "pride and self-esteem."[21]

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19. Horace Bushnell, *God in Christ: Three Discourses* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Company, 1877), 205–206.

20. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, 2:207.

21. Ibid., 212. Years later, Ellen White offered this same theme as the starting point of her book *The Desire of Ages*: "It was to manifest this glory [of God] that He came to our world. To

> Eternal interests are here involved. Upon this theme it is sin to be calm and unimpassioned. The scenes of Calvary call for the deepest emotion. Upon this subject you will be excusable if you manifest enthusiasm. . . . The contemplation of the matchless depths of a Saviour's love should fill the mind, touch and melt the soul, refine and elevate the affections, and completely transform the whole character.[22]

The Socinian Theory: Atonement as Example

This theory was first articulated by a sixteenth-century Polish theologian, Faustus Socinus (1539–1604), and today this view is held by Unitarians. Basically, this view rejects any idea of Christ's death having any vicarious satisfaction and maintains that Christ's ministry on earth was prophetic rather than priestly. Embracing Arianism, Socinianism emphasized only Christ's humanity.

The covenant of which Jesus spoke involves an absolute forgiveness rather than some form of substitutionary sacrifice. The real value of the death of Jesus lies in the beautiful and perfect example that it gives us. It is the type of dedication that all Christians are to practice. Socinianism points to 1 Peter 2:21 as the explicit connection between Christ's example and His death: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (NIV).

Several doctrinal concepts feed into the Socinian understanding of atonement. A Pelagian view of the human condition is foundational: humanity is spiritually and morally capable of doing God's will, of fulfilling God's expectations. Furthermore, God is not perceived as a God of retributive justice, and therefore He does not demand some form of satisfaction from or on behalf of those who sin against Him.[23] And what about Jesus?

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this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God's love,—to be 'God with us.' . . . In the light from Calvary it will be seen that the law of self-renouncing love is the law of life for earth and heaven; that the love which 'seeketh not her own' has its source in the heart of God" (19–20). The same sentiments are echoed at the beginning of *Patriarchs and Prophets*, "The history of the great conflict between good and evil, from the time it first began in heaven to the final overthrow of rebellion and the total eradication of sin, is also a demonstration of God's unchanging love," *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1890, 1958), 33.

22. Ibid., 213.

23. The *Racovian Catechism* states, "For although we confess, and hence exceedingly

He is merely a human. The death He experienced was simply that of an ordinary human being in a fallen and sinful world. His death is an example for all humans of what it means to fulfill God's requirements.

This view of atonement also explains that humanity has in Jesus a perfect example of that total love for God humans must display if they are to experience salvation. The death of Jesus gives humanity inspiration. It is possible for humans to love God wholeheartedly since Jesus did it.

This theory, however, exhibits some evident weaknesses. It fails to come to grips with other texts of Scripture that speak of Jesus's death quite differently. Scripture speaks also of ransom, sacrifice, and sin-bearing in reference to Jesus's death. Three verses after Socinianism's major text, Peter says that Jesus "himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Pet. 2:24, NIV).

For Socinianism the atonement is only a metaphorical concept. All that is necessary for God and human beings to have fellowship with one another is for humanity to have faith in and love for God. For God to have required something more would have been contrary to His nature, and to have punished the innocent (Jesus) in place of the guilty (humanity) would have been contrary to justice. "Rather, God and humans are restored to their intended relationship by our personal adoption of both the teachings of Jesus and the example he set in life and especially in death."[24] Clearly Socinianism is a subjective view of atonement: only humanity benefits from the death of Jesus.

The Governmental Theory: Atonement as a Demonstration of Divine Justice

Another major view of the doctrine of atonement was developed by Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), a seventeenth-century Dutch theologian. He developed his theory in response to the Socinians, whose view of atonement he regarded as too human-centered.

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rejoice, that our God is wonderfully merciful and just, nevertheless we deny that there are in him the mercy and justice which our adversaries imagine, since the one would wholly annihilate the other." Quoted in Millard J. Erickson, ed., *Man's Need and God's Gift: Readings in Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 364.

24. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 802.

For Grotius, God is holy and righteous. As the ruler of the universe, He has established certain laws and transgressions of His laws are assaults upon His government. But God's love is also the basis of His actions and He loves the human race. He has the right to punish sin (since He is the ruler of the universe), but it is not mandatory that He do so. He can forgive sin and absolve the guilty. The way He does this manifests both His clemency and severity. God can forgive sin, but He also takes into consideration the interests of His moral government. To forgive guilty people too often would undermine the authority of His administration.

Hence, Christ's death accomplished the means of atonement. It provides grounds for forgiveness and simultaneously retains the structure of the moral government. His death was not a penalty inflicted on Jesus as a substitute for the penalty that is attached to the sins of humanity (like Anselm advocated). Christ's death was a substitute for a penalty, an example of what will happen to humanity if they persist in sin. In Christ's death God demonstrated that His justice will require humanity to suffer if they continue in sin. Looking at the sufferings of Christ is enough to deter people from sin. And if human beings turn from sin, they can be forgiven and God's moral government can be preserved.

Grotius believed that the death of Christ was not a punishment because Christ was sinless. No penalty could be attached or transferred to Christ. Punishment is personal to the individual. If it could be transferred, the connection between sin and guilt would be severed. Christ's suffering was not a vicarious bearing of humanity's punishment, but a demonstration of God's hatred of sin, a demonstration intended to induce in human beings a horror of sin. Grotius's theory is a form of the "penal substitution" view, because he believed only Christ's sufferings, not His death, are the substitution to the rightful punishment that should be inflicted upon sinners.

To some extent, Ellen White's understanding of atonement falls also within the governmental theory and, in ways, is reminiscent of Hugo Grotius's thought. She affirmed that Calvary is a vindication of God's character, law, and just government. (But in contrast to Grotius, Ellen White believed that Jesus died a substitutionary, vicarious death.) Her concept of the great controversy argues that the universal government of God has been threatened by the rebellion of Lucifer and his angels and the sin of humanity. Satan has claimed that God's law and character are unfair and harmful to the harmony of the universe. To prove these accusations wrong, God sent His Son to

live and die for humanity, and in a broader sense to save the universe from chaos. In Jesus, God's character is demonstrated as love and justice, and His law as fair and equitable.

> His death did not make the law of non effect; it did not slay the law, lessen its holy claims, nor detract from its sacred dignity. The death of Christ proclaimed the justice of His Father's law in punishing the transgressor, in that He consented to suffer the penalty of the law Himself in order to save fallen man from its curse. The death of God's beloved Son on the cross shows the immutability of the law of God. . . . The death of Christ justified the claims of the law.[25]

As is now clear, there exists inter-connectedness among various theological concepts or doctrines, and the view one holds in one area affects the interpretation of Scripture dealing with other doctrines. In other words, one's conclusions on one doctrine constitute the presuppositions for another. "In the doctrine of the atonement we see perhaps the clearest indication of the organic character of theology, that is, we see that the various doctrines fit together in a cohesive fashion. The position taken on any one of them affects or contributes to the construction of the others."[26]

As Leon Morris has rightly pointed out, all theories have something good to say about atonement and all these views possess a dimension of the truth. "Since the atonement is God's perfect provision for man's need it is necessarily many-sided. And since man's perception is at best partial each of us can perceive part of the truth only."[27] Together they present the entire picture of the meaning of Christ's death on Calvary. For Adventists, Morris's approach makes sense since it takes into account all that Scripture has to say on the subject.

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25. White, *Testimonies for the Church,* 2:201. In *The Desire of Ages,* White affirmed the same concept: Christ's death vindicated the character, law, and government of God against all Satan's accusations. "In the opening of the great controversy," she wrote, "Satan had declared that the law of God could not be obeyed." But, "by His life and His death, Christ proved that God's justice did not destroy His mercy, but that sin could be forgiven, and that the law is righteous, and can be perfectly obeyed. Satan's charges were refuted. God had given man unmistakable evidence of His love," 761–762.

26. Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 799–800.

27. Morris, *Glory in the Cross,* 59.

CONCLUSION

In His death Christ (1) triumphed over the forces of sin and death, liberating humanity from their power, (2) rendered satisfaction to the Father for humanity's sins by sacrificing His life on their behalf, as their substitute, (3) demonstrated the great extent of God's love for humanity, (4) gave humanity a perfect example of the type of dedication God desires of them, and (5) underscored the seriousness of sin and the severity of God's righteousness and the impact sin has upon God's government in the universe.

In many ways, Ellen White affirmed all the major aspects of the theories of atonement that we have surveyed. Her writings support the view espoused by many theologians that all the theories together bring out the full meaning of the death of Christ.

CHAPTER 10

ATONEMENT: ACCOMPLISHED AT THE CROSS

Jon Paulien

One of the most debated topics of Christian theology is expressed in these questions: Why the cross? What really happened at the cross? The answers to these questions have been widely debated under the general heading of the atonement. But when Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) approach the matter of atonement, an immediate dilemma is perceived. When Adventists talk about the atonement, they refer specifically to what Jesus is doing now in the heavenly sanctuary. On the other hand, when scholars outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church discuss the atonement, they refer specifically to the cross of Jesus Christ and what God was doing there.[1] The purpose of

1. Siegfried H. Horn, "Atonement," *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary (SDABD)*, ed. Don F. Neufeld (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1960), 92; Interestingly, English dictionaries do feature both meanings of the word; it is not an either/or situation among the major linguists. For example, *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language* (2nd ed., ed. William Allan Nelson [Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1960], 176) notes under theological meanings both "the saving or redeeming work of Christ wrought through his incarnation, sufferings and death," and "reconciliation between God and men, esp. as effected by Christ." The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (ed. William Morris [New York: American Heritage Publishing, 1973], 84) also gives two theological meanings: 1) "redemptive life and death of Christ," and 2) "reconciliation of God and man as brought about by Christ." Joel Green agrees with this assessment of the biblical materials when he says, "In doctrinal statements in the Christian tradition, it [atonement] typically denotes Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. . . . In the biblical materials, however, the concept of 'atonement' refers more broadly to various means by which particular persons

this chapter is to focus on what the Bible has to say about atonement at the cross without denying the traditional view of atonement inherited from the Adventist pioneers. To get a fuller picture of the issues involved in this discussion, the English word *atonement* needs to be defined.

THE ENGLISH WORD *ATONEMENT*

The English word *atonement* does not originate in ancient or biblical languages as many other theological words do. It is a compound word constructed from English components.[2] It seems to have originated early in the sixteenth century with the word *onement,* then came *at onement,* and by the end of the century it appeared as "atonement."[3]

The closest root meaning is "reconciliation"[4] with an extended meaning in English of "propitiation, expiation."[5] Elaborations of the root meaning include "restoration of friendly relations," "the state or act of bringing into concord,"[6] "the action of setting at one, or condition of being set at one, after discord or strife,"[7] and/or "amends or reparation made for an injury or wrong."[8] To "atone for a wrong is to take some

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(or humanity) are restored to right relationship with God." "Atonement," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (NIDB),* vol. 1, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 344–345.

2. Raoul Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 173; C. L. Mitton, "Atonement," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia (IDB),* ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1:309.

3. *The Oxford English Dictionary,* ed. James A. H. Murray et al. (1933; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 1:539; Green, "Atonement," *NIDB,* 1:344.

4. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 173; Mitton, "Atonement," *IDB,* 1:309; W. S. Reid, "Atone, Atonement," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE),* rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:352; *SDABD,* 74; Clark M. Williamson, "Atonement Theologies and the Cross," *Encounter* 71:1 (Winter 2010): 2.

5. *Webster's New International Dictionary,* 176; *The Oxford English Dictionary,* 1:539.

6. Green, "Atonement," *NIDB,* 1:344–345; *Webster's New International Dictionary,* 176.

7. *The Oxford English Dictionary,* 1:539.

8. *The American Heritage Dictionary,* 84.

action that cancels out the ill effects of alienation and brings harmonious relationship."[9]

Use of the word in English can reflect both a process and a state. *Atonement* can be the process of righting wrongs, making amends and bringing people into friendly relations with each other. On the other hand *atonement* can mean to state of being in harmony, or at-one with others.[10] As noted above, the basic root meaning of the word *atonement* in English has tended to expand in the direction of propitiation and expiation. One must be very careful in doing theology to not distort the biblical text on account of changes in the meaning of the English words that are used or have been used to translate the biblical text.

It is also clear from the major English dictionaries that linguists see a twofold application of the word *atonement* in the arena of theology. Atonement occurs both at the cross and in the application of what the cross achieved. So it is not an either/or situation in terms of the English word.

ATONEMENT IN THE BIBLE

Greek and Hebrew Words Translated *Atonement*

In the King James Version of the English Bible,[11] the word *atonement* occurs 81 times in the Old Testament[12] and only one time in the New (Rom. 5:11). Of the 81 occurrences in the Old Testament, 77 are clustered in the section of the Pentateuch that focuses primarily on the regulations for the Hebrew tabernacle.[13] All of them belong to the *kpr* Hebrew word group.[14] Fifteen of

9. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 173.

10. Mitton, "Atonement," *IDB,* 1:309, notes that while the English word *atonement* originally meant primarily the state of being at one, modern usage focuses almost entirely on the derived meaning of "the process by which the hindrances to reconciliation are removed."

11. Usage of *atonement* in the King James Version is mentioned because it was the primary source text for early Seventh-day Adventist reflection on the meaning of the atonement.

12. 11 times in Exodus; 49 times in Leviticus; 17 times in Numbers; and once each in 2 Samuel 21:3; 1 Chronicles 6:49; 2 Chronicles 29:24; and Nehemiah 10:33.

13. From the second half of Exodus through the book of Numbers.

14. The noun form is *kippur* and the verb form *kaphar.* The noun form *kippur* occurs nine times and the verb form *kaphar* occurs seventy-two times.

the occurrences are in Leviticus 16, which describes the services on the Day of Atonement. So it is not surprising that the Adventist pioneers, utilizing the King James Version, would be drawn to a view of atonement that focuses on the rituals of the Hebrew sanctuary and particularly the Day of Atonement. And the general lack of references in the New Testament would also drive SDA pioneers to treat the subject in terms of the Old Testament evidence more than the New.

The root meaning of *kpr* in the Hebrew is to cover (i.e., cover one's face) or cover up (e.g., trouble or sin).[15] It has the extended meaning of making amends and providing reconciliation, expiation, cleansing, and atonement.[16] An expanded noun form of *kpr* is *kapporeth*, which is used 23 times for the "mercy seat" on the Ark of the Covenant.[17] The Ark, of course, played a central role in the services on the Day of Atonement.

Looking at the contexts in which these words for atonement are found reveals some interesting things.[18] The passage that seems to most clearly define *atonement* is Leviticus 17:11.[19] This passage could easily leave the

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15. William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 163. Some scholars suggest a related meaning, to "wipe or rub." See Green, "Atonement," *NIDB*, 1:345; Mitton, "Atonement," *IDB*, 1:310; *SDABD*, 74; Christopher J. H. Wright, "Atonement in the Old Testament," in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 75–76.

16. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 163. See also G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2011), 487–488.

17. Another related word, *kôpher*, implies ransom or redemption. See Henri Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS)* 47:4 (December 2004): 644.

18. In order to be able to weigh all the evidence carefully, I felt it would be important to examine every instance in which the Hebrew words underlying the English word *atonement* occurred. The categorizations of this evidence are my own and can certainly be disputed, but I think the larger picture is reasonably clear and not affected by the fine points of these categorizations.

19. Terry Briley, "The Old Testament 'Sin Offering' and Christ's Atonement," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 3 (Spring 2000): 97–100; Samuel J. Mikolaski, "The Cross of Christ: The Atonement and Men Today," *Christianity Today* (March 13, 1961): 3–4; Leon Morris,

impression that the every word for "atonement," in every case, is focused solely on blood and its manipulation. And this is certainly true of the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:14–19).[20] But the larger picture of the word group's usage in the Old Testament requires that this impression be qualified. Atonement in the Old Testament is not always made by sacrifice and application of blood but can be granted on the basis of a number of other actions as well.[21]

A number of Greek words are used to translate *kpr* in the Greek Old Testament (LXX). The most common translation is by the verb *exilaskomai* and the noun *exilasmos*. The Hebrew word *kapporeth* (mercy seat) is normally translated *hilasterion*. On occasion, the LXX translates *kpr* with the Greek word *lutron*, which means "ransom or redemption."[22] Since variations of these words are found in the New Testament, they will help make it clear how atonement was understood to have occurred at the cross of Jesus Christ.

Reading *atonement* through the lens of the Sanctuary ceremonies and particularly the Day of Atonement led the Adventist pioneers to see the atonement as having a particular focus on the investigative judgment and the final cleansing of the universe from sin. This larger view of God and the cosmic conflict led them often to deny that atonement was completed at the cross.

The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 53. The serious importance of blood in atonement is underlined further in Leviticus 10:16–20, where Moses chides the sons of Aaron for burning the sin offering rather than bringing its blood into the sanctuary.

20. See the discussion in Beale, *New Testament Biblical Theology*, 487.

21. Green, "Atonement," *NIDB*, 1:345; Mitton, "Atonement," *IDB*, 1:310. There are multiple passages in which there is an absence of blood and sacrifice and the atonement is granted on other grounds. Atonement can be granted after application of oil (Lev. 14:29), burning flour (Lev. 5:11–13), burning incense (Num. 16:41–50), payment of money (Exod. 30:11–16), execution (Num. 25:1–13; 2 Sam. 21:1–6), gifts of jewelry (Num. 31:48–54), the release of a live animal (Lev. 16:10), and simple appeals to God with words (Exod. 32:30). In the Psalms, sin is put right largely in the absence of sacrificial or atonement language. See Christopher J. H. Wright, "Atonement in the Old Testament," 81–82. In the non-ritual texts of the Old Testament, the proper atonement for moral wrong doing is repentance. See J. Milgrom, "Atonement in the OT," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, suppl. vol., ed. Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 80–81. Sacrifice can also be used for purposes other than atonement. See Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement," *JETS*, 642.

22. Based on the "ransom/redemption" meaning of the related Hebrew word *kôpher*. See Milgrom, "Atonement in the OT," *IDB Supplement*, 80.

While SDA pioneers were truly on to something important, the one reference to atonement in the New Testament portion of the King James Bible should have given them pause. That reference is found in Romans 5:11.

Atonement Language in the New Testament

In Romans 5:11, according to the King James Version, atonement is clearly in the context of the cross: "We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement."[23] It is true that the King James wording ("we have now received") can be read in terms of the ongoing process of intercession in the heavenly sanctuary. But the aorist indicative form in the Greek (*elabomen*) points to a singular conclusive action in the past, at the cross of Christ.[24] The benefits of that action are now (*nun*) made available to those who are rejoicing (present continuous tense—*kauchômenoi*) in Him. So a full picture of the atonement language in Scripture indicates an either/or approach is incorrect.[25]

It is interesting that the King James Version translates only the noun form of the word for atonement (*katallagên*) as "atonement." Verbal forms of the same word occur in verse 10 (*katêllagêmen*—"were reconciled," *katallagentes*—"having been reconciled") and are translated as "reconciled."[26] So the King James translation actually masks the fact that "reconciled" in

23. Romans 5:1–10 is about the benefits that flow from justification and Romans 5:12–21 contains the famous Adam/Christ typology in which death and sin enter the human race through Adam and these are undone through the obedient life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

24. Beale, *New Testament Theology*, 541.

25. Romans 5:11 is at the heart and pivot of the whole chapter. See the analysis in Beale, *New Testament Theology*, 540–542. Romans 5:11 defines *atonement* as follows: Through the death of Christ people have been restored from a state of hostility into a peaceful relationship with God. This builds on verse one of the same chapter (NIV), where believers, "hav[ing] been justified through faith . . . have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The hostile state of alienation from God introduced by the first Adam is overcome by the death and resurrection of the last Adam (Rom. 5:12–21).

26. There are no differences in Romans 5:10–11 between the Byzantine text (upon which the King James Bible was based) and the scholarly text generally accepted today. So text critical issues do not impact the interpretation of these verses.

verse 10 translates a root form of the same word as *atonement* in verse 11. The more modern translations, therefore, are correct in using "reconciliation" instead of "atonement" in Romans 5:11. Furthermore, since the translators of the King James used "atonement" for the noun form but translated "reconciled" for the verb form, it is clear that they understood "atonement" as a synonym of "reconciliation."

Extended Meaning of the Greek Word *katallassô*

The root meaning of the verb form *katallassô* is difficult to determine, but it has a basic idea of "change" or "exchange."[27] From there it isn't far to the idea of "reconcile," as in "the exchange of hostility for a friendly relationship."[28] When applied to God, the verb is always active; when applied to human beings it is always passive.[29] So reconciliation is something that flows from God to us, not the other way around. The noun form *katallagê* corresponds to the meaning of the verb, with the sense of "exchange" or "reconciliation."[30] Surprisingly, both terms are extremely rare in the LXX (Greek Old Testament). Within the canonical books, *katallagê* is found only in Isaiah 9:5 and there its meaning is obscure.[31]

Reconciliation in the New Testament

The Bible begins with the assumption that humans from the beginning were designed to be in harmonious relationship with God (Gen. 1:26–28). But a radical breach has broken this unity (Gen. 3:22–24; 6:5; Isa. 59:1–2;

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27. Friedrich Büchsel, "*Katallassô*, etc." in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 1:254.

28. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. and ed. Frederick Danker, based on Walter Bauer, *Griechisch-deutsches Woerterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der fruehchristlichen Literature*, 6th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 521.

29. Büchsel, "*Katallassô*, etc." in *TDNT*, 1:255.

30. Ibid., 1:258. In the Bauer/Danker lexicon (521), *katallagê* is defined as "reestablishment of an interrupted or broken relationship."

31. Ibid., 1:258.

Rom. 5:12; Eph. 2:1).[32] So human beings became alienated from (Eph. 4:18) and hostile to God and each other (Col. 1:21; Rom. 5:10; 8:7).[33] This is not only true of Gentiles (Rom. 1:23ff.), but also of Jews (Rom. 3:9–20, 23). The cause of this estrangement is human disobedience toward God and His law (1 John 3:4) arising out of a lack of trust (faith) in who He is (Rom. 14:23).[34] This is where the concept of reconciliation comes in.

The concept of reconciliation is grounded in the realm of personal relationships, severed and restored.[35] In contexts where there is enmity, distrust, or broken relationships of all types, reconciliation is about the healing and restoration of those relationships.[36] So atonement in the New Testament has to do with how the cross of Jesus Christ heals the breach between God and the human race. To gain a clearer understanding of this concept, the main texts where this word group is used, beginning with Romans 5:8–11, will be examined.[37]

Paul declares in Romans 5:8 that the death of Christ, which occurred at a time when humans were still sinners (before they turned to God), demonstrates God's own love toward humanity.[38] When the cross took place, all

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32. Mark L. Y. Chan, "The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33 (1, 2009): 20; Reid, "Atone, Atonement," *ISBE*, 1:353.

33. Mitton, "Atonement," *IDB*, 1:311.

34. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 174.

35. I. Howard Marshall, "The Theology of the Atonement," in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 60; Morris, *The Atonement*, 132–150; C. M. Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1:521.

36. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 181.

37. Although Paul is the only writer of the New Testament who uses the terminology of reconciliation (Rom. 5:8–11; 2 Cor. 5:14–21; Eph. 2:11–16; Col. 1:20–23), it is central to his understanding of the cross and is implied in many other parts of the New Testament, such as Luke 15:11–31 and Matthew 5:23–24. A related concept is the word *peace* which describes the outcome of the reconciliation process. Those in Christ have peace with God and also with others (Acts 10:36; Rom. 5:1; 8:6; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 2:14–17; Col. 1:20). See Green, "Atonement," *NIDB*, 1:346–347.

38 Green, "Atonement," *NIDB*, 1:347; P. Jewett, "Atonement," *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (ZPEB)*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 1: 410.

humans were not only sinners, but enemies of God (v. 10) and the death of God's Son reconciled humanity to God. Sin was the root cause of the enmity, and since humans were unable to remove it, God put it out of the way at the cross.[39] Paul's use of "were reconciled" (Rom. 5:10, NIV)[40] clearly places the reconciliation in the past rather than the present from the point of our experience. As a passive, the word also makes it clear that the reconciliation that took place on the cross was entirely God's work, humanity had no part in it.[41] It is objective, outside of humans.

Paul reiterates his point in verse 11, but from the standpoint of the converted person rather than preconversion. Through our Lord Jesus Christ "we have now received the reconciliation (or atonement)" (NASB). The "now" in verse 11 is in contrast with the time of the believer's enmity and sinfulness. Paul moves from the time of the cross (in vv. 8 and 9) to the moment when that past act of atonement is applied to the new believer (v. 11). Reconciliation is something to be "received" (*elabômen*), it exists objectively before an individual experiences it, and it is outside of and prior to an individual's response.[42] Arising out of God's love, the cross was God's act of reconciliation and atonement which is applied to human beings as they respond to the preaching of the gospel.[43] While Jesus Christ is the active agent of reconciliation, the Father is its author.[44] "The grief of the

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This reconciling love was demonstrated at the cross but goes all the way to eternity past (John 17:6ff.; Eph. 1:4; 2 Tim. 1:9–10). See Reid, "Atone, Atonement," in *ISBE*, 1:353.

39. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 181; I. Howard Marshall, "The Death of Jesus in Recent New Testament Study," *Word and World* 3:1 (Winter 1983): 18.

40. This translation of the aorist passive participle (*katallagentes*) is standard, being found, for example, in the King James Version, the New International Version, and the English Standard Version.

41. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 181.

42. Ibid., 181; Morris, *The Atonement*, 139.

43. Rohintan K. Mody, "Penal Substitutionary Atonement in Paul," in *The Atonement Debate*, 116.

44. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 181; Arland J. Hultgren, "Salvation: Its Forms and Dynamics in the New Testament," *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology* 45:3 (Fall 2006): 216, 221.

Father is as important as the death of the Son."[45] The death of Christ, then, "made it possible for a holy God to do for sinners what otherwise He could not have done."[46]

In 2 Corinthians 5:14–21, Paul grounds reconciliation completely in the death of Christ. The crucial act is that "one died for all" and so there is a sense that all have somehow died in that action (2 Cor. 5:14). Then Paul gives his classic statement about reconciliation in verses 18–20. Reconciliation comes from God and God here (v. 18) is clearly distinguished from Christ, so God the Father is in view. Through the actions of Jesus Christ at the cross, God the Father is reconciled to humanity and gives humanity the ministry of reconciliation.

He elaborates on this in verse 19: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (KJV). J. I. Packer expressed this beautifully: "The two loves, love of Father and Son, are one."[47] That reconciliation is grounded in "not reckoning to them their sins" (my translation). The message regarding that reconciliation is then committed or entrusted to "us." This last point is elaborated in verse 20. Paul and the apostles have become God's ambassadors to invite others to participate in that reconciliation.

The passage in 2 Corinthians 5 makes several critical points. First, it clearly distinguishes the work of Christ on the cross from the prior purpose of the Father to provide the reconciliation. Christ does not change the heart of the Father by the action He does at the cross; rather, the Father Himself was acting in our behalf through the work of Christ.[48]

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45. Gabriel Fackre, "A Theology of the Cross," *Andover Newton Quarterly* 16:2 (November 1975): 155, quoting Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974), 243.

46. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 182.

47. J. I. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution," *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): 40. Packer does not see any contradiction between the full, loving engagement of the Father in the atonement and the concept of penal substitution. To him, penal substitution heightens the love of God rather than diminishes it. The highest measure of divine love is seen in Jesus experiencing the full measure of the divine reaction against sin.

48. This point is also made by Jesus in John 3:16 and 14:10. See Grace Adophsen Brame, "The Cross: Payment or Gift?" *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33:2 (Summer 2005): 170–172. In the New Testament, God and Jesus are always portrayed as the subject of the atonement, never as its object. If God were the object, Jesus would be giving up His life to

Second, there is a "now and not yet" aspect to reconciliation.[49] It is a completed action at the cross, outside of humanity, once for all.[50] On the other hand, reconciliation is also a task humans are to do (vv. 18–19); it has not yet happened in the fullest sense.[51] Reconciliation is only complete when human beings respond to what God has already done.[52] Third, there is a strong sense of exchange or substitution in the passage. Through one death "all died" (5:14, NIV, NKJV), and the One who knew no sin was made sin so "that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (5:21, KJV).

In Colossians 1:19–22, the concept of reconciliation is expanded beyond the human race to the entire universe.[53] Christ "is the image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15, KJV), pre-eminent (1:18), and one in whom all the fullness of God dwells (v. 19). Through Him everything in heaven and earth is reconciled,[54] making peace through the blood of the cross (v. 20). What happened on the cross, therefore, provides atonement not just for the human race, but for the entire universe. In verse 21, however, Paul steps back and addresses the condition humanity was in before the cross. Human beings were alienated (estranged), hostile (enemies) in mind, and doing evil deeds. These very same people were reconciled (*apokatêllaxen*) "in the body of His flesh through death" (v. 22, KJV). The end result is human beings who are holy, blameless, and unreproachable in God's sight.

The passage in Colossians 1 brings out a number of important things. The focus in this passage is not on the Father (as was the case in 2 Cor. 5), but on Jesus Christ, who carries the fullness of God in Himself and thus is qualified to be the agent on God's side of the reconciliation process.

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appease God. If Jesus were the object, God would be punishing Jesus in His death. But the atonement is never expressed in the latter two ways. Green, "Atonement," *NIDB*, 1:346.

49. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 181.

50. The Greek expresses this in the indicative mood combined with past tenses. Reconciliation is an established fact that cannot be altered.

51. In verse 20 this is expressed with an aorist imperative (*katallagête*), which means it does not fully happen until humans respond to what God has done.

52. Morris, *The Atonement*, 145.

53. Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:521.

54. Aorist infinitive (*apokatallaxai*), implying a point in time rather than a process.

The one-time death of Jesus Christ on the cross has reconciled (i.e., made atonement) to God not only the human race, but in some sense the entire universe. While not denying the biblical teaching about continuing atonement in the heavenly sanctuary, Paul is clear in this passage that the decisive act of atonement occurred on the cross. And atonement does not end at the cross, but results in transformed lives.

The final text that centers on the language of reconciliation is Ephesians 2:11–16. The focus there is not on God's side in the atonement, but on the need for human response.[55] The condition of the Gentiles before conversion is described in verse 12 (ESV) as "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." But "now" (2:13) in Christ, those who were afar "have been brought near"[56] through the blood of Christ, a reference to the cross.[57] In the flesh of Christ on the cross (2:14), He brought an end to the hostility (enmity) between God and humanity and also the "dividing wall" (2:14, ESV) between humans. Through Christ, Gentile and Jew have become one. Christ acted as He did on the cross in order that He "might reconcile"[58] both Jew and Gentile to God and to each other. The impact of the cross included "killing" (2:16, ESV) the enmity.

This passage in Ephesians reiterates the one-time act on the cross as the decisive event in the atonement, but it focuses more than the previous passages on the outcome of the cross—the ongoing nature of the atonement in its effects on the Ephesian church. While there is no talk here of a heavenly sanctuary, or Christ's ongoing intercession in heavenly places, the atonement on the cross and the ongoing atonement in the sanctuary are not in conflict with each other. They are two parts of a larger concept. Reconciliation and atonement involve both an indicative (i.e., past, completed action) and an imperative (i.e., something that still needs to happen).[59]

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55. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 182; Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:521.

56. Aorist passive indicative (*egenêthête*), implying a one-time act in the past that the Ephesians had nothing to do with, but that had a powerful effect on their lives.

57. Hultgren, "Salvation," in *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology*, 220.

58. Aorist active subjunctive (*apokatallaxê*). The subjunctive express probability, in this context, the purpose of God, so there is an implication of future reconciliation here.

59. This is beautifully expressed by N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers

Conclusion

The examination of the biblical use of the word *atonement,* along with its equivalent, *reconciliation,* has led to some significant conclusions. First, while atonement is not limited to the cross, it is clearly grounded there in the biblical sense.[60] It is a one-time objective act that removes all barriers to reconciliation except the human response. Second, there is a now and a not-yet sense to atonement. The cross is an established fact, a one-time event in the past. But atonement and reconciliation don't end there—they continue in the work of Christ in heaven and in the ministry of reconciliation on earth.[61] These continuing actions work to effect that human response that was not completed at the cross. So in one sense, atonement is complete at the cross, and in another sense it is not.

THE PROBLEM OF METAPHOR

A small aside will be helpful before tackling the why and the how of the cross. When it comes to spiritual matters, it is very difficult to use direct speech.

Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 98: "The cross is not just an example to be followed, it is an achievement to be worked out, put into practice."

60. While Ellen G. White can say "The intercession of Christ in man's behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross" (*The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1911], 489), she is also very firm that "The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster" (Francis D. Nichol, ed., *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary [SDABC],* seven volumes [Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1956], 5:1137) and "the cross . . . is the means of man's atonement" (6T 236). In speaking about the cross she could say, "The conditions of the atonement had been fulfilled" (Manuscript 138, 1897). On Ellen White's view, see Denis Fortin, "The Cross of Christ: Theological Differences Between Joseph H. Waggoner and Ellen G. White, *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14:2 (Autumn 2003): 134–139.

An excellent summary of what the New Testament has to say about the centrality of the cross can be found in John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 17–46. An argument for a much more marginal role for the cross in the New Testament can be found in Robert M. Price, "The Marginality of the Cross," *Journal of Unification Studies* 6 (2004–2005): 23–38.

61. Joel B. Green and Mark K. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 133–134.

Knowing God is like gazing into the sun.[62] God is real, yet in everyday human experience people do not see, hear, or touch God (in the Bible, Moses and Jesus were notable exceptions).[63] All talk of God, therefore, involves the stretching of human language. When it comes to spiritual matters, God is generally spoken about using metaphors, analogies, or other figures of speech.[64]

When it comes to getting right with God, for example, the Bible frequently makes use of law court metaphors. The human condition is described in terms of guilt and condemnation.[65] Human beings are legally out of synch with God. Salvation is then described in legal terms such as *justification, acquittal,* and *vindication.* On the other hand, if the human condition is described in terms of debt (a banking or financial metaphor), the appropriate salvation word would be *forgiveness* or possibly *redemption.*

People often treat such language as if it were scientifically precise with reference to their salvation (which itself is a metaphor based either in the realm of rescue operations or healing), but it is actually metaphorical, speaking about something beyond the five senses in the language of concrete, everyday existence (*concrete* itself is here a figure of speech!). Other well-known biblical metaphors are *the body of Christ, the fruit of the spirit,* and *the bread of life.*

When it comes to explaining how the cross of Jesus Christ reconciles humanity to God, language moves immediately into the realm of metaphor. Metaphor is based on a similarity between something that cannot be described directly and something that known from everyday experience. The analogy between the two conceptual worlds expresses something that

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62. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?" in *Tyndale Bulletin,* 6–8, also notes scriptural support for this theme in Ephesians 3:19 (ESV: "the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge"); Romans 11:33–36 (KJV: "How unsearchable are His judgments, His ways past finding out"); and 1 Corinthians 13:9, 12 (KJV: "For we know in part and we prophesy in part").

63. "It is a unique kind of knowledge which, though real, is not full; it is knowledge of what is discernible within a circle of light against the background of a larger darkness; it is, in short, knowledge of a *mystery,* the mystery of the living God at work," Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?", *Tyndale Bulletin,* 6.

64. Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross,* 38–43, 124; I. Howard Marshall, "The Theology of the Atonement," in *The Atonement Debate,* 50.

65. Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD,* 1:518.

is real and true, but it rarely does so in a complete way.[66] There is both commonality and difference. To press any single metaphor into doing the job of explaining everything is to distort the understanding of the whole.

This does not imply some sort of post-modern "anything goes" approach to Scripture. Even God speaks in analogies and models, but they are "revealed models" or "controlling models."[67] God's models are revelation, not speculation. They are ways of thought that God Himself has taught His children. The biblical metaphors operate as controls for unrestrained theological modeling.[68] While humans know only in part, what the Bible teaches them is adequate for both salvation and a living relationship with God.

Throughout history, Christian theology has often focused on one or another New Testament model of the atonement and tried to absolutize that metaphor, as if it explained everything. But that is never the perspective of the New Testament writers, as will be demonstrated.[69] The greatest justice is done to the atonement at the cross if believers are open to the great variety of metaphors and figures of speech that were used in the New Testament to express how God reconciled the world to Himself at the cross.[70]

Coming back to Romans 5:8–11, one notes the wide variety of metaphors for the atonement that occur in that single passage. The language of sin and blood (vv. 8–9) is drawn from the cultic context of the ancient tabernacle. The language of enmity and reconciliation comes from the realm of relationships. And the language of justification comes from the law court. Paul does not limit himself to a single metaphor to describe what

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66. A good discussion of metaphor can be found in Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement," *JETS*, 634–640.

67. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?", *Tyndale Bulletin*, 14–16.

68. Ibid., 12.

69. Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:518; Ben Wiebe, "Cross Currents: Rethinking Atonement (with Reflection on Campbell, Stone, and Scott)," *Stone-Campbell Journal* 13 (Fall 2010): 202.

70. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve? *Tyndale Bulletin*, 10, recalls Calvin, who noted that God's love for us and hostility to sin (at one and the same time) are compatible "in a way that cannot be put into words." See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, xvii. 2. See also Mark D. Baker, "How the Cross Saves," *Direction* 36:1 (2007): 45; Steve Chalke, "The Redemption of the Cross," in *The Atonement Debate*, 37; Chan, "The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross," *ERT*, 23–24; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 124–126, 134.

happened at the cross, and he can mix several metaphors into a single paragraph![71] When it comes to describing what God did for humanity in Christ, human language is exposed in all its weakness. The Word of God is expressed in the language of humanity![72]

WHY AND HOW THE CROSS?

Though conservative Christians agree on the facts of Jesus's death and resurrection, they differ widely on the "why" of the cross.[73] Throughout Christian history churchmen and scholars have debated the meaning of the cross as atonement without coming to a settled conclusion.[74] Most of these debates were grounded at one point or another on specific metaphors or models found in the New Testament. There was often the attempt to put forward a particular metaphor as if it were the only possible one. But, as has been seen, the full richness of the biblical testimony pushes the readers toward a multiplex approach. So this chapter will close with a survey of the main metaphors[75] by which the New Testament writers expressed their understanding of what the atonement was all about.[76] These are usually

71. Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:521.

72. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages, Book One* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1958), 21.

73. S. Mark Heim, "Cross Purposes: Rethinking the Death of Jesus," *Christian Century* (March 22, 2005): 20.

74. A good summary of the classic views on the meaning of the atonement can be found in John Sanders, "Introduction," in *Atonement and Violence: A Theological Conversation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), xiii–xv. A good summary of the most recent issues in the debate over the meaning of the atonement can be found in Sanders, *Atonement and Violence*, ix–xi.

75. Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 41, 123, list five major metaphors in the New Testament, as does Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement," *JETS*, 629–630. Wayne Northey, "The Cross: God's Peace Work Towards a Restorative Peacemaking Understanding of the Atonement," in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, ed. Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 356–357, lists ten, as does Mark D. Baker, "How the Cross Saves," *Direction* 36:1 (2007): 46–55.

76. One could argue that *reconciliation* is one metaphor among many in the New Testament. And that is certainly true. But since the goal of this paper is an understanding of the *atonement* (an English word) and *atonement* is a translation of *katallásso* in Romans 5:11,

grounded both in the Old Testament Scriptures and in the New Testament writers' perception of who Jesus was and is.[77]

The Cross as a Sacrifice

As noted previously, the Hebrew words for atonement (*kpr, kapporeth*) are heavily associated with the Old Testament sacrificial system (Exod. 29:36; Lev. 4:20; Num. 15:25).[78] Given the nature of Christ's death, therefore, it is not surprising that the New Testament uses sacrificial language to describe the cross.[79] It is a major theme in Hebrews, where Jesus is described as the fulfillment and extension of that sacrificial system.[80] Other explicit

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it seemed appropriate to begin with *reconciliation* as expressing the fundamental meaning of what the translators of the King James Bible and the Adventist pioneers understood by *atonement.* Further aspects of the atonement at the cross will be discerned by looking at other metaphors of what God did on the cross.

77. N. T. Wright, "The Reasons for Jesus' Crucifixion," in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ,* ed. Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 135–142.

78. Brame, "The Cross: Payment or Gift?" *Perspectives in Religious Studies,* 167; Briley, "The Old Testament 'Sin Offering' and Christ's Atonement," *Stone-Campbell Journal,* 94–97; Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 175; Green, "Atonement," *NIDB,* 1:345–346. Briley points out that while sacrifice was widespread in the ancient world, there were significant differences between pagan and Hebrew sacrificial understandings. In the Hebrew understanding there was no magical power in the sacrifice; its value was solely in the blessing of God. Also blood played no role in ancient pagan sacrifices, and holiness was required of the offerer. Among the Church Fathers, the sacrificial metaphor appears relatively late in Cyprian, Eusebius, and John of Damascus. See G. W. Bromiley, "Atone; Atonement: History of the Doctrine," in *ISBE,* 1:356.

79. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 175–180; Paul Jewett, "Atonement," *ZPEB,* 1:408; Marshall, "The Theology of the Atonement," in *The Atonement Debate,* 59–60; Mikolaski, "The Cross of Christ," *Christianity Today* 3; Mitton, "Atonement," *IDB,* 1:312; Kathryn Tanner, "Incarnation, Cross and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal," *Anglican Theological Review* 86:1 (Winter 2004): 48–56; Tuckett, *ABD,* 1:518–520.

80. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 176; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross,*131; Geoffrey Grogan, "The Atonement in the New Testament," in *The Atonement Debate,* 92; Steve Motyer, "The Atonement in Hebrews," in *The Atonement Debate,*136–149. Explicit texts in Hebrews include 9:13–15, 22–28; 10:10, 12, 26 and 13:11–12.

references to the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice include 1 Corinthians 5:7 (KJV: "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us") and Ephesians 5:2 (ESV: "a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God").

The cross as a sacrifice is also implied in frequent references to the blood of Christ (Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Rom. 3:25; 5:9; Eph. 1:7; 2:13; Col. 1:20; 1 Pet. 1:18–19).[81] It is also implied in John 1:29, NIV, where Jesus is described as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"[82] For the writers of the New Testament, the great Old Testament text that led them to apply sacrificial language to the death of Christ was Isaiah 53,[83] where the Suffering Servant was led as "a Lamb to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7), died as "an offering for sin" (Isa. 53:10, KJV), and "bare the sin of many" (53:12).

Why the cross? The metaphor of sacrifice implies that death is the penalty for sin (Gen. 2:16–17; Ezek. 18:4, 20) and that the death of a sacrificial victim would substitute or be exchanged for the death of the sinner.[84] Since the book of Hebrews denies that the sacrifices in the Old Testament sanctuary were the ultimate basis for remission of sin, the sacrifice of Christ is not one sacrifice among many, but the single sacrifice that was truly

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81. James D. G. Dunn, "Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus," in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L. L. Morris on His 60th Birthday,* ed. Robert Banks (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1974), 125–141; Morris, *The Atonement,* 52–53, 63; Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD,* 1: 518. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 175–177, points to Leviticus 17:11 as a key text in the association of sacrificial blood with the atonement.

82. George L. Carey, "The Lamb of God and Atonement Theories," *Tyndale Bulletin* 32 (1981): 97–122. On the relation of Passover to sacrifice, see Bruce H. Grigsby, "The Cross as an Expiatory Sacrifice in the Fourth Gospel," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 15 (July 1982); Morris, *The Atonement,* 88–105. See also Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross,* 130–131; Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD,* 1:518.

83. Mikolaski, "The Cross of Christ," *Christianity Today,* 3; Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD,* 1:518–519. Excellent interpretations of Isaiah 53 in light of atonement at the cross can be found in Chan, "The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross," *ERT,* 21–22; E. Robert Ekblad, "God Is Not to Blame: The Servant's Atoning Suffering According to the LXX of Isaiah 53," in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ,* ed. Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 180–204; Sue Groom, "Why Did Christ Die? An Exegesis of Isaiah 52:13—53:12," in *The Atonement Debate,* 96–114.

84. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 176, 178. According to 2 Corinthians 5:14, in this one death "all died" (NIV, NKJV). The concept of substitution or exchange is also clear in verse 21 of the same chapter.

meaningful and put an end to all others (Heb. 9:25–26; 10:1–14). Through the sacrifice of Christ, the sins of the world could be forgiven.[85] Unfortunately, the biblical texts concerning sacrifice never fully reveal the inner logic behind such ritual acts. It is clear that sacrifice is effective in restoring right relations with God, how this is so is less clear.[86] Jesus's death was "for us" (1 Thess. 5:10), "for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3),[87] and "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28, NIV, ESV).

The Cross as a Ransom or Redemption

It has also been noted that in the LXX the Hebrew words for "atonement" (*kpr, kapporeth*) were sometimes translated by the Greek word for "ransom/redemption" (*lutron*). So it should not be surprising if *lutron* and its derivatives (*apolutrosis* and *antilutron*) are used to explain the atonement in the New Testament.[88] In any case, the language of ransom or redemption had a rich background in the first century. In the Gentile world, slaves and prisoners of war could be "redeemed" by paying a suitable ransom price.[89] Among the Jews this language was grounded in the Israelite deliverance from Egyptian slavery at the time of the Exodus (Exod. 6:6; 15:13; Deut. 7:8).[90]

In the New Testament, the cross of Christ is described in ransom/redemption language (Mark 10:45 and parallels; Rom. 3:24; Heb. 9:12, 15;

85. Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:519.

86. Briley, "The Old Testament 'Sin Offering' and Christ's Atonement," *Stone-Campbell Journal*, 93; Green, "Atonement," *NIDB*, 345. Perhaps the meaning of sacrifice in biblical times was so self-evident to the ancients that it needed no explanation.

87. For an in-depth look at the implications of 1 Corinthians 15:3 for the death of Christ, see Chan, "The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross," *ERT*, 29–30; Grogan, "The Atonement in the New Testament," in *The Atonement Debate*, 88; Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 36–39; Mitton, "Atonement," *IDB*, 1:312.

88. The ransom idea was very popular among the early church fathers. It was mentioned by Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, and in the Epistle to Diognetus. See Bromiley, "Atone; Atonement: History of the Doctrine," *ISBE*, 1:355–356.

89. Morris, *The Atonement*, 107–110; Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:520.

90. Green, "Atonement," *NIDB*, 346; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 126; Morris, 113; Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:520.

Eph. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:18–19).[91] Paul can also use the language of having been "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23, KJV). Scholars have debated whether God's redeeming of Israel in the Exodus and of the human race at the cross did indeed require the payment of a price or not.[92] But there is a strong sense of substitution or equivalence in the Greek form *antilutron* ("ransom in place of," see 1 Tim. 2:6) and the way *ransom* is expressed in Mark 10:45 ("ransom [*lutron*] in place of [*anti*] many"—my translation).[93] Ransom in the New Testament, however, may be less about a transaction than about the value that God places upon the human race.[94]

If one understands that the New Testament points to the payment of a price, there is no indication to whom the price was paid, whether to God, Satan, or some other entity.[95] What is clear from this language is that the atonement at the cross was costly to the godhead. The forgiveness that humans receive is free through the cross, but it was not cheap to God. What Jesus endured on the cross was in behalf of, in place of, all of humanity.[96]

The Cross as a *Hilasterion*

A third Greek word associated with Old Testament atonement language is *hilasterion*, which was consistently applied in the LXX for the "mercy seat" on the ark of the covenant (e.g., Lev. 16:2ff.). It is transliterated here because

91. Marshall, "The Theology of the Atonement," in *The Atonement Debate*, 60.

92. The classic debate over whether the language of redemption in the Bible requires payment of a price was between Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (1965; repr., London: The Tyndale Press, 2000), 11–64 and David Hill, *Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 49–81. See also Green, "Atonement," *NIDB*, 346; Morris, *The Atonement*, 116–119.

93. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 177–178; Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 127; Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:521.

94. Brame, "The Cross: Payment or Gift?" *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 172–173.

95. Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 128; Jewett, "Atonement," *ZPEB*, 1:410. This issue was a major point of contention in the course of church history. See Bromiley, "Atone; Atonement: History of the Doctrine," *ISBE*, 1:355–360.

96. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 178.

there is no settled English equivalent. In Hebrews 9:5 *hilasterion* is used in common Old Testament fashion to describe or name the mercy seat in the Most Holy place of the Hebrew sanctuary.[97] There is no direct theological meaning stated there.[98]

The other usage of *hilasterion* is in Romans 3:25.[99] *Hilasterion* in Romans 3:25 is usually translated as "propitiation" (KJV, ESV) or as "expiation" (RSV, NAB). The New International Version clarifies without clarifying by translating *hilasterion* as "sacrifice of atonement." In pagan Greek sources *hilasterion* carries the idea of propitiation, to turn away someone's anger or to conciliate, usually by the offer of a gift.[100] In Jewish and Christian sources the word usually means expiation, to cancel guilt or pay the penalty for a crime, to nullify sin and its effects.[101] The first meaning considers *hilasterion* in personal terms, while the second considers it in impersonal terms.[102] Pagan views of wrath and propitiation are absent from the

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97. G. K. Beale applies this meaning also to Romans 3:25; see G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 486–489, while Morris argues strongly against applying this usage to Romans 3:25. See Morris, *The Atonement*, 168.

98. Related nouns and verbs are found in Hebrews 2:17 and 1 John 2:1–2 and 4:10. See Morris, *The Atonement*, 170–172, for a discussion of these. They have similar meaning to the likely usage in Romans 3:25.

99. Romans 3:25 stands at the culmination of a process of reasoning that goes all the way back to the first chapter of the epistle. After an introductory summary of the gospel (Rom. 1:16–17), Paul speaks of the wrath of God being revealed against sin (1:18), but since sin has left the entire human race in a hopeless condition (1:18—3:20), a mighty intervention from God is needed. That intervention is described by means of multiple metaphors. It is the manifestation of the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ (3:21–22). It is justification by His grace through the redemption (*apolutroseôs*) which is in Christ Jesus (3:24). That redemption is further explained as a *hilasterion* through His blood (3:25). So the word *hilasterion* is a crucial part of the solution God offers on account of human sin.

100. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 178; Rohintan K. Mody, "Penal Substitutionary Atonement in Paul," in *The Atonement Debate*, 124–127; Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:519.

101. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 178; C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder, 1935), 82–95; Green, "Atonement," *NIDB*, 345; Milgrom, "Atonement in the OT," *IDB Supplement*, 80–81; Mitton, "Atonement," *IDB*, 1:313; Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:519.

102. Morris, *The Atonement*, 151–152, says you can propitiate a person, but you

scriptural view of God: He is not a capricious and vindictive deity whose mind must be changed by an overwhelming sacrifice.[103] But in the context of Romans 3:25, wrath and negative judgment are too central to ignore in relation to the solution that God provides, so there is an element of propitiation in Paul's use of *hilasterion*.[104] How does one reconcile the love of God with His wrath against sin?[105]

From this point of view, God's holiness made the penalty for sin inescapable. But God's love endured the penalty of sin in humanity's place. God took upon Himself the penalty of sin. "What the holiness of God required, His love provided."[106] At the cross both God's wrath against sin and His love for the sinner are revealed. There justice and mercy kiss each other (Ps. 85:10). "Love does not gloss over sin, but effectively grapples with it."[107] Whatever is understood by the phrase "the wrath of God," it is important to note that the wrath of God is not removed by human activity, its removal is due solely to God Himself.[108]

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expiate a sin or a crime. So this translational dilemma has major significance for the role of God in the atonement. Is there someone who needs to be addressed or only an object that needs to be removed?

103. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 178; Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, 82–95.

104. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 179; Mitton, "Atonement," *IDB*, 1:310. For a strong defense of propitiation as an important aspect of *hilasterion* in the New Testament, see Morris, *The Atonement*, 151–176. Some recent scholars are concerned that views such as this encourage violence in the name of God. See, for example, Jürgen Moltmann, "The Crucified God: Yesterday and Today: 1972–2002," trans. Margaret Kohl, in Marit Trelstad, *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 127–138; Marit Trelstad, *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*; J. Denny Weaver, "The Nonviolent Atonement: Human Violence, Discipleship, and God," in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, ed. Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 316–355.

105. For an extensive discussion of the wrath of God in both testaments and its implications for today, see Morris, *The Atonement*, 153–157, 163–166.

106. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 179.

107. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 179–180.

108. Morris, *The Atonement*, 157.

He dealt with this while humans were still sinners, so the way to reconciliation is completely open to everyone.

This element of wrath and propitiation does not necessarily diminish the love of God, it can even raise it to unimaginable heights.[109] The greater the challenge that sin presents, the greater the action of love that was needed to overcome it. The challenge of sin highlights the love of God all the more. While *hilasterion* as a metaphor is challenging in today's world and easily misunderstood, it too provides a biblical dimension for understanding atonement at the cross.

The Cross as Acquittal in Court (Justification)

Why the cross? If the problem of sin is described in terms of a broken law that results in a state of guilt, the solution is acquittal (justification) in God's court of judgment.[110] This acquittal is made possible by two realities; the cross exhausting the penalty for breaking the law and the perfect law-keeping of Jesus providing the "righteousness" that is needed in the final judgment (Rom. 3:21–26; 5:12–21; 8:3–4).[111] To put it in other terms, Christ redeemed the human race from the curse of the law, having become that curse for them (Gal. 3:13). The concept is used in a similar fashion outside of Paul in Luke 18:9–14.

Today, *legalism* is often a dirty word, lending a negative connotation to the Bible's concern for covenant, law, righteousness, and judgment. But

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109. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?" *Tyndale Bulletin*, 41, notes that the divine withdrawal from Jesus on the cross was all the more intense because Jesus had experienced the full depth of the Father's love. For him, penal substitution demonstrated the depth of the Father's love, what He was willing to take on Himself to save humanity. Timothy Keller, in *King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 141–142, points out that when you love wounded or needy people, there is always a cost to yourself. Philip Yancey points out that only someone who has been hurt can forgive. At Calvary, God chose to be hurt, "Surveying the Wondrous Cross: Understanding the Atonement Is About More Than Grasping a Theory," *Christianity Today* 53:5 (May 2009): 72.

110. The Greek word for justification (*dikaiosunê*) means essentially the same thing as righteousness and/or acquittal. See Mikolaski, "The Cross of Christ," *Christianity Today*, 4; I. Howard Marshall, "The Death of Jesus in Recent New Testament Study," *Word and World* 3:1 (Winter 1983): 17–18; Morris, *The Atonement*, 183–185.

111. The only Church Father who comes close to expressing this viewpoint is Cyril of Jerusalem. See Bromiley, "Atone; Atonement: History of the Doctrine," *ISBE*, 1:356.

legal systems do not need to be seen as impersonal, harsh, cold, and unfeeling. Rightly handled, constitutional law enables people with differing goals and interests to live together in peace. And the application of even-handed justice comes very close to mercy in the experience of those whose wrongs have been set right.[112]

Paul argues that God is completely just in both condemning and punishing sin and in pardoning and accepting sinners (Rom. 3:23–26).[113] Jesus Christ, acting on the sinner's behalf has both put away human sin by His death (3:25; 5:9) and fulfilled the just requirement of the law by His perfect thirty-three and a half years on this earth (8:4). So, according to this model, Christ's sacrifice is not a compromise of justice, but actually demonstrates it (3:26). Because of justification, relationship can be restored.[114]

It is important to note at this point that all of these first four metaphors of atonement have an element of substitution in them. God in Christ does for the sinner what the sinner is incapable of doing.[115] Many writings on atonement, therefore, highlight substitution as a metaphor of atonement in the New Testament.[116] This study does not, simply because there is no Greek word for "substitution" in the New Testament. Substitution is a natural by-product of most other metaphors rather than a central metaphor in its own right. It is assumed in the Scriptures rather than proved and explained.[117]

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112. Morris, *The Atonement,* 178–179.

113. Dederen, "Christ: His Person and Work," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology,* 180.

114. Ibid., 180.

115. According to the Scriptures, at the cross Jesus substituted for both Adam and Israel. Hans Boersma, "Eschatological Justice and the Cross: Violence and Penal Substitution," *Theology Today* 60 (2003): 186–199. See also Richard L. Mayhue, "The Scriptural Necessity of Christ's Penal Substitution," *Master's Seminary Journal* 20:2 (Fall 2009): 139–148; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views,* ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 67–98.

116. The language of substitution, representation, and/or vicarious suffering was extremely popular among the early church fathers, being expressed by Irenaeus, the Epistle to Diognetus, Tertullian, Athanasius, Eusebius, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Chrysostum, Nestorius of Constantinople, and Augustine. See Bromiley, "Atone; Atonement: History of the Doctrine," *ISBE,* 1:355–356.

117. While some prefer words like *representation* and *vicarious* to *substitution,* Packer, Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 17, notes that the three words are

The Cross as a Victory over Satan/Sin/Evil

The idea of ransom/redemption recalls the Exodus, where God's redemption of Israel proved also to be a victory over the evil powers under Pharaoh.[118] In fact, Israel's freedom could not have been obtained without such a prior victory. The language of victory is widespread in the New Testament.[119] It presupposes a somewhat dualistic view of the universe in which spiritual powers and sin hold sway over the human race.[120]

Perhaps the clearest text asserting victory over the evil powers is Colossians 2:14–15. While parts of this passage are difficult, the main message of these two verses is clear: The cross of Jesus Christ has "disarmed the powers and authorities" (Col. 2:15, NIV) through the cross, resulting in forgiveness of sins for the human race (2:13). The language of powers (*archas*) and authorities (*exousias*) translates Greek words that have consistent reference to the demonic realm (see Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 3:10; Col. 2:10). A further clear reference is Revelation 12:9–11, where Satan is cast down from heaven as the accuser of the "brothers" and is overcome on earth by "the blood of the Lamb."[121] The ultimate

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essentially synonyms, meaning putting a person or thing in place of others. They mean to do something so that others don't have to do it (Rom. 5:8; Gal. 3:13). See also Marshall, "The Death of Jesus," *Word and World,* 20; Samuel J. Mikolaski, "The Nature of Atonement; The Cross and the Theologians," *Christianity Today,* 5.

118. The classic exposition of this view of the atonement is by Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement,* trans. A. G. Herbert (1931; repr., London: SPCK, 1965). More recent summaries of the "Christus Victor" view are in Gregory A. Boyd, "Christus Victor View," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views,* ed. James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 23–49; Paul R. Eddy and James Beilby, "The Atonement, an Introduction," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views,*12–14; Weaver, "The Nonviolent Atonement: Human Violence, Discipleship, and God," in *Stricken by God?,* 321–337. See also Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD,* 1: 521.

119. It was also popular among the early church fathers, including Justin, Origen, Eusebius, and Augustine. See Bromiley, "Atone; Atonement: History of the Doctrine," *ISBE,* 1:355–356.

120. Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD,* 1:521. Sin itself is seen as a malignant power in Romans 7:7–11.

121. See further references such as John 12:31; 16:11; Romans 8:35–38; 1 Corinthians 15:24–25; Philippians 2:9–11; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Revelation 5:5–10. This perspective

victory, of course, is the victory over death (1 Cor. 15:57). This was won by Christ at His resurrection and culminates in the resurrection of those who believe in Christ (1 Cor. 15:20–22).

Why the cross? Because it was needed to defeat the powers of sin and Satan, freeing human beings to return to God.[122] Jesus is the Champion (substitute) who defeats Satan for humanity (cf. 1 Sam. 17:8–11).[123] At the cross, Satan and his henchmen directed all the evil they could upon Jesus Christ, but He did not respond in kind. He thereby exhausted the power of evil and defeated it.[124] An additional way the cross defeated Satan may be hinted at in the next idea of how the cross effects the atonement.

The Cross as the Revelation of God's Character

While the New Testament models of atonement addressed so far all focus on what God has done by way of sacrifice, redemption, propitiation/expiation, justification, and victory to pave the way for human beings to be reconciled to Him, this model of the atonement focuses on the human side of the equation, the effect the cross has on human beings.[125] One way the New Testament portrays the human condition is in terms of ignorance or blindness.[126] Jesus is the One "who brings light and knowledge and who reveals the true nature of God."[127] This perspective is, therefore, particularly prevalent in the Gospel of John.[128]

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often puts more emphasis on the cosmic significance of Christ's death than on its role in human salvation. See Boyd, "Christus Victor View," in *The Nature of the Atonement*, 33.

122. Theung-Huat Leow, "'The Cruciality of the Cross:' P. T. Forsyth's Understanding of the Atonement," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2:2 (April 2009): 197–198.

123. Chan, "The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross," *ERT*, 26–27; Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?" *Tyndale Bulletin*, 20.

124. N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 88–90.

125. Packer, "What Did the Cross Achieve?" *Tyndale Bulletin*, 19.

126. Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 132.

127. Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD*, 1:521; Chan, "The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross," *ERT*, 24–26.

128. Chan, "The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross," *ERT*, 24–26; Terence Forestell, *The Word of the Cross* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1974), 113, 120: Green and Baker, 132–133. Church Fathers who speak of the atonement in these terms include

In the Prologue to the Gospel of John, the coming of Jesus reveals the glory and character of God (John 1:14). Jesus's intimate relationship with God enables Him to rightly "exegete" (*exêgêsato*) God (1:18). Jesus is the "light of the world" (8:12; 9:5) who not only reveals God but exposes the true character of human beings as well (3:18–21; 13:1–17). Helping His disciples to know God is at the core of Jesus's mission (17:3). And at the center of that "making known" (17:26) is the cross, which in John is described as a "lifting up" (3:14) which enables all to see the glory of God (17:1). The cross of Christ is, therefore, the supreme moment of revelation.[129]

In the Gospel of Mark, everyone, including the disciples of Jesus, struggles with who Jesus is (Mark 1:27; 2:6–7; 3:21; 4:10–13; 8:13–21). It is only at the moment Jesus dies that the centurion recognizes what the narrator and God have been saying all along, Jesus is the Son of God (Mark 1:1, 9–11; 9:2–8; 15:39).[130] It is the cross that reveals who Jesus is.

This focus on knowledge is not gnostic in character, but echoes the Hebrew concept of knowledge as involving close personal relationships (Gen. 4:1,17,25; Deut. 34:10; 2 Chron. 33:13; Isa. 55:5; Hos. 6:3; 13:5).[131] Why the cross? To provide human beings with the kind of knowledge that will draw them back to God.[132]

The Cross as a Pattern/Model

While "What would Jesus do?" is a common enough phrase, the focus here is not Jesus's life as a model for human beings to imitate, but specifically

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Justin, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen. See Bromiley, "Atone; Atonement: History of the Doctrine," *ISBE,* 1:355–356.

129. Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD,* 1:521.

130. Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross,* 132.

131. Tuckett, "Atonement in the NT," *ABD,* 1:522.

132. This model seems most effective when combined with one or more of the objective models of atonement like sacrifice, ransom, or victory. The cross best reveals the love of God if it was necessary in some way, if it had a purpose other than revelation as well. See Chan, "The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross," *ERT,* 25–26. A parent racing into a house to save a child demonstrates love. Racing into an empty burning house to "demonstrate love" is not nearly as effective. See Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement," *JETS,* 645; Marshall, "The Theology of the Atonement," in *The Atonement Debate,* 62–63.

His death on the cross.[133] The New Testament frequently encourages believers to imitate the crucified Christ.[134] The cross as a pattern or model for Christian behavior is explored under two terms, "missional suffering" and "cruciformity."[135] There are multiple passages in the New Testament that call on believers to self-sacrificial suffering in behalf of the kingdom and after the pattern of Jesus's own suffering on the cross.[136]

Perhaps the best-known call to "cruciformity" is found in the Gospels. In Mark 8:34 (NAB) Jesus said, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me" (8:35–38; cf. Matt. 16:24–27; Luke 9:23–26). It is in the context of the cross that Jesus invites the first to be last and to become the servant of all (Mark 9:30–35; cf. Matt. 17:22–23; 18:1–5). The cross sets a new standard for leadership, servant leadership (Mark 10:42–45; Matt. 20:25–28). Jesus invites His followers to follow Him in the context of the cross (John 12:26; cf. 20–25), then sets the example by washing the disciples' feet (John 13:12–17; cf. 34–35; 15:12–13). Hebrews 12:1–2 describes the Christian life as a race looking to the crucified Christ as a model. John exhorts the believers that if they know Jesus laid down His life for them, they should do the same for each other (1 John 3:16). And nowhere in the New Testament is this message clearer than in 1 Peter 2:21 (ESV): "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps."

Paul delights in becoming one of Christ's "fools" and urges the Corinthians to follow his steady and constant example of living the cross (1 Cor. 4:8–17; 11:1). For Paul, this is not so much a doctrine as a "cruciform way of life."[137] This cruciform teaching becomes explicit in 2 Corinthians 5:14–15 where he urges that One died for all so that we may be constrained to live no longer for ourselves, but for the One who died for us

133. Church Fathers who spoke of the cross as an example or model include Justin and Origen.

134. Jason B. Hood, "The Cross in the New Testament: Two Theses in Conversation with Recent Literature (2000–2007)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009): 286.

135. Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 35, 48; Hood, "The Cross in the New Testament," 287–291.

136. Hood, "The Cross in the New Testament," 287.

137. Ibid., 288.

(cf. Gal. 5:24; 6:14,17; Eph. 5:1–2). This teaching reaches an exalted height when Paul counsels in Ephesians 5:25–28 (KJV): "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it." So for Paul it is clear that the self-sacrificing love of the cross provides the model for every aspect of life.[138]

The Cross as a New Covenant

The final model of the atonement[139] in the New Testament explains the cross in terms of a new covenant. According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus offers His own interpretation of the cross in His comments at the last supper (Mark 14:24; Matt. 26:28; Luke 22:20).[140] In all three versions, the cup represents the blood of the covenant and Luke clearly adds the qualifier "new": "the *new* covenant in my blood."[141] Jesus's (new) covenant blood is "poured out for many" (Mark 14:24, ESV), "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28), or simply "for you" (Luke 22:20).

When Jesus said "*the* covenant," He was talking about the one and only covenant of the Old Testament, grounded in the fundamental event of

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138. In the title of a book, Richard Hays identifies the cross as one of the main sources of New Testament ethics. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation, a Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1999).

139. This model comes last for two reasons only. First, it has only received attention in the last few years as a model of the atonement. See Michael J. Gorman, "Effecting the New Covenant: A (Not So) New, New Testament Model for the Atonement," *Ex Auditu* 26 (2010): 26–59. Gorman builds on the work of R. Larry Shelton, *Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2009) and Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2009). Second, I realized as this chapter was almost complete that I had written on this model in the past without connecting the idea to "the atonement." See Jon Paulien, *Meet God Again for the First Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 77–112, 126–136. It was the reading of Gorman's article (previous note) that made me realize that he and I were saying the same things, but he was talking about atonement on the cross. This is probably my favorite model of the atonement because it is so solidly biblical and clearly goes back to Jesus Himself.

140. Gorman, "Effecting the New Covenant," *Ex Auditu*, 29.

141. Some manuscripts leave out Luke 22:20 entirely and some manuscripts of Matthew and Mark add the word "new," but I am working with the standard scholarly Greek text.

Israel's history, the Exodus.[142] After all, Jesus was presiding at a Passover meal as He spoke these words and a review of the events of the Exodus was part of the Passover ritual.[143] *The* covenant of the Exodus was the covenant with Abraham, which was grounded in the language of Eden.[144] Clearly, Jesus saw His upcoming death as the decisive event in all of Israel's history, and by extension, the history of the whole human race.[145]

In the only New Testament account of the last supper outside the Gospels (1 Cor. 11:23–25), Paul passes on a similar tradition, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" (v. 25). In the book of Hebrews, the word *covenant* appears 16 times, nearly half the 33 occurrences in the New Testament as a whole. Jesus is there described as the Mediator of a new (Heb. 9:15; 12:24), eternal (13:20), or better (8:6) covenant that is made effective by His blood or by His death (10:19; 12:24; 13:20). Not only that, the new covenant promise of Jeremiah is quoted twice in the book (Heb. 8:8–13; 10:16–18).[146]

What makes this line of interpretation exciting is that covenant is not only a major category throughout the New Testament,[147] even where the word *covenant* is not used, but this model has the potential of drawing a common thread through nearly all of the previous models.[148] In summary, the new covenant promised in the Old Testament (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 11:17–20; 36:23–28) was to be a transforming, creative act of God that would generate a renewed covenant people of God. They would be liberated, restored, forgiven, empowered, and permanent.[149] The New Testament writers understood that transforming act of God to have occurred at the cross.[150]

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142. Gorman, "Effecting the New Covenant," *Ex Auditu*, 29.

143. Paulien, *Meet God Again*, 102–103; Gorman, "Effecting the New Covenant," *Ex Auditu*, 29.

144. Ibid., 29–34.

145. Ibid., 55–75.

146. Ibid., 30–31.

147. Jon Paulien, *Meet God Again*, 77–112, 126–136.

148. Gorman's working attempt to do this is on pages 55–58 of his seminal article, "Effecting the New Covenant," *Ex Auditu*.

149. Ibid., 33–36.

150. Spelled out from Matthew to Revelation in ibid., 36–55.

CONCLUSION

There are a wide variety of metaphors for the atonement in the New Testament. Not only are these metaphors diverse, but they tend to be intertwined with each other, making it difficult to separate them and to favor one over the others. The more these various metaphors are understood and respected, the richer will be the understanding of the message of the cross. And as the Gospel is embodied in a variety of cultures, it may yet be discovered that there are new biblical metaphors that have been overlooked up until now. Believers may also be led by the Spirit to express the cross in a way the New Testament writers had not thought of. But in all thinking regarding the atonement, believers need to be guided by the inspired models placed for them in the Scriptures.

What conclusions can believers draw from this brief survey of the relationship between the atonement and the cross?[151] The English word for *atonement* is most closely related to the concept of reconciliation. Atonement provides both the means and the incentive for human beings to become reconciled to God. In the New Testament atonement is clearly focused on the cross, but in the book of Hebrews the principle of the atonement continues in the heavenly work of Jesus Christ.

The human race is in great need of atonement, being unable to save itself. There are barriers between the human race and God on both sides of the equation. Because of sin reconciliation is, first of all, very costly to God. He cannot set its implications aside lightly. Also because of sin, human beings need to be drawn away from rebellion and back to relationship with God.

Although sin is a barrier between God and the human race, God does not require sacrifice in order to desire reconciliation with the human race; instead, He Himself lovingly provides the sacrifice/ransom/atonement needed to reconcile all to Himself. Human beings are called to respond to God's reconciling action with an action of their own.

Although God has given humans over to the consequences of their own sinful actions, He continually desires fellowship with sinful humans. His love provides all that they cannot perform in order for atonement to

151. This conclusion is modeled on the style of the conclusion to the article by W. S. Reid, "Atone, Atonement," *ISBE*, 1:354–355.

take place. The atonement made at the cross is not limited to some humans or even all humans, but in some sense affects the entire universe.

The New Testament offers a variety of models to explain the atonement. There was no attempt to set one view as normative over against the others, and various models could be mingled in a single sentence or paragraph.

In many ways, the atonement is as inscrutable to humans as God is. What humanity knows for sure is that God is portrayed in Scripture as infinitely loving and infinitely gracious to erring humanity. However one expresses the atonement at the cross, it is clear that God has provided all that human beings need in order to be reconciled to Him. So the word from Paul continues to ring out, "We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20, NIV).