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“David Allen’s new book is an insightful and illuminating treatment of the crucial doctrine of the atonement, which includes an unusual and refreshing combination of careful exposition of Scripture, close attention to historical theology, and nuanced and compelling systematic analysis. Allen deftly addresses an impressively wide array of questions and issues, advancing the conversation with a clear, consistent, and deeply biblical theology of the atonement, which displays the breadth and depth of God’s love and mercy without compromising God’s justice or pitting divine love and justice against one another. This splendid book is sure to be profitable for a wide readership.”

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“The doctrine of the cross of Christ is of first importance for the Christian faith and grasping its meaning and significance is every Christian’s privilege, joy and duty. This book is a wonderfully concise and lucid account of the teaching of the Bible and the history of Christian thought on the glorious message of the cross. Highly recommended.”

—*Brian Rosner, principal, Ridley College, Melbourne, Australia*



THE

ATONEMENT



DAVID L. ALLEN



THE  
ATONEMENT

A Biblical, Theological, *and* Historical Study of the

CROSS OF CHRIST

**BH**  
ACADEMIC  
BRENTWOOD, TENNESSEE

*The Atonement: A Biblical, Theological, and Historical Study of the Cross of Christ*

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## *Dedication*

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To my wife, Kate,  
who has taught me much  
about His grace and redemption



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## Abbreviations

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AB	Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries Series
ANF	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D. 325.</i> Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. 10 vols. 1885–1887.
BDAG	Bauer, Walter. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature.</i> Revised and edited by Frederick William Danker. Translated by William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, and F. W. Danker. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CSB	Christian Standard Bible
EQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IJST	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JBTM	<i>Journal for Baptist Theology &amp; Ministry</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JSOTSS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KJV	King James Version

- LCC Library of Christian Classics, 24 vols. (Louisville: WJK)
- LW *Luther's Works*. Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. American Edition. 55 vols. St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986.
- LXX Septuagint
- MSJ *The Master's Seminary Journal*
- MWJT *Midwestern Journal of Theology*
- NAC The New American Commentary
- NASB New American Standard Bible
- NEB New English Bible
- NICNT The New International Commentary on the New Testament
- NICOT The New International Commentary on the Old Testament
- NIDNTE *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*. Edited by Moisés Silva. 2nd ed. 5 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014.
- NIGTC New International Greek Testament Commentary
- NIV New International Version
- NIVAC NIV Application Commentary
- NKJV New King James Version
- NPNF<sup>1</sup> *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 28 vols. in 2 series. 1886–1889. Series 1, 14 vols.
- NPNF<sup>2</sup> *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. 28 vols. in 2 series. 1886–1889. Series 2, 14 vols.
- NSBT New Studies in Biblical Theology
- NTC New Testament Commentary

<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
<i>SBL</i>	Society of Biblical Literature
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SNTSMS</i>	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
<i>ST</i>	<i>Summa Theologica (Summary of Theology)</i> by Thomas Aquinas
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1974.
<i>TDNTa</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> [see <i>TDNT</i> ]: <i>Abridged in one Volume</i> . Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985.
<i>VTS</i>	Vetus Testamentum Supplements (Brill)
<i>WA</i>	<i>Weimarer Ausgabe</i> —Weimar edition of <i>D. Martin Luthers Werke</i> . Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Schriften. Edited by J. K. F. Knaake et al. 72 vols. Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1883–1929.
<i>WBC</i>	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>





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## *Preface*

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**T**he doctrine of the atonement of Christ is the heart of Christianity. The cross of Christ is the heart of the apostles' preaching. Christians—those who bear the name of Christ—are not only a people of the Book but also a people of the cross.<sup>1</sup>

The literature on this subject in the history of the church, and especially since the twentieth century, is nothing short of staggering. My attempt in this short work dwarfs in comparison. All one can do is bring his teacup to the ocean of truth. Nevertheless, I have attempted to provide something of an overall summary of the doctrine, which will be beneficial to the church.

In writing on such a vital topic—one that is central to Scripture and theology—I hope to avoid the Scylla of distortion through oversimplification and the Charybdis of distortion through overcomplication. Much confusion ensues when this topic is treated with too broad a brush or when it is crushed under the weight of excessive theological speculation.

There are many ways to approach the topic: New Testament theology, key words for atonement found in Scripture, systematic theology (attributes of God, etc.), and historical theology (theories of atonement in their historical development).

The approach I take in this book is to begin with Old Testament and New Testament canonical theology and trace the key texts that deal with the atonement. Then, I move to the systematic realm, where we look at the theology of the atonement. Finally, I conclude with a summary section on historical theology, which traces the development of the doctrine of the atonement in church history.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles B. Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross: The Death of Jesus in the Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 18.

In the past twelve years, my research and writing has focused mostly on the question of the extent of the atonement (see *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* [Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016]). That volume weighed in at more than 800 pages. Nevertheless, I was not able to address all of the exegetical and theological issues related to this question. In this volume, the reader will note that I have not only addressed this subject again in the chapter “The Intent, Extent, and Application of the Atonement,” but I have also attempted to address each atonement text specifically in relation to this question, including why I think these texts affirm an unlimited atonement exegetically. A resurgence of interest in recent years concerning the question of the extent of the atonement merits this approach, and this additional material can be viewed as something of a companion that furthers the case for unlimited atonement found in *The Extent of the Atonement*.

Clearly Scripture speaks of the atonement with a multivalent voice. Several key metaphors are employed by the biblical writers to express and explain the atonement. People differ over how to approach the biblical material. Does Scripture single out one metaphor over all others? Should we single out one metaphor over the others? Should we synthesize all the metaphors into one model? Should we simply let all atonement metaphors stand on all fours without attempting to rank their relative importance? Should we see the biblical metaphors as being in competition or complementation? Answers are not easy to come by. Nevertheless, let us sit at the feet of Scripture . . . and at the foot of the cross, that we may better understand this marvelous mystery that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19).

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## *Introduction*

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The cross of Christ is the centerpiece of Christianity, and from this hub emanate all the spokes of salvation. “Jesus’s cross stands not only at the climax of redemptive history but at the theological crossroads where a number of crucial Christian doctrines intersect.”<sup>1</sup> The importance of the atonement is demonstrated in the many prophecies and types of the Old Testament (OT) focusing on the death of Christ as noted by 1 Pet 1:10–11.

Scripture demonstrates the central importance of the atonement. The Gospel writers themselves devote anywhere from 25 to 42 percent of their respective Gospels to the final week and death of Christ. No less than 175 direct references to the death of Christ occur in the New Testament (NT).

The gospel itself centers around the cross of Christ. In what is unarguably the key NT text stating the gospel in the clearest of terms, Paul writes, “[T]hat Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3–4). The term “gospel” signifies and summarizes the good news message of both the person and work of Christ in God’s atoning and redemptive act to accomplish, ground, and implement His saving purpose for humanity.

As Martin Hengel explains, Christianity’s message fundamentally differed from the customary conceptions of atonement in the ancient world. Rather than being offered for individual crimes, the atonement dealt with the universal guilt for all humanity. God’s grace appeared, not as the heroic

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 176. The centrality of the cross does not minimize other biblical and theological aspects related to the atonement. As Jeremy Treat states, “The cross must be *central* but never *solo*” (Jeremy R. Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014], 218).

actions of a particular man but from God Himself through the unique God-man, Jesus Christ. Also distinct from first-century culture was the eschatological character of the atonement.<sup>2</sup>

There is a certain mystery to the atoning work of Christ. “One has sinned. Another has made satisfaction. The sinner does not make satisfaction; the Satisfier does not sin. This is an astonishing doctrine.”<sup>3</sup> At noon on the day Christ died, God shrouded the cross in darkness. “Well might the sun in darkness hide, and shut its glories in; when God the mighty maker died for man, the creature’s sin.”<sup>4</sup> As on the Day of Atonement in the OT when the high priest went behind the veil into the holy of holies, where no human eye observed the pouring out of the blood on the altar, so the death of Christ is so marvelous and wonderful that there will always be something of a mystery about which no theologian can ever fully fathom. “But none of the ransomed ever knew / How deep were the waters crossed / Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through / Ere he found his sheep that was lost.”<sup>5</sup> As T. F. Torrance puts it: “[T]he innermost mystery of atonement and intercession remains mystery: it cannot be spelled out, and it cannot be spied out.”<sup>6</sup>

New Testament authors write of the atonement in historical, doctrinal, and doxological terms. The Gospel accounts address mostly the death of Christ in narrative fashion with little explication of how His death was an atonement for sins beyond the sacrificial substitutionary nature of it. Acts narrates the birth and growth of the early church through the preaching of the apostles. This preaching is based on the fact of the atonement and resurrection, but again, little explanation of the theology of the atonement is given. The letters of the New Testament tease out the doctrinal aspects

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 31–32.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, “Lectures on Isaiah,” 43:24, *Luther’s Works*, 17, trans. H. C. Oswald (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 99.

<sup>4</sup> Isaac Watts, stanza 4 of Hymn 9: “Godly Sorrow from the Sufferings of Christ,” in *The Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, of the Rev. Isaac Watts, D. D.*, new ed., ed. Samuel W. Worcester (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1851), 379; commonly known by the first line and title “Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed” (1707).

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth C. Clephane, *The Ninety and Nine* (Boston: D. Lothrop & Company, 1877).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 2.

of the atonement. Here we learn more about the atonement's nature. Here also doxological aspects are evident in the hymnic and benedictory material of some of the letters. Finally, Revelation narrates the events in heaven surrounding the worship of Jesus, the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, along with His second coming to earth and millennial reign. Here narrative merges into doxology:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain  
To receive power and riches and wisdom,  
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!” (Rev 5:12)

Theologians throughout church history have grappled with the meaning of the atonement. As Johnson has noted, there is an “immense diversity and simultaneous homogeneity of views” on the atonement.<sup>7</sup> Though we will not spend an inordinate amount of space on the various “theories” of the atonement, we will survey the subject in chapter 9. Our primary purpose is to examine the atonement and attempt to answer the following questions with respect to it: What? Why? How? and For whom? Vanhoozer writes,

Among the most important questions to be asked of any theory of atonement are (1) Who needs to be reconciled to whom? and (2) How does Jesus's death bring about reconciliation? The questions really concern where to locate the complication: “Where did the difficulty lie that was to be overcome by Redemption? Was it in forgiving the penitent, or in producing the penitence that could be forgiven? Was it in God or in man, in the Divine conscience or the human?”<sup>8</sup>

Fred Sanders points out that “minimally, the doctrine of atonement must analyze a problem and explain its resolution: the problem of sin resolved by forgiveness, the problem of vice resolved by the power to be

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<sup>7</sup> Adam J. Johnson, “Atonement: The Shape and State of the Doctrine,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 12.

<sup>8</sup> Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” 177.

virtuous, the problem of mortality resolved by eternal life, the problem of oppression resolved by powerful deliverance, and so on.”<sup>9</sup>

James Denney well notes that the question regarding the “how” of the atonement is often vaguely answered or not answered at all.<sup>10</sup> Although the work of Christ on the cross to address the sin problem is the culminating point in revelation, the nature, mechanism, and scope of the atonement is an insoluble problem for some. However, as Denney states, rather than being the problem, the atonement is actually the solution of all problems.<sup>11</sup>

Johnson identifies five key elements in thinking about the atonement: (1) the characters involved—namely, the triune God, humanity, angelic and demonic hosts, and even animals; (2) the divine attributes emphasized in atonement; (3) the problem of sin; (4) how the cross saves people from sin; and (5) how God saves us for participation in His life.<sup>12</sup>

What was the primary motivation for God’s provision of the atonement? Scripture answers this question clearly—His love for all the world: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). Jesus also said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). Paul grounds the atonement of Christ in the love of God: “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:14–15).<sup>13</sup> John expressed it this way: “In this the love of God was

<sup>9</sup> Fred Sanders, “These Three Atone: Trinity and Atonement,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 20.

<sup>10</sup> James Denney, *Studies in Theology* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1895; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 102.

<sup>11</sup> Denney, 107.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, “Atonement,” 7–9.

<sup>13</sup> When Calvin explained the priestly office of Christ, he stated, “But God’s righteous curse bars our access to him, and God in his capacity as judge is angry toward us. Hence, an expiation must intervene in order that Christ our priest may obtain God’s favor for us and appease his wrath. Thus Christ to perform this office had to come forward with a sacrifice.” See John Calvin, *Institutes* 2.15.6, in *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., LCC 20–21 (Philadelphia: WJK, 1960), 1:501. Notice that Calvin does not speak of the love of God for us; only of His anger and

manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9–10). Scripture regularly speaks of the love of God as the foundational motivation for the atonement and the salvation of the world. It is difficult to find a verse in the NT that speaks of God’s love that does not also speak of Christ’s death on the cross.<sup>14</sup>

The atonement must be considered in relationship to sin itself and to all people who are sinners. The atonement in one sense has two objects: (1) all sin, past and future, including the penalty for all sin—eternal death; (2) all people without exception. Framed in this way, all branches of Christendom would agree, with the exception of those among the Reformed who assert a limited atonement. I will say more on this later.

### **The Intent, Extent, and Application of the Atonement**

Three interrelated aspects of the atonement are vital to distinguish: intent, extent, and application.

The *intent* of the atonement answers the question: What is the purpose and plan of God in Christ’s death? This includes such questions as:

- Does God desire the salvation of all people equally?
- Does God have a universal saving will for all people?
- Does God in eternity past purpose that Christ should save only a select group of people, the elect?
- What is the relation of election to the atonement?
- Does God purpose that Christ should die for the sins of all people?

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wrath. Calvin does, however, speak of God’s love in reference to John 3:16 and the atonement: “We see that the first place is assigned to the love of God as the chief cause or origin” (*Institutes* 2.17.2 and 1:529, respectively). Calvin, in his commentary on Rom 3:25, refers to John 3:16 and the love of God as a foundational motive for the atonement. Likewise, G. C. Berkouwer states, “Paul recapitulates everything in ‘the love of Christ.’ This love is the unity of all the aspects of the work of Christ as the unsearchable riches which derive from his poverty as a historical reality” (G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, Studies in Dogmatics, trans. Cornelius Lambregtse [1965; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984], 254.)

<sup>14</sup> James M. Boice, *Foundations of Christian Theology*, vol. 2, *God the Redeemer* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 210.

- Does God’s intent in the atonement necessarily have a bearing upon the extent of the atonement?<sup>15</sup>

The *extent* of the atonement answers these questions:

- For whose sins did Christ die?
- Was the provision of the atonement limited or universal?
- Did Christ die for the sins of the elect alone or did He die for the sins of the world?

Until the rise of Reformed theology in the sixteenth century, the near universal testimony of the church was to affirm a universal atonement.<sup>16</sup>

The *application* of the atonement answers these questions:

- Who receives the saving benefits of the atonement?
- What conditions for the atonement are being applied to an individual?
- When are the benefits of the atonement applied—in the eternal decree of God, at the cross itself (justification at the cross), or at the moment the sinner exercises faith in Christ?

The latter is the biblical view. “The note of grace in the NT is always accomplished by a reference to faith (Eph 2:8). After the indicative of God’s grace comes the imperative of personal belief.”<sup>17</sup>

Christians have differed on the answers to the questions of intent and extent, especially since the time of the Reformation.<sup>18</sup> Some have argued that God only intends to save certain people whom He has unconditionally elected to give faith before the creation of the world; thus, Christ only died for the sins of these people. Others believe Christ intended to die for the

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<sup>15</sup> For Reformed perspectives on the intent of the atonement from the perspective of a Calvinist who affirms an unlimited atonement, see Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation: The Doctrine of Salvation*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 162–66.

<sup>16</sup> See David L. Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Historical and Critical Review* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 23–26.

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Lyon and Peter Toon, “Atonement,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2 vols., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1:233.

<sup>18</sup> For a detailed study of these questions, especially the question of extent, consult Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*.



sins of all people in the world, but He also only intended to save certain people to whom He has, before creation, unconditionally elected to give faith. Both of these two groups represent the Reformed tradition and are called Calvinists, though they differ among themselves over the extent of the atonement.<sup>19</sup>

The idea of “intent” gets to the question of God’s *will*, and whether or not God *equally* wills the salvation of all men. Even though both Calvinists and non-Calvinists agree that God has resolved or purposed only to save those who are in Christ through faith (i.e., those who believe), the Calvinist denies that God loves everyone *equally* or that He *equally* desires the salvation of everyone. And so, for the Calvinist, just as there is an *unequal* will for the salvation of all in God, so there was in Christ an *unequal* will in coming to die. Calvinists think that Christ *especially* desires or intends the salvation of some, while the non-Calvinist thinks that Christ desires the salvation of all equally. The moderate Calvinists, like all Calvinists, believe that Christ *especially* desires or intends the salvation of the elect, but they depart from other Calvinists in also maintaining that Christ suffered for the sins of all humanity as an expression of God’s general love.

The majority of Christians in church history have taken the position that Christ died for the sins of all, that God *equally* desires their salvation, but only intends to save those who meet His condition of salvation—namely, faith in Christ.<sup>20</sup> All, whether Calvinist or non-Calvinist, agree that *only those who believe will be saved*, and so God has purposed to save *only those who believe*. The question regarding *intent* is whether or not God *equally* desires everyone to believe and to be saved and whether or not this will is also reflected in Christ and in His intent in making satisfaction. On this issue, Calvinists and non-Calvinists differ.

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<sup>19</sup> As I noted in *The Extent of the Atonement* (xix–xx), all Arminians, non-Calvinists, and moderate Calvinists believe that Jesus died for the sins of all humanity, regardless of the latter’s view of a special intent. All moderate Calvinists believe God’s special intent in the atonement is to save only the elect, although they also believe that Christ died for the sins of all people. All high Calvinists and hyper-Calvinists assert that Christ died only for the sins of the elect and that it was God’s intent that Christ should so die for their sins *only*.

<sup>20</sup> Part of the conflict between the non-Reformed and the Reformed is exactly how election should be understood in Scripture. All affirm the doctrine of election. For differing views on election, see Chad O. Brand, ed., *Perspectives on Election: Five Views* (Nashville: B&H, 2006). The only exception here would be universalists, who assert that God will save all people in the end and none will be lost eternally.

## Atonement Metaphors and Models

There are several ways the doctrine of atonement in Scripture can be approached. One option is to list and discuss the major terms, topics, and/or metaphors used by biblical authors in texts that deal with the atonement: sacrifice, redemption, propitiation, etc. A second option is to trace the development of the doctrine via historical theology. This approach discusses the various “theories” of the atonement as they developed in church history. A third approach is that of systematic theology.<sup>21</sup> A fourth approach is that of biblical theology. Here we begin with the canonical books of Scripture as they appear in canonical order—OT, then NT.

The approach taken in this volume is something of a combination of the four approaches. I will begin with the biblical texts that specifically address the atonement. Then I will consider the atonement from a theological perspective under several topics such as “Necessity,” “Christology,” “Intent, Extent, and Application,” “Nature,” and “Special Issues.” Finally, I will survey how various theories of the atonement developed in church history.

Scripture makes use of different metaphors in reference to the atonement.<sup>22</sup> “The variety of different descriptions of the atonement is due in part to the variety of ways in which the human situation itself is described.

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<sup>21</sup> “Systematic theology can treat the work of Christ by relating the death/resurrection of Jesus to the nature or attributes of God . . . to the universality and consequences of human sin, to the interfacing of time and eternity, and to the suprahuman, specifically demonic, powers” (James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, 2 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 2:4). In addition to Garrett’s section on the atonement, other modern Baptist systematic theologies covering the topic include: Paige Patterson, “Atonement,” in *A Theology for the Church*, rev. ed., ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H, 2014), from a non-Calvinist perspective; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), from a high-Calvinist perspective; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), from a moderate Calvinist perspective.

<sup>22</sup> Helpful works on the many different atonement metaphors include: Dale B. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); John McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992); Gordon Fee, “Paul and the Metaphors for Salvation: Some Reflections on Pauline Soteriology,” in *Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 43–67; Gregory K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Temple* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); Scott

Very different models and categories are used to describe the ‘lost’ condition of the human race prior to Christ.”<sup>23</sup> These metaphors are “drawn, for example, from the temple (e.g., sacrifice), battlefield (e.g., victory), commerce (e.g., redemption), and law court (e.g., justification).”<sup>24</sup> Most of the categories of suggested models and metaphors for atonement involve at least these four. For example, Jeremias proposes four: sacrifice, purchase and redemption, forensic category, and “ethical substitution.”<sup>25</sup> Green and Baker posit five images: the court of law, the world of commerce, personal relationships, worship, and the battleground.<sup>26</sup> Blocher posits five sets of metaphors: sacrifice, punishment, ransom, victory, and Passover.<sup>27</sup> The largest list of which I am aware is that of John McIntyre, who suggests thirteen models of the atonement.<sup>28</sup>

Conceptually, I find Oliver Crisp’s discussion on atonement metaphors, models, doctrine, and theories to be quite helpful. Atonement “theories” are attempts to explain doctrine. “Doctrines and models of the

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Hahn, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises: God’s Covenant Love in Scripture* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> Christopher M. Tuckett, “Atonement in the NT,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:518.

<sup>24</sup> Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” 176. “Using different word pictures to articulate the breadth and depth of the gospel, the Bible presents a multicolored tapestry. Legal language (justification, punishment, judgment) illuminates the fundamentally moral character of redemption. Temple language (atonement, sacrifice, sanctification) highlights the mystery of the universal presence of God as creator interwoven into the local presence of God as redeemer. Familial language (adoption, bride and bridegroom, reconciliation) explores the central relational quality of God’s dealing with his creatures. Terms associated with the marketplace (redemption and possession) capture the dynamic of God’s ownership of his people in all of life” (Richard Lints, “Soteriology,” in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Kelly M. Kapic, and Bruce McCormack [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012], 263).

<sup>25</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1965), 32–36.

<sup>26</sup> Joel B. Green and Mark D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 23.

<sup>27</sup> Henri A. G. Blocher, “The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ: The Current Theological Situation,” *European Journal of Theology* 8 (1999): 30.

<sup>28</sup> McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 44–48. A good summary of the biblical metaphors for atonement can be found in Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), s.v. “Atonement.”

atonement are more than just metaphors, though they include metaphors as elements of a larger conceptual whole.” Crisp continues, “Then doctrines, and, by extension, models that attempt to offer some explanatory framework for making sense of the atonement, cannot be merely metaphors. For they include, in this way of thinking, irreducibly propositional components.”<sup>29</sup> Any discussion of atonement must consider the issue of mechanism—how is it that the atonement functions to reconcile people to God. Here, according to Crisp, atonement doctrine segues to models. “For it is models of atonement that take the more general doctrinal ideas about Christ’s work of reconciliation, and specify a particular way in which this makes sense, in light of the data of Scripture and tradition.”<sup>30</sup> No single model of the atonement provides a complete and full picture of how atonement functions.

In light of this, some models of the atonement focus more or less on the results of the atonement rather than on the means or mechanism by which atonement actually takes place or functions. This appears to be true of the Christus Victor model.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, the Satisfaction model and its variations (Substitution) tend to be more diagnostic of *how* the

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<sup>29</sup> Oliver D. Crisp, “Methodological Issues in Approaching the Atonement,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 319. According to Crisp, doctrine is a comprehensive account of a particular teaching about a theological topic held by some Christian community or denomination. A model is an explanatory framework. Doctrines are broad and thin. Models are narrower and thicker. Crisp illustrates by comparing doctrines to a map of the world and models to a map of the U. S. or a road map of a region of the U. S. (Crisp, 324–25).

<sup>30</sup> Crisp, 322. Crisp contends “that most theologians engaged in the project of providing some doctrinal explanation of the work of Christ as an atonement are attempting to give a model of atonement that they find compelling. They are not actually engaged in providing a theory of atonement” (Crisp, 330). Thus, Christus Victor is more akin to a “motif” or “metaphor” for the atonement rather than a theory or model. “Doctrines and models of atonement are more than motifs or metaphors. A doctrine of atonement is a comprehensive account of the reconciling work of Christ held by some community of Christians, or some particular denomination” (Crisp, 330). For Crisp, models of atonement are more than theories, but less comprehensive than doctrines of atonement. “So models are narrower in scope than doctrines of atonement. Classic atonement models, on this way of thinking, include satisfaction, penal substitution, the governmental view, the vicarious humanity view of John McLeod Campbell, some versions of the moral exemplar view, and, perhaps, some of the patristic accounts of atonement such as those provided by Athanasius and Irenaeus” (Crisp, 331).

<sup>31</sup> So noted by Kathryn Tanner, *Christ the Key* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 253.

atonement actually functions. What is needed is to discern how to categorize and then how to order the objective and subjective biblical models of the atonement such that they are compatible and cohere.<sup>32</sup>

Jeremy Treat has noted the revisionist history common in recent atonement literature and how it has fueled the either/or reductionism prevalent in recent atonement debates.<sup>33</sup> The modern assumption that all atonement metaphors are created equal, even those in Scripture, must be challenged.<sup>34</sup> Treat expresses three concerns with this trend:

1. The “eager acceptance of all of the biblical metaphors has often been strangely paired with the rejection of penal substitution.”
2. The “emphasis on upholding diversity has often come at the cost of unity.” Also, there has been a reinterpretation of “the major biblical theme of the wrath of God.”
3. The “emphasis on plurality turns into relativism when the various atonement dimensions merely become alternative options to be chosen according to context.”<sup>35</sup>

As Vanhoozer notes, “The death of Jesus appears as it really is only in canonical-linguistic context, where it is the climax to a covenantal drama in which penal substitution and relational restoration are equally important and equally ultimate.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> As noted by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: WJK, 2005), 386–87; and Treat, *The Crucified King*, 187. “Paul’s ‘of first importance’ (1 Cor 15:3) demonstrates that there is a place for dogmatic rank in theology” (Treat, 223).

<sup>33</sup> Treat, 181.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*; Joel B. Green, “Kaleidoscopic View,” in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 165–71. “For Green and Baker, because the New Testament language of Christ’s accomplishment is metaphorical and the meanings of metaphors are bound to their cultures, they argue that some biblical metaphors simply will not be suitable for today’s culture and should be replaced with new ones” (Treat, *The Crucified King*, 183).

<sup>35</sup> Treat, 181–83. Treat lobbies for penal substitution as the foundational expression of how the atonement works, and yet he finds valid insights from the other theories of atonement as well. Interestingly, Treat’s approach was anticipated 150 years earlier by Thomas J. Crawford, *The Doctrine of Holy Scripture Respecting the Atonement* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1871; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), 395–401.

<sup>36</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 387.

## Recent Atonement Studies

Before launching into terminology and the OT and NT atonement texts, something should be said concerning where atonement studies have been for the past few decades. Readers who are interested in pursuing this line of investigation will profit from *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, edited by Adam Johnson, beginning with his introductory chapter, “Atonement: The Shape and State of the Doctrine,”<sup>37</sup> as well as *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, edited by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Kelly M. Kopic, and Bruce L. McCormack.<sup>38</sup>

Generally speaking, from the historical perspective, approaches to the atonement can be broadly classified as objective and subjective. Objective atonement theories focus on what God did through Christ on the cross with respect to sin. Subjective atonement theories focus on the human response to the cross. Though there is certainly overlap, emphasis lay more on the objective side until the mid-nineteenth century, when the focus shifted to more subjective theories and approaches.

Since the 1930s and the advent of Gustaf Aulén’s *Christus Victor*, it has become commonplace to posit a tripartite classification for the many theories of the atonement propounded in church history: Christus Victor, Satisfaction/Penal Substitution, and Exemplarist (Moral Influence). However, recent scholarship on the history of atonement theories has demonstrated that this is too simplistic to account for the data.<sup>39</sup> As Crisp points out, when this is done,

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<sup>37</sup> Johnson, “Atonement: The Shape and State of the Doctrine,” 1–17. For a survey of the state of atonement studies through 2004, see Robert J. Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet: A Trinitarian Theology of Atonement* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 23–46.

<sup>38</sup> Also see Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” 175–202.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007); Johnson, “Atonement: The Shape and State of the Doctrine,” 1–17. “While one still finds many works that presuppose the ‘three main views of the atonement,’ this is becoming less and less common. Historical accuracy is in and of itself sufficient reason to debunk this artificial categorization and limitation of atonement theories, but the bigger concern is that such a framework for interpreting the history of the doctrine hampers our appreciation of both the immense diversity and simultaneous homogeneity of views which are of significant value in their own right” (Johnson, 12).

Not only does this flatten out the differences between particular doctrines, it distorts the nature of the differences that exist between the different historic approaches to this matter. For if some of these approaches are mere motifs or metaphors, and others doctrines or models that set out a mechanism for atonement, while still others are more like theories about atonement models, then what we have is not a typology of different doctrines of atonement. Instead, we have different levels of theological explanation regarding the atonement.<sup>40</sup>

Some atonement theories—like penal substitution, for example—have come under heavy fire in the past century.<sup>41</sup> Others that largely have been discarded for centuries, such as Irenaeus’s recapitulation theory, have gained new interest. Still others, like the *Christus Victor* theory and its variations, have been revived in an effort to counter penal substitution.<sup>42</sup>

Some studies in recent years have focused on questions concerning violence (cultural anthropologist René Girard’s theory of mimesis and rivalry),<sup>43</sup> and social context (liberation theology, feminist theology, and Post-colonial critique from the Majority World countries of Asia, Africa,

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<sup>40</sup> Crisp, “Methodological Issues in Approaching the Atonement,” 333.

<sup>41</sup> Green and Baker noted in 2000 that the penal substitution model of the atonement had faced little competition until recently (*Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 23–26). Rutledge notes that this breakdown in consensus began as the result of several factors, including pressure from the academy, lack of theological interest, “but perhaps mostly—and rightly—because critiques of the *exclusive* and *rigidly schematic* use of this model have begun to hit home” (Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Jesus Christ* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015], 4). See the “Resolution on Penal Substitution” passed at the 2017 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in the appendix.

<sup>42</sup> Johnson, “Atonement: The Shape and State of the Doctrine,” 16–17. “For an increasing number of theologians, the vacuum created by the critique of penal substitution has been filled with variants of the *Christus Victor* theory—a long-standing train of reflection exploring the work of Christ as depriving Satan of his (real or usurped) power or rights over creation and humankind. This family of theories is exceptionally diverse, ranging from revitalizations of traditional positions to demythologized accounts that employ categories of ‘victory,’ ‘ransom,’ and ‘Satan’ by filling them with the new meaning, often tied to views of evil as a societal force” (Johnson, 16–17).

<sup>43</sup> For an excellent short summary of Girard’s thesis, see Cornelis van der Kooi and Gijbert van den Brink, *Christian Dogmatics: An Introduction*, trans. Reinder Bruinsma with James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 469. For a critique of Girard, see Hans Boersma, *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 133–51.

and Latin America).<sup>44</sup> Others still have undergone more careful nuancing, such as the “exemplarist” theories, where Abelard has been falsely reputed to be the father of all “moral influence” theories of the atonement.<sup>45</sup> Analytic theologians and philosophers of religion have also made significant contributions to atonement studies in recent years.<sup>46</sup>

In order to assist the reader, chapter 1 will provide definitions of key terms and concepts discussed in the book. Hebrew and Greek terms are transliterated for easy access.

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<sup>44</sup> Kelly M. Kopic, “Atonement,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 3rd ed., ed. Daniel Treier and Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 98–99.

<sup>45</sup> Johnson, “Atonement: The Shape and State of the Doctrine,” 12. Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 166–67.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, William Lane Craig, *The Atonement in Cambridge Elements: Elements in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Yuijin Nagasawa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 53–97, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.cambridge.org/core>. Johnson lists the following, among others: Oliver D. Crisp, “Non-Penal Substitution,” *IJST* 9, no. 4 (2007): 415–33; Eric T. Yang and Stephen T. Davis, “Atonement and the Wrath of God,” in *Locating Atonement: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989); Eleanore Stump, “Atonement and Justification,” in Feenstra and Plantinga, eds., *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 178–209; and Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See Johnson, “Atonement: The Shape and State of the Doctrine,” 15.



## CHAPTER 1

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### *Atonement: Terminology and Concepts*

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Many different words are used in Scripture to refer to some aspect of the work of Christ on the cross. Theologians also employ a number of theological terms in discussions of the atonement. These terms must be spelled out early and clearly. This chapter will introduce these key terms and concepts, which will be developed in greater detail in successive chapters.

#### **Atonement**

The English word “atonement,” first used in 1526 by William Tyndale in his English translation of the NT, renders the Greek word *katallagē* (“reconciliation”) in Rom 5:11. However, the word “atonement” itself does not correspond etymologically to any Hebrew or Greek word. This English word expresses the concept of “at-one-ment” (i.e., reconciliation) when the benefit of the work of Christ is applied to one who believes.

In the NKJV translation, the word “atonement” appears ninety-seven times, exclusively in the OT. In the CSB and ESV translations, the word is used eighty times in the OT and twice in the NT.<sup>1</sup> Acts 27:9 refers to the “Day of Atonement.” In Heb 2:17, “atonement” is used to translate the Greek word *hilasmos*, which connotes both propitiation and expiation of sin by the work of Christ on the cross. The word indicates *objective*

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<sup>1</sup> NKJV: 11 times in Exodus; 51 in Leviticus; 16 in Numbers; 3 in Deuteronomy; once in 2 Samuel, 1 Chronicles, Nehemiah, Proverbs, Isaiah, and Jeremiah; twice in 2 Chronicles and Psalms; 6 times in Ezekiel. CSB and ESV: 6 times in Exodus; 47 in Leviticus; 17 in Numbers; once in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles; twice in 2 Chronicles; 6 times in Ezekiel.

reconciliation with all humanity in the sense that the removal of all legal barriers between sinful humanity and God renders humanity to be “savable.”

What is meant by the phrase “removal of legal barriers” (as used by theologians of the past, both Calvinist and non-Calvinist, and as I am using it now)? Removal of legal barriers in the atonement of Christ is *not* tantamount to justification, such that there is no legal basis for condemnation of a person due to his sin. Atonement and justification are two distinct things. God cannot save people simply by an act of His will (voluntarism).<sup>2</sup> The righteous requirement of the law must be satisfied in order for God to approach humanity with offers of mercy. In the cross God has taken away that legal necessity, thereby providing a righteous path for forgiveness. He has removed all things on His part that stood in the way of His being able to offer forgiveness in a just way (Rom 3:21–26). The great theologian James Denney understood the concept well:

The work of reconciliation, in the sense of the New Testament, is a work which is *finished* . . . before the gospel is preached. . . . It is a work *outside of us*, in which God so deals in Christ with the sin of the world that it shall no longer be a barrier between Himself and man. . . . Reconciliation is not something which is doing; it is something which is done.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, James Pendleton argues,

So far as the claims of law and justice are concerned, the atonement has obviated every difficulty in the way of any sinner’s salvation. In supplying a basis for the exercise of mercy in one instance it supplies a basis for the exercise of mercy in innumerable instances. It places the world, to use the language of Robert Hall, “in a salvable state.” . . . There is no natural impossibility in the way of their salvation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Voluntarism* is any system, theological or otherwise, that assigns a more prominent role to the will than to the intellect.

<sup>3</sup> James Denney, *The Death of Christ: Its Place and Interpretation in the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1912), 145–46.

<sup>4</sup> James M. Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines: A Compendium of Theology* (1878; repr., Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010), 242.

We shall have opportunity to develop this in more detail below when we discuss the extent of the atonement.

## Propitiation

Atonement conveys the notion of both propitiation and expiation. *Propitiation*, giving prominence to the secondary meaning of the Hebrew verb *kaphar* (“cover”) and the primary meaning of the Greek *hilasmos*, is an act prompted by God’s love, mercy, and grace, whereby His holiness and justice are demonstrated via substitutionary sacrifice for sin. Endemic to the meaning of the word “propitiation” is the turning away of God’s wrath against sinners (Rom 1:18). God’s love and wrath are compatible aspects of His nature,<sup>5</sup> and the concept of propitiation in Scripture always includes both.<sup>6</sup> The word “propitiation”<sup>7</sup> encompasses two aspects of the atonement: (1) God’s justice is satisfied, and His wrath against sin and sinners is removed. (2) Sin is objectively atoned for and guilt is removed.

Where there is sin, there is always guilt—*objective guilt* before God since sin is a violation of God’s law and *subjective guilt* in the human heart due to our personal responsibility for our sin. We are obligated to keep God’s law, but because of our sin we are powerless to do so. We deserve condemnation for our sin. Moreover, sin brings separation between God

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<sup>5</sup> See Tony (Anthony N. S.) Lane, “The Wrath of God as an Aspect of the Love of God,” in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 138–67; and John C. Peckham, *The Love of God: A Canonical Model* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 117–45.

<sup>6</sup> The Greek noun *hilasmos* occurs twice in the NT (1 John 2:2; 4:10). The Greek noun *hilastērion* (“mercy seat, place of propitiation, or propitiation”) also occurs twice (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5). In the LXX, the Greek verbal form (*hilaskomai*) is sometimes used to render *kaphar* (Hb., “cover over”). For detailed lexical discussion of the meaning of “propitiation,” see *BDAG*, 473–74; *TDNT*, 3:300–23; *TDNTa*, 362–66; *EDNT*, 2:185–86; and *NIDNTTE*, 2:531–41. See also Leon Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Many modern English versions of the NT translate the Greek noun *hilasmos* (“propitiation”) and its cognates as “atoning sacrifice” (e.g., NIV and CSB). The CSB attaches a footnote explaining that the Greek word means “propitiation.” The primary reason why some translations render the term as “atoning sacrifice” is the fact that the English word “propitiation” is rarely found in common vernacular and does not communicate as well to a modern audience as the phrase “atoning sacrifice.” Other versions retain the translation “propitiation” (e.g., NASB).

and humanity—i.e., broken fellowship. Sin incurs God’s condemnation of those who are guilty. Guilt demands punishment, hence the cross. Forgiveness is extended based on the cross, which grounds God’s forgiveness of sin.

Note that Christ’s advocacy with the Father is connected to the fact that He is the propitiation “for our sins” (1 John 2:1–2). His death on the cross has satisfied the justice of God and averted the wrath of God (see also Rom 3:25).<sup>8</sup>

### Expiation

The term *expiation* includes the primary meaning of *kaphar* (Hb., “cover”) and the secondary meaning of *hilasmos* (Gk., “removal of sin and cancellation of punishment based on substitutionary sacrifice”). The focus of expiation has to do with the effect of atonement on sin itself.

In modern usage, atonement, therefore, is something accomplished by God through Christ on the cross. Atonement is also an act of Christ that is, in some sense, offered to God (Heb 9:14). The ultimate goal of the atonement is the reconciliation of sinners with God (2 Cor 5:14–21). Objectively considered, *reconciliation* focuses on God’s attitude toward sinners—i.e., He is willing to delay sin’s punishment of the sinner; subjectively, God is willing to be reconciled to all sinners who meet His condition of faith in Christ.

Christ’s atonement is fundamentally an act of reconciliation between sinful humanity and God. Sherman describes the atonement this way: “In its most basic sense, it *answers* the human problem. It is the activity of God the Father in the Son through the Spirit that overcomes the bondage or desire or pride or dislocation or estrangement or alienation or evil or limitation that separates humanity from God, and thus enables the restoration of the true and proper relation between them.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For a helpful summary study of the wrath of God and atonement, consult Yang and Davis, “Atonement and the Wrath of God,” 154–67 (see “Introduction,” n. 46).

<sup>9</sup> Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 15 (see “Introduction,” n. 37).

## Salvation as Redemption and Reconciliation

*Redemption* and *salvation* are terms that indicate what is bestowed on individuals on the ground of the atonement of Christ. Atonement is the ground of redemption applied and of salvation; redemption in the sense of the actual forgiveness of sins is the result of atonement applied by the Holy Spirit. By design, the atonement exhibits God's love for sinners and satisfies God's justice in dealing with sin; by design, redemption and salvation are the benefits of atonement given to those who meet God's condition of salvation—repentance of sin and faith in Christ. Atonement was a finished act on the cross; redemption occurs at the moment a person is granted the benefits of the atonement via regeneration by the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes theologians use "atonement" to refer to the fact of reconciliation as a completed act in the sense of finally having been accomplished at regeneration (i.e., it is complete on God's part and the individual's part). In this sense, atonement includes the prior work of Christ on the cross coupled with the person's response of exercising faith in Christ, which results in salvation. I will not be using the term in this sense unless otherwise noted.

Theologically, "atonement" connotes the work of God and Christ on the cross on behalf of sinful humanity whereby a satisfaction for sin is made to effect reconciliation of humanity with God. It is what God did through Christ's death on the cross to remove sin, which stands as an obstacle and barrier between God and humanity. In modern usage, atonement refers to the expiation, propitiation, and objective reconciliation that Christ achieved on the cross; satisfaction for sin was accomplished, and thus all barriers have been removed, except the animosity that still resides in the human heart through unbelief. This is the meaning of the term "atonement" as I use it in this work.

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<sup>10</sup> See "Atonement," in *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, 12 vols., ed. John McClintock and James Strong (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1867–1887; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1:516; Gerald O'Collins, "Redemption: Some Crucial Issues," in *The Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5. In earlier centuries, particularly the nineteenth, theologians used the terms "atonement" and "redemption" synonymously. See, for example, Robert Lewis Dabney, *The Five Points of Calvinism* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1992), 60.

*Soteriology* is the theological term that defines and describes the work of Christ with respect to how He saves, as distinguished from Christology, which addresses the person and nature of Christ. “In the person of Christ there is the revelation of God, and in the death of Christ there is the redemption of man.”<sup>11</sup> Christology and soteriology are intricately intertwined. The deity and humanity of Christ expressed in the incarnation are foundational to the work of atonement accomplished on the cross. Anselm rightly said that only man should make the sacrifice for his sins because he is the offender, but only God could make the sacrifice for sins since He has demanded it. Jesus, as God and man, is the only Savior in whom the “should” and the “could” are united.<sup>12</sup>

We must locate the atonement within the broader sphere of salvation. How are the two words “salvation” and “atonement” related, and how do they differ? “Salvation” covers the broad spectrum of biblical concepts used to explain the problem and solution of human sin. “In theological discourse, the ‘doctrine of salvation’ refers to the breadth of divine actions in renewing, redeeming, and reconciling a fallen humanity.”<sup>13</sup> The atonement specifically addresses the means of salvation; salvation covers the actual results of atonement applied to the believer: justification, reconciliation, redemption, etc. Within soteriology, “salvation” is the broader term and refers to the entire plan and process whereby God reconciles people to Himself by dealing with the sin problem through the means of the atonement of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Salvation is what happens to people, and includes such biblical concepts as repentance, faith, regeneration, justification, reconciliation, adoption, union with Christ, sanctification, and glorification. Scripture speaks of salvation in broad terms that include three distinct but related stages:

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<sup>11</sup> Hugh Dermot McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ: In Faith, Revelation, and History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 18. “Christ did something for mankind because of who he was; and because of who he was, he did what he did” (McDonald, 26).

<sup>12</sup> Anselm, *Why God Became Man [Cur Deus Homo]*, in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. and trans. Eugene R. Fairweather, LCC 10 (Philadelphia: WJK, 1956), 2.6, pp. 150–51.

<sup>13</sup> Lints, “Soteriology,” 261 (see “Introduction,” n. 24).

<sup>14</sup> The noun “salvation” (Gk. *sōtēria*) occurs 49 times in the NT, appearing most frequently in Hebrews (7 times). The verb “save” (Gk. *sōzō*) occurs 106 times. The personal noun “savior” (Gk. *sōtēr*) occurs 24 times. See *BDAG*, 982–83; *EDNT*, 3:319–21.

(1) Salvation from the penalty of sin is described as *justification* and is a past act as far as the believer is concerned. (2) *Sanctification* is an ongoing activity whereby believers are in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ as the power of sin is being broken in their lives. (3) *Glorification* is the point in the future, in heaven, when believers will be saved from the very presence of sin in their lives.

Salvation includes atonement. Atonement does not include all that is covered in salvation.

Salvation is grounded in atonement. Atonement is the basis for salvation. The noun “salvation” connotes the act of saving someone from sin and the resultant state of being saved. Theologically speaking, salvation denotes deliverance from divine wrath, sin, and spiritual death, along with the bestowal of eternal life on the sinner who believes in Jesus, including all spiritual blessings temporal and eternal.<sup>15</sup> The noun “atonement” refers specifically to what Christ accomplished on the cross with respect to God, man, sin, Satan, and the universe. Although the terms are interrelated, “atonement” should be distinguished from terms such as “salvation,” “reconciliation,” and “redemption.”

The connection between salvation and atonement is important to understand. Salvation is inseparable from the sacrifice and satisfaction rendered to God by Christ on the cross. In order to forgive sin (provide salvation), Jesus must bear sin (make atonement). “In the Bible,” as James Denney states, “to bear sin is not an unambiguous expression. It means to underlie its responsibility and to receive its consequences: to say that Christ *bore* our sins is precisely the same thing as to say that He *died* for our sins; it needs no other interpretation, and admits of no other.”<sup>16</sup>

In the atonement, “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19). We can have no true theology that does not have the cross at its center. We can have no true salvation apart from atonement.

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<sup>15</sup> Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 27 (see “Introduction,” n. 15).

<sup>16</sup> Denney, *Studies in Theology*, 104 (see “Introduction,” n. 10). “‘To bear his iniquity’ is a phrase of frequent occurrence in the Old Testament. It means, to suffer the consequences of his iniquity. This can be seen by a reference to Lev. v. 1 . . . that when our iniquities were laid on Christ he suffered the consequences of our iniquities. He bore our sins in the sense of bearing the penalty of the law, which law we had violated” (Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 225).

Only at the cross do we learn who God is; only at the cross do we learn who Jesus is; only at the cross do we learn the sinners we are; and only at the cross do we learn what redemption and salvation are all about.<sup>17</sup>

Most discussions of the atonement seldom address other theological aspects that focus on the internal change that occurs when the atonement is applied to the believer. This change is grounded in the cross but does not occur at the cross. All aspects of salvation are acts that should be distinguished from the act of atonement. Scripture uses many different terms and phrases to describe what the atonement of Christ and its application accomplished for believers. These include:

- salvation (Luke 2:30; Acts 4:12)
- redemption (Eph 1:7; 1 Pet 1:18; Rev 5:9)
- regeneration (Titus 3:5)
- justification (Rom 5:9)
- sanctification (Heb 2:11; 10:10, 14; 13:12)
- glorification (Rom 8:30)
- adoption (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:5)
- eternal life (John 3:16)
- acceptance before God (Eph 2:13)
- access to God (Heb 10:19)
- peace with God (Col 1:20)
- cleansing from sin (Heb 9:14)
- victory (Rev 12:11)

### **Sacrificial Language**

The sacrificial nature of the atonement begins with the OT. A variety of sacrifices are prescribed in the OT: burnt offering, grain offering, fellowship

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<sup>17</sup> McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 25. “The more I keep the cross in my mind’s eye, the more fullness I seem to discern in it. The longer I dwell on the cross in my thoughts, the more I am satisfied that there is more to be learned at the foot of the cross than anywhere else in the world” (J. C. Ryle, “The Cross of Christ,” in *Old Paths*, 2nd ed. [London: William Hunt and Company, 1878], 252).



offering, sin offering, guilt offering. The Day of Atonement was the most important annual sacrificial offering made by the high priest. One question is whether the OT sacrifices secured God's grace and forgiveness or merely declared such to be the case. According to those who hold the latter view, sacrifices were made not so much to attain God's forgiveness as to retain it.<sup>18</sup> The majority, however, have interpreted the OT sacrifices as God's method of removing the sin barrier and restoring covenant relationship with the people.<sup>19</sup>

The NT commonly uses sacrificial language to describe the atonement. For example, John the Baptist's exclamation, "Behold! The Lamb of God" (John 1:29) refers to Jesus as the Passover lamb. John's Gospel very clearly coincides the death of Jesus with the slaughtering of the Passover lambs (19:14). Paul likewise presents the death of Christ in sacrificial language (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; Gal 3:13; 4:5). Such language predominates in Hebrews with its focus on the Day of Atonement (Hebrews 9–10) and the new covenant as a covenant sacrifice (Heb 7:22; 8:6; 9:15).

The NT authors make clear that the death of Christ was a sacrifice for sins. This is clearly evidenced in the Gospel accounts of the Lord's Supper. Paul also attests to the sacrificial nature of the death of Christ via his many references to Christ's death as a "sacrifice" and to the "blood" of Christ. We find the same usage in the General Epistles as well.

## Redemption Language

The atonement is also referenced in relation to "redemption." New Testament authors employ four different Greek terms for "redemption."

1. *Agorazō* is a commercial term that originally denoted the act of making a purchase in the marketplace. This word occurs in 1 Cor 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet 2:1; Rev 5:9; 14:3–4.

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<sup>18</sup> John Seldon Whale, *Victor and Victim: The Christian Doctrine of Redemption* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 52.

<sup>19</sup> See Robert H. Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 24.

2. *Exagorazō*—This word’s prepositional prefix (“ex-”) indicates purchase with a price that liberates. This word is used in Gal 3:13; 4:5.
3. *Lutroō* connotes the act of liberating by means of the payment of a ransom price. The word occurs in Luke 24:21; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18. The noun form *lutron* occurs in two key Gospel texts—Matt 20:28 and Mark 10:45. The nominal form *lutrosis* occurs three times—in Luke 1:68; 2:38; and Heb 9:12.
4. *Apolutrōsis*, which is akin to *lutroō*, means to effect release by payment of a ransom.<sup>20</sup> This term occurs in Luke 21:28; Rom 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col 1:14; and Heb 9:15.

Often in Scripture, redemption language is used “in general terms to indicate the liberation (here from the Law) achieved by Jesus, but without pressing the analogy of secular redemption any further to think in terms of specific ransom prices.”<sup>21</sup> Redemption in the NT connotes a state of deliverance by means of payment of a ransom price. The question immediately arises as to whom was the ransom paid? Some among the early church fathers suggested that the ransom was paid to Satan, but such a view was rightly abandoned. Others have suggested that the ransom was paid to God. Forde is correct when he asserts: “The New Testament shows no interest whatever in the question of *to* whom his sacrifice might have been made.”<sup>22</sup>

In Protestant theology, sometimes “atonement” and “redemption” are used as synonyms. The Westminster Confession, for example, speaks of

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<sup>20</sup> See *BDAG*, 605–06; *EDNT*, 2:364–66.

<sup>21</sup> Tuckett, “Atonement in the NT,” 1:521 (see “Introduction,” n. 23).

<sup>22</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, “Seventh Locus: The Work of Christ,” in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, 2 vols. (1984; repr., Philadelphia: Fortress, 2011), 2:89. Likewise, Douglas J. Moo writes, “If we ask further the question, ‘To whom was the ‘ransom’ paid?’ it is not clear that we need to answer it” (Douglas J. Moo, *Romans 1–8*, Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary [Chicago: Moody Press, 1991], 230). O’Collins concurs: “But nowhere does the NT speak of this ‘price’ or ‘ransom’ being paid to someone (e.g., God) or to something (e.g., the law)” (O’Collins, “Redemption,” 8). Thiselton calls the question of to whom the ransom price should be paid a “pseudo-question” (Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007], 323). On this question and its bearing on the nature of the Trinity, see Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 294–99 (see “Introduction,” n. 41).

the elect who have “fallen in Adam” as being “redeemed by Christ” where the context makes clear that the reference is to the atonement.<sup>23</sup>

## Reconciliation

*Reconciliation* (Gk. *apokatallassō*) is a crucial NT term that expresses God’s ultimate purpose for humanity in the atonement. The noun (Gk. *katallagē*) denotes a reestablishment of an interrupted or broken relationship. The verb forms (Gk. *katallassō* and *apokatallassō*) denote “to reconcile; to exchange hostility for a friendly relationship.”<sup>24</sup> Paul uses the noun in two crucial atonement passages: Rom 5:10–11 and 2 Cor 5:18–20. He employs the verb forms six times, five in atonement passages (*katallassō* in Rom 5:10–11 and 2 Cor 5:18–20; *apokatallassō* in Eph 2:16 and Col 1:20–22). God Himself is the subject of the act of reconciliation in 2 Cor 5:18–19. Having pointed out that God first has “reconciled us to Himself” (2 Cor 5:18), Paul then exhorts his readers to “be reconciled to God” (v. 20). God acts unilaterally in the atonement such that reconciliation is His gift (v. 18).

According to 2 Cor 5:18–20, reconciliation must be understood both objectively and subjectively. Objectively, the death of Christ reconciles the world to God (v. 19). Subjectively, individuals are reconciled to God when they repent and believe the gospel (v. 20). The entire world is objectively reconciled to God in the sense that the atonement of Christ has removed all legal barriers (Christ satisfied the full demands of the law) and rendered every person savable (v. 19). This will be discussed in the next section.

## Satisfaction

Theologians use the term “satisfaction” in the sense of the provision of atonement as an expiation or propitiation for sin. The word is not used in modern translations of the NT, but it occurs twice in the KJV in the sense

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<sup>23</sup> “The Westminster Confession (1646),” in *Creeeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H. Leith, 3rd ed. (Louisville: WJK, 1982), 198; *WCF*, 3.6.

<sup>24</sup> *BDAG* 521; *TDNT*, 1:251–59; *TDNTa* 40–42; *EDNT* 1:62, 307; *NIDNTE* 1:145–76; 1:242–49.

of expiating sin (Num 35:31–32). Theologians since Anselm, especially from the Reformation through the nineteenth century, commonly use “satisfaction” to describe the work of Christ on the cross in relation to sin. The death of Christ satisfies both the law of God and the wrath of God.

### Unity and Diversity

Within the NT, there is a unity in diversity of expression concerning the atonement. The diversity is apparent in the fact that the atonement is sometimes treated objectively in relationship to God and subjectively in relationship to the world and/or to believers. Sometimes the focus is on the world, sometimes on the church, and sometimes on individual believers (e.g., Gal 2:20). Objectively, the atonement is a once-for-all event. Subjectively, the atonement is applied to believers at the point of faith in Christ.<sup>25</sup> The former is a single event. The latter is a repeated occurrence. The unity is apparent in the fact that God provides atonement, Christ procures atonement on the cross, and the Holy Spirit applies atonement to any and all who believe.

A good working definition of “atonement” is provided by the Baptist systematic theologian A. H. Strong: “[T]he death of Christ is a vicarious offering, provided by God’s love for the purpose of satisfying an internal demand of the divine holiness, and of removing an obstacle in the divine mind to the renewal and pardon of sinners.”<sup>26</sup> Methodist systematic theologian Thomas Oden expresses it this way: “*Christ suffered in our place to satisfy the radical requirement of the holiness of God, so as to remove the obstacle to the pardon and reconciliation of the guilty. What the holiness of God required, the love of God provided in the cross.*”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> I am not here taking into account the application of the atonement to infants and young children who die. For discussion of this issue, see Adam Harwood and Kevin Lawson, eds., *Infants and Children in the Church: Five Views on Theology and Ministry* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. in one (1907; repr., Philadelphia: The Griffith & Rowland Press, Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1972), 727.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Oden, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, *The Word of Life* (San Francisco: Harper-Collins, 1992), 2:349; emphasis original.

Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar helpfully summarizes five main features of the atonement in the New Testament:

1. The Son gives Himself “for us.”
2. The Son gives Himself for us by exchanging places with us.
3. The Son saves us from something (sets us free).
4. The Son saves us for participation in the life of God.
5. The Son accomplishes this out of obedience to the Father, who initiated the entire process motivated by His love.<sup>28</sup>

The remainder of this volume will be an attempt to summarize and evaluate biblically and theologically these five motifs.

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<sup>28</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, vol. 4, *The Action* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 241–43.



## CHAPTER 2

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### *Atonement in the Old Testament*

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In the OT, God is the only Savior of Israel and of the world (Isa 43:11; 45:15,21). God instituted the Mosaic law for Israel with its concomitant priestly sacrificial system. God required for Israel a sacrificial system in which the basic concept of atonement was a covering for sin by means of a sacrifice. Although the exact meaning of “sacrifice” in the OT is never explained, it is everywhere assumed.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Substitution**

Substitution is the essential factor in the sacrifices of the OT.<sup>2</sup> This is seen in at least two ways. First, sometimes the one who brings an offering is represented by the offering, which is viewed as a substitute in his stead. This is the case with all animal offerings for sin, for example. Second, sometimes something is substituted for the animal to be offered. Either way, substitution is front and center. The idea of substitution is brought out most fully when someone offers another life in the place of his own. Thus, three principles are seen in OT sacrifices:

1. The sacrifice is offered to God, who is holy.

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<sup>1</sup> See Derek Kidner, *Sacrifice in the Old Testament* (London: Tyndale Press, 1952).

<sup>2</sup> Sacrifice and substitution are clearly taught in the OT. See Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 1:209–23; and Johann Heinrich Kurtz, *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1863), 120.

2. The sacrifice is a substitution on the part of the innocent for the guilty.
3. The laying on of hands by the one who offers indicates substitution by incorporation.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the Old Testament sacrifices, when rightly offered, involved a consciousness of sin on the part of the worshiper, the bringing of a victim to atone for the sin, the laying of the hand of the offerer upon the victim's head, the confession of sin by the offerer, the slaying of the beast, the sprinkling or pouring-out of the blood upon the altar, and the consequent forgiveness of the sin and acceptance of the worshiper. The sin-offering and the scape-goat of the great day of atonement symbolized yet more distinctly the two elementary ideas of sacrifice, namely, satisfaction and substitution, together with the consequent removal of guilt from those on whose behalf the sacrifice was offered.<sup>4</sup>

The substitutionary nature of sacrifice is evident early on in Genesis 22 where the ram is sacrificed in the place of Isaac. The vicarious and substitutionary death of an animal in place of a person is expressed in Gen 22:13—"instead of his son." Two principles are evident in this text: (1) the divine rejection of human sacrifice coupled with divine sanction of sacrifice in general, in that God commanded Abraham to offer a sacrifice; (2) the acceptance of an animal sacrifice as the substitute for the life of a human being. Substitution is further explicated in the three primary places where atonement is discussed in the OT: Exodus 12, Leviticus 16, and Isaiah 53.

### ***Exodus 12: The Passover***

The first Passover is recorded in Exodus 12. The term *Passover* comes from the English translation of Exod 12:13, "When I see the blood, I will pass over you." On the eve of the exodus from Egypt, God told the people of Israel to slay the Passover lamb and place its blood on the doorposts of

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<sup>3</sup> Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 2:723 (see chap. 1, n. 26).

<sup>4</sup> Strong, 2:725.



the house. When the death angel observed the blood on the doorposts, he “passed over” and the firstborn son in that household was safe. In order for the inhabitants of the house to be safe, a lamb had to die. This death was viewed as a substitute for the firstborn sons of Israel. The consecration of the firstborn sons functioned as a reminder to Israel of the first Passover, particularly the substitutionary aspect of it (Exod 13:11–16).

The Synoptic Gospel writers all connect Jesus’s Last Supper to the Passover, both with respect to timing and symbol (e.g., Mark 14:13–24).<sup>5</sup> Paul makes the connection when he refers to Christ as “our Passover, [which] has been sacrificed” (1 Cor 5:7). Peter also makes this connection when he says that we are “redeemed . . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet 1:18–19).

There are a number of significant parallels between the OT Passover and the Last Supper. First, the fellowship meal was eaten by the family. Jesus ate this fellowship meal with His disciples on the eve of His crucifixion. Second, the original Passover occurred on the eve of the exodus. There was a readiness to depart Egypt and trek toward the Promised Land. Luke describes Jesus’s death as an “exodus” (Luke 9:31). Third, the blood of the lamb applied to the doorposts brought protection from the death angel and “salvation” for the firstborn. The blood of Christ shed on the cross was a sacrificial offering that brings salvation to those to whom it is applied.

### *Exodus 24: The Covenant Offerings*<sup>6</sup>

The foundation of the Mosaic covenant offerings is Exodus 24. Here, for the first time in Scripture, the significance of blood as a necessary part of the covenant sacrifice is mentioned. God teaches Israel that He must be approached through an offering. True worship of God must be based on atonement for sin. Exodus 24:5 stipulates the sacrifice of animals and the significance of the shedding of blood. The substitution of the animal

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<sup>5</sup> See the discussion in Steve Jeffery, Michael Ovey, and Andrew Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions: Rediscovering the Glory of Penal Substitution* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 38–41.

<sup>6</sup> The OT describes five major offerings: the burnt offering (Lev 6:8–13), the grain offering (Lev 6:14–23), the peace (or fellowship) offering (Lev 7:11–18), the sin offering (Lev 6:24–30), and the trespass (or guilt) offering (Lev 5:1–13).

for the worshiper indicates that the sacrifice was vicarious and penal. The death of the animal, signified by the shed blood, became the medium of sin's expiation and forgiveness.<sup>7</sup>

On whether the OT sacrifices were to be understood as retaining God's forgiveness or obtaining it, two views have been proffered. Some have interpreted the sacrifices to be declarative and retentive. In this view, the sacrifices were offered not to *obtain* God's mercy and forgiveness but rather to *retain* it. Others have understood the sacrifices to be God's chosen way of removing the barrier of sin and of restoring fellowship in the covenant.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Leviticus 16: The Day of Atonement***

Atonement as sacrifice is connected to four things in the OT: sin, guilt, forgiveness, and cleansing. The Hebrew terminology used to describe the offerings that God initiated in the Mosaic law, culminating on Israel's most important day of the year, the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), illustrates the nature of atonement as sacrifice. Leviticus 16 is the key passage describing the event. On that day, the high priest entered the holy of holies in the tabernacle (later the temple) to atone for the sins of all the nation of Israel by means of the shed blood of a sacrifice. Feinberg describes the details of the Day of Atonement:

Although many additional rites were added over the centuries, the basic description of the original Day of Atonement is Leviticus 16. Complex and detailed ceremonies all focused on the central objective of complete atonement by sacrifice. First, the high priest removed his official garments, made for beauty and glory, and clothed himself in white linen as a symbol of repentance as he went about the duties of the day. Next, he offered a bull calf as a sin offering for the priests and himself. That done, he entered the Holy of Holies with a censer of live coals from the altar of incense, filling the area with incense. He sprinkled the bullock's blood on the mercy seat and on the floor before the ark of the covenant.

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<sup>7</sup> Kurtz, *Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament*, 102–09. Kurtz's work, though dated, is an excellent treatment of sacrifices in the Old Testament.

<sup>8</sup> Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:9 (see "Introduction," n. 21).

Then he cast lots over two live goats as a sin offering for the nation, taking the blood inside the veil and sprinkling it as before, thus atoning even for the Holy Place. He confessed the sins of the nation over the live goat as he placed his hands on its head. Finally he sent the live goat, called the scapegoat (KJV, i.e., the escape goat), into the wilderness. Symbolically it carried away the sins of the people. Then the high priest clothed himself in his usual apparel and offered a burnt offering for himself and one for the people with the fat of the sin offering. Outside the camp the flesh of the bull calf and goat was burned.<sup>9</sup>

The NT makes clear that these offerings were never intended to provide final atonement for sin. “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin” (Heb 10:4). The inadequacy of the OT offerings to take away sin is due to their transitory and preparatory nature. “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect” (Heb 10:1).

The scapegoat ritual on the Day of Atonement demonstrates substitutionary atonement. As Jeffrey, Ovey, and Sach point out, “When a person lives who otherwise would have died, and an animal dies that would otherwise live, substitution is necessarily entailed.”<sup>10</sup> When Lev 16:22 speaks of the scapegoat as bearing “on itself all their iniquities,” the meaning of the phrase in Hebrew depends partially on the subject of the verb. Here the subject is “goat.” When God is the subject, the phrase means “to forgive sin” as in Num 14:18. The scapegoat bears not only the *guilt* of the people but also the *sin* of the people; and it does so via substitution, bearing the guilt and sin *in place of* the people.<sup>11</sup>

In summary, the Levitical sacrificial system, including its central Day of Atonement ritual illustrates the substitutionary and propitiatory nature

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Feinberg, “Atonement, Day of,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2 vols., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1:233.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 49.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey, Ovey, and Sach, 49–50. See also Garry J. Williams, “The Cross and the Punishment of Sin,” in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today*, ed. David Peterson (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 68–81.

of the atonement provided for the people. Two animals were involved in the Day of Atonement ritual. The first animal was slain sacrificially. The shedding of blood pictured the necessary means of atonement (propitiation/expiation). The scapegoat ritual pictured the effect of the atonement: the removal of guilt and forgiveness.

### Use of Hebrew *kipper* (“to cover”)

The key word for “atonement” in the OT is the Hebrew verb *kipper* (“make atonement,” piel stem of *kaphar*), which occurs sixteen times in Leviticus 16 alone (vv. 6, 10–11, 16–18, 20, 24, 27, 30, 32–34). The word connotes a “covering” and when applied in atonement contexts refers to the covering of the guilt of sin (or the stain of some ritual “uncleanness” that is not necessarily sin). Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach summarize four possible meanings for *kipper*, none of which necessarily excludes the others.<sup>12</sup> First, where God is the subject, *kipper* can mean “forgive.” However, in some texts, *kipper* is distinct from forgiveness and is a prerequisite to it (Lev 4:20, 26, 31; 19:22; Num 15:25). Nevertheless, the notion of forgiveness is prominent. Second, the word can connote “cleansing” as in Lev 16:30.<sup>13</sup> Third, *kipper* can mean “ransom,” as does its cognate *kopher* (e.g., Exod 30:12). In the Day of Atonement ritual, the life of the animal is substituted for human lives. Fourth, the word can refer to the averting of God’s wrath.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 44–48. For a more detailed discussion, see David Peterson, “Atonement in the Old Testament,” in *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming Atonement Today*, ed. David Peterson (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 1–25; and the crucial work by Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 160–78 (see chap. 1, n. 6).

<sup>13</sup> See Jay Sklar, “Sin and Impurity: Atoned or Purified? Yes!” in *Perspectives on Purity and Purification in the Bible*, ed. Baruch J. Schwartz, David P. Wright, Jeffrey Stackert, and Naphtali S. Meshel (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 18–31; Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, Hebrew Bible Monographs 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2015). Sklar demonstrates that the Hebrew *kipper* includes both the element of atonement as ransom and the notion of purification (183–87). The blood of the sacrifice has the power both to atone for sin and to cleanse the sinner. Though sin and impurity cannot always be equated, the two are related. Sin always involves impurity, but not all impurity is the result of sin.

<sup>14</sup> “When *lutron* [Gk.] is translating *kopher* [Hb.], it always implies a vicarious or substitute-gift that compensates for the debt; the debt is not simply canceled” (Otto Procksch, “The *Lutron* Word-Group in the Old Testament,” in *TDNT*, 4:329).

The sacrificial offering (the shedding of blood) propitiates the wrath of God, expiates the guilt of sin, and effects reconciliation. The word *kipper* includes the notions of propitiation, expiation, purification, and reconciliation.<sup>15</sup> In Exod 30:12,15, and Num 35:31–33, the noun *kopher* refers to the price paid for sin's forgiveness. The lid that topped the ark of the covenant located in the holy of holies is the *kapporet* (Hb.; Gk. *hilastērion*), called the "mercy seat." It was made of gold with the upper part carved into the form of a pair of cherubim with wings stretching over the ark (Exod 25:17–22). Upon this "mercy seat" the high priest sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement, effecting forgiveness of the sins of the nation Israel.

The concept of atonement is also succinctly and clearly expressed in Lev 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul." On the ground of atonement, guilty sinners could experience forgiveness and a restored relationship with God. In Lev 4:4, 15, 24, 29, the individual identified himself with the sacrificial animal by placing his hands on the animal's head. The animal was slain, symbolically taking the sinner's place.

## Psalm 22

Jesus used the language of Psalm 22 while on the cross. Matthew 27:46 records His cry of dereliction with the words from Ps 22:1, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" Psalm 22 is debated as to its messianic significance. Does the suffering expressed refer to David's suffering or that of Israel only? Jewish scholars, along with many Christian scholars, see no reference in this psalm beyond that of David or Israel. However, there are three good reasons to see in Psalm 22 a prophetic reference to the suffering of Christ on the cross: (1) the detail of suffering expressed, (2) how some of those details are descriptive of what Christ suffered on the

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<sup>15</sup> See the important work of Paul Garnet, "Atonement Constructions in the Old Testament and the Qumran Scrolls," *EQ* 46 (1974): 131–63. He concludes that the Hebrew *kipper* includes the meaning of "propitiation" because it relates particularly to the removal of sin's guilt and punishment, involving a change in God's attitude toward the sinner.

cross according to the NT accounts, and (3) the fact that Christ referenced this psalm from the cross to express His cry of dereliction. As Patterson states,

The possibility of a dual venue for understanding the psalm gains credibility because of those involved in the crucifixion whose behavior seems to be forecast in Psalm 22. Romans cast lots for the clothing of Jesus (Ps 22:18), and hostile Jews shouted that since Jesus trusted in God, then God should rescue him (Ps 22:8). Even if the translation of verse 16, “They pierced my hands and my feet,” is dismissed or denied its application to the passion narrative, enough is here to account for the messianic significance assigned to the passage by many commentators.<sup>16</sup>

The evidence suggests that Psalm 22 is a messianic psalm predicting the suffering of Christ on the cross.

### **Isaiah 52:13–53:12<sup>17</sup>**

In many ways, Isaiah 53 is the capstone text in the OT with reference to the atonement. The fourth Servant Song is found in Isaiah 52:13–53:12. This section is comprised of five paragraph units: 52:13–15; 53:1–3; 53:4–6; 53:7–9; and 53:10–12. I will limit my focus primarily to Isa 53:4–6 and 53:10–12 since these are the verses most germane to the topic.

Who is the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53? Isaiah never tells us. What seems obvious is that the Suffering Servant cannot be identified with a corporate entity such as the nation of Israel. At least sixteen different individuals have been suggested as the identity of the Servant, including the prophet Isaiah himself. If we don NT glasses, obviously the Servant in Isaiah 53 is none other than Jesus Christ. The NT authors quote and allude to Isaiah 53 and interpret it to refer to Jesus. Several specific statements

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<sup>16</sup> Paige Patterson, “The Work of Christ,” in *A Theology for the Church*, rev. ed., ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 447.

<sup>17</sup> Some of this material appears in my chapter “Substitutionary Atonement and Cultic Terminology in Isaiah 53,” in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53*, eds. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012), 171–89.

made in Isaiah 53 concerning the Suffering Servant parallel the life and death of Jesus. Oswalt correctly points out that these points of contact “are so many and various that they cannot be coincidental.”<sup>18</sup>

Though the Servant is distinguished from Yahweh, statements made about the Servant accord Him divine status. In Isa 52:13, for example, the Servant is said to be “exalted and extolled and . . . very high.” This expression in Hebrew is used in only three other places in the entire OT, all of which are in Isaiah (6:1; 33:10; and 57:15). In each case the phrase refers to Yahweh. Groves interprets this data to mean that “Yahweh’s own lips declared that the Servant was to be identified with Yahweh himself.”<sup>19</sup>

In Isa 53:4–6, to whom do the pronouns “we,” “our,” and “us” refer? The indeterminacy of the referent is probably intentional on the part of Isaiah. It seems virtually certain that Isaiah is referring to himself along with all the people of Israel.<sup>20</sup> However, Isa 42:6 and 49:6 indicate that the Suffering Servant’s ministry is not limited to the people of Israel only. Additionally, the Servant is also to be a light to all the nations. Thus, contextually, the use of “we,” “our,” and “us” appears to be all-inclusive.<sup>21</sup>

Does the Servant suffer as a result of the sins of the people of Israel (or the nations), or does He suffer in the place of the people? Those who, like Orlinsky and Whybray, take the former view,<sup>22</sup> argue that Israel has already suffered, and thus the Servant cannot suffer for Israel. All He can do is to participate with His people in their suffering. Most who hold this view take the Servant to be either the prophet Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, or some later prophet. Whoever the Servant is, He is righteous; but because

<sup>18</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 407–08. “Four assumptions illuminate Christ’s suffering: he suffered truly, voluntarily, innocently, and meaningfully by divine permission. An adequate doctrine of the cross requires that all four points be held closely together” (Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 2:322 [see chap. 1, n. 27]).

<sup>19</sup> J. Alan Groves, “Atonement in Isaiah 53,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 81.

<sup>20</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: 40–66*, 384.

<sup>21</sup> Oswalt, 384.

<sup>22</sup> Roger N. Whybray, *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet: An Interpretation of Isaiah Chapter 53*, JSOTSS 4 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978); Harry M. Orlinsky, *Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah*, VTS 14 (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

of the people's sin, He must suffer with them as well. There are several problems with this viewpoint, two of which are fatal.

First, this view violates the broader context of Isaiah 53. In chapters 49–52, Isaiah speaks of the anticipation of salvation for the people. In chapters 54–55, God invites the people to participate in His salvation. Isaiah 53 is the key chapter linking these two sections by identifying that the means of this salvation is through the atonement of the Suffering Servant. Since the Servant is identified with the “arm of the LORD,” who brings about this salvation (v. 1), it is not possible to identify the Servant with the prophet Isaiah, who winds up suffering because of the sins of the people.<sup>23</sup>

Second, the punishment for sin in view in Isaiah 53 is not temporal punishment but spiritual (eternal) punishment. The entire Levitical sacrificial system addressed this latter issue for the nation of Israel. Leviticus 17:11 is a key verse, stating that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. The overall purpose of the sacrificial system was to provide atonement for the people.<sup>24</sup> The many allusions in Isaiah 53 to aspects of the sacrificial system, especially the Day of Atonement ritual, make it impossible to view the nature of the suffering as anything less than substitutionary.

#### *Verse 4*

In Isa 53:4, the Servant's suffering was for the prophet Isaiah and his people. The Hebrew text makes clear this contrast by the use of the emphatic independent pronouns “He” and “we,” both of which function as subjects: “Surely *He* has . . . carried our sorrows; yet *we* esteemed Him stricken” (emphasis added).

The use of the verbs “borne” (Hb. *nasa'*) and “carried” (Hb. *sabal*) is reminiscent of sacrificial language found in Leviticus. On Yom Kippur, the

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<sup>23</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: 40–66*, 385. Oswalt notes an additional problem for Whybray's position: “If the prophet was put into prison for preaching against Babylon, in what sense was he there as a result of his fellow exiles' sins? In what sense could his imprisonment produce healing for the people? Why should his people feel that he was somehow doing this all on their account and be deeply ashamed of how they had thought of him? Again, this passage is too deep and too broad to rest on the small shoulders of a hypothetical prophet” (394).

<sup>24</sup> Oswalt, 394. Notice that Heb 9:1–14 makes this point from the perspective of the NT.



Day of Atonement, the scapegoat would “bear” (Hb. *nasaʿ*, “carry away”) the sins of the people. According to Lev 16:22, the sacrificial animal dies in the place of the people. The use of *sabal* (Hb.) implies the bearing of a burden for someone else (Isa 46:4, 7). This introduces a clear note of substitution on the part of the Suffering Servant *in the place of* the people. Isaiah’s use of the active voice in Isa 53:4 as distinct from the passive voice in the surrounding context makes it clear that the Servant’s choice to take the sins of the people upon Himself was *his own* decision and act.<sup>25</sup>

### Verse 5

Verse 5 continues the contrast between the Servant and the people. Notice the structure of this verse: “He” . . . “for our . . .,” “He” . . . “for our . . .,” “our . . . upon Him,” “by His . . . we are . . . .” The first part of verse 5 speaks of “our transgressions,” and “our iniquities.” These references prepare the way for what follows in the second part of the verse, “where the vicarious suffering of the Servant comes into full view.”<sup>26</sup> Not only does the Servant substitute Himself for the people, but also the Servant’s actions bring positive benefits to the people: “by His stripes we are healed.” The Hebrew word translated “chastisement” (*musar*) frequently connotes punishment, as in the context here. The phrase “chastisement for our peace” is rendered literally by Motyer as “our peace–punishment,” which semantically conveys the meaning “the punishment necessary to secure or restore our peace with God.”<sup>27</sup> Verses 4 and 5 clearly affirm substitution on the part of the Servant.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Hermann Spieckermann, “The Conception and Prehistory of the Idea of Vicarious Suffering in the Old Testament,” in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah III. Vol. 2: Isaiah 49–55*, trans. Anthony P. Runia, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 1998), 292.

<sup>27</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 430.

<sup>28</sup> In fact, Motyer states, “Thus, verse 4 demands the noun ‘substitution,’ and verse 5 adds the adjective ‘penal’” (Motyer, 430). Although the verse does not explicitly mention God’s wrath, the Servant undergoes the punishment in the place of others. See Koole, *Isaiah 49–55*, 296.

### Verse 6

The author continues his use of emphatic subjects in verse 6 with “All we” and “the LORD.” The use of *kullanu* (Hb., “all of us”) bookends verse 6. The verse begins with “All we” and ends with “us all,” obviously a reference to the entire human race.<sup>29</sup> The author has placed the emphasis on the final phrase, “the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,” by the emphatic use of the divine name “Yahweh” (Hb., “the LORD”) coupled with the use of the object marker in Hebrew before the noun “iniquity.” Not only is this an act of substitution, but the entire concept is heavily reminiscent of sacrificial terminology and practice in the Mosaic covenant. The Servant is “the provision and plan of God, who himself superintends the priestly task (Lev 16:21) of transferring the guilt of the guilty to the head of the Servant, giving notice that this is indeed his considered and acceptable satisfaction for sin.”<sup>30</sup> Finally, the text says explicitly that God is the initiator of this act of suffering and substitution.<sup>31</sup>

Isaiah 53:6 is probably the key verse in the Old Testament asserting the unlimited, universal nature of the atonement. Even if Isaiah 53 were speaking *only* of Jews in context, which is highly doubtful, obviously there are many Gentiles who are among “the elect” and thus the death of Christ was not for Israel only. Calvin’s comment on this verse is interesting: “On him [Christ] was laid the guilt of the whole world.”<sup>32</sup> Calvin also stated, “God is satisfied and appeased, for he bore all the wickedness and all the iniquities of the world.”<sup>33</sup> As I have demonstrated elsewhere, Calvin himself held to unlimited atonement.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 389. See Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement* (see chap. 1, n. 16) for a discussion of Isa 53:6 and the meaning and use of “all” referring to all Israel and, by extension, all humanity. See also Norman F. Douty, *Did Christ Die Only for the Elect? A Treatise on the Extent of Christ’s Atonement* (Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications, 1972; repr., Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 72–73.

<sup>30</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 431. “While the Servant suffers we are still straying, and the Lord, acting as high priest in relation to the Victim-Servant (6c; cf. Lv. 16:21), loads him with our wrong” (Motyer, 429).

<sup>31</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 389.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Isaiah*, 4:131.

<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Sermons on Isaiah’s Prophecy*, 70.

<sup>34</sup> See Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 48–97.

### Verses 7–12

Isaiah 53:7–9 makes use of terminology indicating that the Servant suffers to the point of death. Verse 7 speaks of the Servant being led “as a lamb to the slaughter.” Every NT reference to Jesus as the Lamb of God is derived from this prophecy in Isa 53:7 (see Matt 26:63; 27:14; Mark 14:61; 15:5; John 1:29; 19:9; Acts 8:32; 1 Pet 2:23). Verse 8 speaks of His being “cut off from the land of the living.” Verse 9 states, “And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death.”

Isaiah 53:10–12 expresses a contrast with the previous three verses. First, the suffering of the Servant was designed and implemented by the Lord Himself (v. 10), as indicated by the emphatic placement of the divine name, Yahweh, at the beginning of the clause. The mistreatment of the Servant by the people turns out to be a part of God’s divine plan. God Himself is behind both the salvation plan and the specific means by which it would be accomplished.<sup>35</sup> Second, the suffering of the Servant is couched in terms of an “offering for sin” (Hb. *’asham*, v. 10). Third, despite His death (v. 9), the Servant will “see His seed” and “prolong His days” (v. 10).

Isaiah’s use of the term *’asham* in verse 10 refers to the “trespass [or guilt] offering,” which functioned as an atoning sacrifice for sin (Leviticus 5–7; cp. “sin offering,” Lev 6:24–29).<sup>36</sup> Both the sin and guilt offerings “are widely regarded as the primary expiatory offerings in the Levitical system of offerings.”<sup>37</sup> Notice the recurrent phrase, “So the priest shall make atonement for them, and it shall be forgiven them” (see Lev 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:6, 10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7). Here the twin concepts of atonement for sin and forgiveness of sin are constantly juxtaposed. Again, the famous statement in Lev 17:11 serves as the foundation for the entire Levitical system of sacrifices: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have

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<sup>35</sup> Koole, *Isaiah 49–55*, 318.

<sup>36</sup> Lev 5:16, 18; 7:7. The word occurs a total of 35 times in Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel. When the word is used in contexts other than the tabernacle/temple, it almost always connotes guilt that leads to judgment.

<sup>37</sup> Richard E. Averbeck, “Sacrifices and Offerings,” *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 720.

given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”

The statement that the Servant will “see His seed” and “prolong His days” (v. 10) immediately follows on the heels of verse 9 where the Servant’s death is mentioned. Though some interpreters take these statements as metaphorical, clearly Isaiah must be speaking of the Servant’s resurrection since the dead do not have children.<sup>38</sup> The language and imagery suggest a reference to the resurrection of Christ. The NT also closely links the atonement accomplished on the cross by Christ with His resurrection, as in 1 Cor 15:3–4. In verse 11, the single grounds by which the Servant can make many righteous is His bearing “their iniquities,” Oswalt points out that in the Hebrew text, “The object, ‘their iniquities,’ is placed at the beginning of the clause in the emphatic position, and ‘he,’ the internal subject of the verb, is emphasized by the addition of the 3rd masc. sg. independent pronoun. The sense is, ‘it is *their* iniquities that *he* carries.’”<sup>39</sup>

Verse 12 functions as a summary, where the conclusion concerning the allotment of a portion with the great and the dividing of booty is stated first followed by the reason: “Because He poured out His soul unto death.” This order serves to give semantic prominence to the stated cause—namely, the Servant’s substitutionary death. The notion of the Servant’s pouring Himself out to death clearly suggests sacrificial language, especially in light of the immediate context of the guilt offering in verse 10. Oswalt has well said, “The Servant will be exalted to the highest heaven (52:13) not because he was humiliated (although he was), not because he suffered unjustly (although he did), not because he did it voluntarily (although he did), but because it was all in order to carry the sin of the world away to permit God’s children to come home to him.”<sup>40</sup>

Verses 11–12 clearly state that the Servant suffers for the sins of the people: “He shall bear [Hb. *sabal*] their iniquities” (Hb. *ʿawon*, v. 11); “He

<sup>38</sup> See Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (New York: Abingdon, 1954), 204–05.

<sup>39</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 405, n. 60 (emphasis original).

<sup>40</sup> Oswalt, 407. “The uniting doctrinal theme is the understanding of the Servant’s death as a *guilt offering* (9–10b), a *sin-bearing sacrifice* which removes sin and imputes righteousness (11–12ab), and as a *voluntary self-identification and interposition* (12c–f)” (Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 437).

bore [Hb. *nasaʿ*] the sin [Hb. *chētʿ*] of many” (v. 12).<sup>41</sup> Both phrases speak of the bearing of both guilt and punishment. Furthermore, only in Isaiah 53 are these phrases used of a person and not of an animal in this fashion. Isaiah affirms the Suffering Servant as offering a penal substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the people.<sup>42</sup>

Those who hold to limited atonement commonly appeal to the “many” in Isa 52:14–53:12 and NT texts that quote or refer to the Isaiah text as evidence for limited atonement (e.g., Mark 10:45). But this is a misreading of the Hebrew and the Greek texts. As Joachim Jeremias has pointed out concerning the pre-Christian interpretations of the “many” in Isaiah 53, the “many” is extended to include the Gentiles in *I Enoch* and *The Wisdom of Solomon* and may refer to them primarily, if not exclusively, in Isa 52:14–15. But, Jeremias continues, in the Hebrew text there is no difference between the “many” of Isa 52:14–15 and Isa 53:11–12. All Jews and Gentiles are included. He explains further:

In fact, the Peshitta renders Isa. 52.15, “he will purify many peoples.” . . . If the Peshitta version of the Old Testament is pre-Christian (which is probable), then we have here an example of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the group of “many” for whom the atoning work of the servant is effective. . . . The “for many” of the Eucharistic words is therefore, as we have already seen, not exclusive (“many, but not all”), but, in the Semitic manner of speech, inclusive (“the totality, consisting of many”). The Johannine tradition interprets it in this way, for in its equivalent to the bread-word . . . it paraphrases “for many” as “for the life of the world” (John 6.51c).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Leviticus also uses this language—for example, “The goat shall bear [*nasaʿ*] all their iniquities [*ʿawon*]” (on the Day of Atonement, 16:22) and “lest they bear [*nasaʿ*] sin [*chētʿ*] for it and die thereby” (22:9).

<sup>42</sup> Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 60. See also Groves, “Atonement in Isaiah 53,” 61–89.

<sup>43</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 228–29.

Verse 12 also emphasizes that the Servant does not suffer as a passive or unwilling victim but rather willingly and with deliberate intent. God's promise to exalt the Servant in verse 12a is predicated upon the Servant's willingness to offer Himself up to die as a sacrifice on behalf of the people as stated in verse 12b. The use of the passive voice in verse 12 indicates God's activity in the suffering of the Servant. Finally, notice that the entire pericope of the Fourth Servant Song begins (52:13) and ends (53:11–12) with God's perspective.<sup>44</sup>

Isaiah concludes verse 12 with the same verb that he used to conclude verse 6, as noted by Motyer: "In the former the Lord makes his Servant the sin-bearer, in the latter the Servant interposes himself on behalf of those whose sins he bears: he is thus the mediator between God and us (6) and us and God (12)."<sup>45</sup> There can be little doubt that Isaiah's vocabulary is drawn from the Day of Atonement ritual and clearly affirms that Christ's atonement is substitutionary.

A deliberate word play between Isa 52:13 and 53:12 serves to create a lexical *inclusio*, providing linguistic cohesion for the Fourth Servant Song. The Servant who has carried (*nasa'*) the sin of the people (Isa 53:12) is the one who will be "extolled" (*nasa'*) by Yahweh Himself (Isa 52:13).

Isaiah's use of the Hebrew term *nasa'* in Isa 53:4, 12 is reminiscent of Lev 16:22 where the same word is used describing the scapegoat's bearing the iniquities of the people.<sup>46</sup> Both Leviticus 16 and Isaiah 53 clearly present an atonement that is substitutionary in nature.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Luke," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 386.

<sup>45</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 437.

<sup>46</sup> See the discussion in Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, NAC 3A (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 221. Rooker notes that Ben-Shammai argued that the Suffering Servant carried out the role of the scapegoat in bearing the sins of the people (Rooker, 226).

<sup>47</sup> The charge that Anselm, Luther, Calvin, along with others since the Reformation, unduly rely on forensic metaphors of substitution for the atonement is wide of the mark given the fact that Isaiah 53 clearly presents atonement in this sense.

## Substitutionary Atonement

No less than twelve times in Isaiah 53 does the author make a statement concerning the substitutionary nature of the work of the Suffering Servant who bears the sins of others.

- “He has borne our griefs” (v. 4);
- He “carried our sorrows” (v. 4);
- “He was wounded for our transgressions” (v. 5);
- “He was bruised for our iniquities” (v. 5);
- “The chastisement for our peace was upon Him” (v. 5);
- “By His stripes we are healed” (v. 5);
- “The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (v. 6);
- “For the transgressions of My people He was stricken” (v. 8);
- “When You make His soul an offering for sin” (v. 10);
- “He shall bear their iniquities” (v. 11);
- “He was numbered with the transgressors” (v. 12);
- “He bore the sin of many” (v. 12).

The Servant’s voluntary sacrifice of Himself on behalf of the people by taking their sins and receiving their punishment is clear. Several truths are evident: (1) God ordained the Servant’s suffering. (2) The Servant does not suffer for His own sins, and He suffers in silence. (3) The Servant suffers voluntarily. (4) The Servant substitutes Himself for the people and suffers for them. (5) The Servant’s suffering is redemptive for the people.

Among the four Gospels, only in Luke does Jesus directly quote Isaiah 53: “For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors.’ For the things concerning Me have an end” (22:37). This quotation serves as a preface for the beginning of the Passion narrative and is itself prefaced by an introductory formula: “For I tell you, this Scripture must be fulfilled in me” (ESV). Thus, for Luke, Isaiah 53 is the hermeneutical key to the Passion narrative.<sup>48</sup> Jeremias argues that unless one sees Isaiah 53 in the background of the words of Jesus in the Last Supper, the narrative “would remain

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<sup>48</sup> Pao and Schnabel, “Luke,” 385.

incomprehensible.”<sup>49</sup> Matthew 26:28 records Jesus saying at the Last Supper: “For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” This seems to be a direct reference to Isa 53:10, where the Servant is said to make Himself “an offering for sin,” and to Isa 53:12, where the Servant who “was numbered with the transgressors” nevertheless “bore the sin of many.” Clearly Jesus considered the Servant of Isaiah 53 to be fulfilled in Himself.<sup>50</sup>

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah are at pains to show that the Mosaic covenant with its Levitical sacrificial system was inadequate to secure the salvation of the people of Israel (Isa 1:11–15; Jer 31:31–33). God promised “new things” (Isa 48:6) and “a new covenant” (Jer 31:31–33), which would be accomplished through the substitutionary suffering and death of the Davidic Messiah, Jesus Christ. The sacrificial system was only a “shadow” (Heb 8:5; 10:1) of which Jesus is the substantive final fulfillment. The author of Hebrews makes clear the impossibility for “the blood of bulls and goats” to “take away sins” (10:4). No animal sacrifice can function as a permanent substitute for the sins of a human being. Final salvation from sins is brought about only through Isaiah’s Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ. How is it, then, that the author of Hebrews develops the high priesthood of Christ? The Davidic Messiah was not of priestly descent, and Jesus was not of the tribe of Levi but of Judah. Through the brilliant exegetical juxtaposing of Ps 110:1 with Ps 110:4, the author of Hebrews accomplishes his theological task:

The LORD said to my Lord,  
 “Sit at My right hand,  
 Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.” (Ps 110:1)

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<sup>49</sup> Joachim Jeremias, “This Is My Body...” *Expository Times* 83, no. 7 (April 1972): 203.

<sup>50</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1981), 445–46. See also John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, WBC 35c (Dallas, TX: Word), 1077. Joseph A. Fitzmyer concludes the opposite, however (*The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV*, AB 28A [Garden City, NY: Doubleday], 1418). See the discussion in Bradly S. Billings, *Do This in Remembrance of Me: The Disputed Words in the Lukan Institution Narrative (Luke 22.19b–20): An Historico-Exegetical, Theological and Sociological Analysis*, Library of New Testament Studies 314 (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 42–43.



The LORD has sworn  
 And will not relent,  
 “You are a priest forever  
 According to the order of Melchizedek.” (Ps 110:4)

Jesus, the Suffering Servant, is both King and Priest.

The Melchizedek comparison is one example of OT typology that is fulfilled in the NT. Other examples include the Sweet Savor Offerings (Leviticus 1–3); Non-Sweet Savor Offerings (Leviticus 4–5); the two goats on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16); the kinsman redeemer (Lev 25:49; Isa 59:20; the book of Ruth); the Lamb (Isa 53:7; John 1:29); Passover (Exod 12:11); and the Rock (Exod 17:6; Num 20:8; 1 Cor 10:4).<sup>51</sup>

Thus, Schürer concluded with respect to the concept of sacrifice in the OT:

Consequently it cannot be disputed, that in the second century after Christ the idea of a suffering Messiah, and indeed of a Messiah suffering as an atonement for human sin, was, at least in certain circles, a familiar one. In this respect a thought, which in itself was quite current in Rabbinic Judaism, was applied to the Messiah, viz. the thought that the perfectly righteous man not only fulfils all the commandments, but also atones by sufferings for sins that may have been committed, and that the overplus suffering of the righteous man is of service to others.<sup>52</sup>

In the OT, the types and symbols given in the Passover, the Day of Atonement, the tabernacle, and the entire sacrificial system—culminating with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53—point unmistakably to the person and work of Christ in the NT where they find their complete fulfillment in

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<sup>51</sup> For OT typology, see Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*; Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin, 2 vols. (London: T&T Clark, 1875).

<sup>52</sup> Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, Second Division, trans. Sophia Taylor and Peter Christie, 5 vols., *History of Judaism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1891; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 2:186.

the new covenant inaugurated by the cross.<sup>53</sup> As T. F. Torrance explains, “The *promises* of the covenant are fulfilled in him . . . the *commands* of the covenant are fulfilled in him.” The OT sacrifices symbolize “the fulfilment of the divine judgment on the sin of humanity and the removal of that obstacle or barrier of sin between God and humanity.”<sup>54</sup>

The new covenant, promised in the OT, is inaugurated in the NT at the Last Supper as recorded in the Gospels. Jesus took the bread, broke it, and said, “Take, eat; this is my Body” (Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22). He also took the cup of wine and said that it represented His “blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt 26:28). As Torrance correctly notes: “It is distinctly a covenant sacrifice involving a) the breaking of the bread and the shedding of the blood, b) communion in a covenant meal, and c) commitment and solemn obligation, an aspect especially brought out by the epistle to the Hebrews.”<sup>55</sup>

Concerning Christ’s cross in relation to the OT sacrifices, James Pendleton states, “It was the antitype and the consummation of all sacrifices. The sacrificial rite was divinely appointed. Every altar sent its blood and smoke in the direction of Calvary. The many victims pointed to *one victim*.<sup>56</sup> In a sense, the OT sacrificial system was a rehearsal for the real thing: the cross. Now that the cross is accomplished, there is no need to return to the rehearsal.”<sup>57</sup>

In light of the clear evidence of atonement as sacrifice and substitution in the OT, it is somewhat surprising to find that many want to distance the OT teaching on atonement from “propitiation” and “penal substitution.” For example, Stephen Chapman correctly notes that most scholars have

<sup>53</sup> “Atonement through the temple finds its *end* and at the same time also its fulfillment in the eschatological saving event on Golgotha” (Hengel, *The Atonement*, 53; emphasis original [see “Introduction,” n. 2]).

<sup>54</sup> Torrance, *Atonement*, 9; emphasis original (see “Introduction,” n. 6).

<sup>55</sup> Torrance, 14. Torrance emphasizes the point that “the real agent” in the OT sacrificial system is God Himself: “The words for atonement, reconciliation, expiation, etc. are *not* used of action upon God, . . . God is not the object of this action. He is always subject. . . . Thus the question so often posed, ‘Do the Old Testament sacrifices remove sin or are they only concerned with liturgical or cultic uncleanness?’ is a false question with a false alternative” (Torrance, 19).

<sup>56</sup> Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 238 (see chap. 1, n. 4).

<sup>57</sup> Forde, “Seventh Locus: The Work of Christ,” 2:87 (see chap. 1, n. 22).

been reluctant to accept Milgrom's sharp distinctions between expiation and propitiation in Leviticus, "preferring to conclude that Israelite sacrifices had different nuances of expiation and propitiation, depending on their various contexts."<sup>58</sup> Chapman considers expiation as objective, necessary, representative, and participatory, but not substitutionary or penal.<sup>59</sup>

However, in light of the evidence, such a conclusion is clearly unwarranted. The OT presents atonement as substitutionary, using categories of both propitiation and expiation.

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<sup>58</sup> Stephen B. Chapman, "God's Reconciling Work: Atonement in the Old Testament," in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 99. See Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3; 3 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1991–2001).

<sup>59</sup> Chapman, "God's Reconciling Work," 101–06.



## CHAPTER 3

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### *Atonement in the New Testament*

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Whereas the OT provides the prophetic and symbolic foundation for the concept of atonement as a substitutionary sacrifice, the NT authors build on that foundation, demonstrating the prophetic fulfillment in the Gospels and doctrinal development in the letters. As in the OT, the NT writers treat the atonement as sacrificial, substitutionary, and representative. We have already seen the many metaphors in which atonement language is presented in the NT. As Blocher correctly notes, atonement passages in the NT are convergent and complementary, not contradictory.<sup>1</sup> The NT writers are more concerned to address the nature of salvation rather than the actual way it has been achieved via atonement.<sup>2</sup>

We will first categorize the various texts in the NT that deal directly or indirectly with the atonement.<sup>3</sup> This approach will allow us to have a bird's eye view of the overall picture. Then we will consider key texts on

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Blocher, "Atonement," in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 75.

<sup>2</sup> I. Howard Marshall, "The Development of the Concept of Redemption in the New Testament," in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L. L. Morris on His 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. Robert Banks (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 169.

<sup>3</sup> Theologians have various strategies for treating all the texts in the NT that address the subject of the atonement. For example, Augustus H. Strong, one of the most important systematic theologians of the twentieth century, subsumed all passages on the atonement into four categories (Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 716–22 [see chap. 1, n. 26]): (1) Moral—atonement as a provision originating in God's love and as an example of love; (2) Commercial—atonement as a ransom to free from the bondage of sin; (3) Legal—atonement as an act of obedience to the law, a penalty borne in order to rescue the guilty; (4) Sacrificial—atonement as a work of priestly mediation, a sin-offering, propitiation, substitution.

the atonement as they appear in canonical order, beginning with the Gospels and ending with Revelation.<sup>4</sup> At this point, we can do little more than touch on these texts in a very cursory and summary fashion. Certain texts that are considered by all to be especially crucial regarding the atonement will be discussed more fully.

### **Categorization of Texts**

New Testament texts on atonement can be categorized as follows:

#### ***1. Texts That Address God's Intent or Purpose for the Atonement***

[J]ust as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Matt 20:28)

But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! (Luke 12:50)

Then He also said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day." (Luke 24:46)

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:14–15)

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father." (John 10:11, 17–18)

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<sup>4</sup> Among the many helpful summary treatments of NT texts on the atonement, consult: Leon Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965); Hill and James, eds., *The Glory of the Atonement*, 90–208 (see chap. 2, n. 39); and Paige Patterson, "The Work of Christ," 439–79 (see "Introduction," n. 21).

“Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour.’”  
(John 12:27)

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?  
(Rom 8:32)

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. (Titus 2:11–14)

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. . . . Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil. (Heb 2:9–10, 14)

He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. (Heb 9:26)

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

## ***2. Texts That Address Atonement as Necessary for Salvation***

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6)

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. (1 Cor 3:11)

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 2:5)

## ***3. Texts That Address Atonement as Motivated and Initiated by the Love of God***

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:6–8)

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know *Him thus* no longer. Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all



things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore *you* on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin *to be* sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor 5:14–21)

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. (Eph 5:2, 25)

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 John 4:9–10)

#### ***4. Texts That Address What the Atonement Accomplishes for Sinners and Sin***

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you." (Luke 22:19–20)

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." (John 6:51)

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Rom 5:6–8)

For what the law could not do in that it was weakened through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh. . . . He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? (Rom 8:3, 32)

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor 15:3)

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. . . . For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Cor 5:14–15, 21)

Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. (Gal 1:3–4)

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. (1 Thess 5:9–10)

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. (Heb 9:27–28)

Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. (1 Pet 2:24)

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 every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying:

“Blessing and honor and glory and power  
Be to Him who sits on the throne,  
And to the Lamb, forever and ever!”

Then the four living creatures said, “Amen!” And the twenty-four elders fell down and worshiped Him who lives forever and ever. (Rev 5:9, 13–14)

### ***5. Texts That Address Christ’s Death as Sacrificial in Nature***

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

Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. (1 Cor 5:7)

And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. . . . Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her. (Eph 5:2, 25)

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Heb 2:17)

For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. (Heb 7:13–14)

For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens. (Heb 7:26)

And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no remission. Therefore, it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another—He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put sin away by the sacrifice of Himself. (Heb 9:22–26)

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19–22)

## ***6. Texts That Address the Atonement as the Ground of Reconciliation and Forgiveness***

“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” (Matt 26:28)

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:14–18)

“Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.” (Acts 13:38–39)

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received this reconciliation. . . . Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous. (Rom 5:10–11, 18–19)

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. (Eph 1:7)

But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:13)

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight. (Col 1:21–22)

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. (1 Thess 5:9–10)

### ***7. Texts That Address Atonement as the Means of Redemption***

“Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matt 20:28)

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. (Acts 20:28)

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. (Rom 3:23–24)

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? (1 Cor 6:19)

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”). (Gal 3:13)

To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. (Eph 1:6–7)

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. (Col 1:13–14)

For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. (1 Tim 2:5–6)

Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works. (Titus 2:13–14)

But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. (Heb 9:11–12)

[C]onduct yourselves . . . in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. (1 Pet 1:17–19)

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 5:9–10)

### ***8. Texts That Address Atonement as a Propitiation and Expiation for Sin***

Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. (Rom 3:24–26)

Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (Heb 2:17)

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. (1 John 2:2)

### ***9. Texts That Address Atonement as the Ground of All Spiritual Benefits to Believers***

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name. (John 1:12)

“He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” (John 3:36)

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” (John 14:26)

This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. (Acts 2:32–33)



For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom 6:23)

And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. (Heb 5:9)

## Jesus and the Atonement

According to the Gospel writers, Jesus often predicted His own death.<sup>5</sup> In the Synoptic Gospels, when Jesus was recognized by His disciples as the Messiah, He immediately informed them that His suffering and death on the cross were a necessity: “The Son of Man must [Gk. *dei*] suffer” (Mark 8:31), “must [Gk. *dei*] go to Jerusalem” (Matt 16:21), and “must [Gk. *dei*] . . . be killed” (Luke 9:22). Jesus and the Gospel writers link His death with the Jewish Passover, the Day of Atonement, and Isaiah 53. Jesus predicted His impending death in the Gospels on several occasions (Matt 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19; 26:12, 28, 31; Mark 9:32–34; 14:8, 24, 27; Luke 9:22, 44–45; 18:31–34; 22:20; John 2:19–21; 10:17–18; 12:7).

### *Matthew*<sup>6</sup>

In Matthew’s Gospel, the angelic birth announcement to Joseph stressed the importance of the name to be given to Mary’s Son: “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (1:21). The meaning of the name *Jesus* (Gk., “Jehovah is salvation”) focuses on the work that Jesus would accomplish—“salvation.” We find references to Isaiah 53 (see chapter 2) in Matt 8:17 and 12:17–21. Matthew 20:28 is a direct reference to Isaiah 53 and the Suffering Servant who will “give His life a ransom for many.” In the Greek text of this verse, the preposition *anti*

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<sup>5</sup> Matt 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:18–19; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34; Luke 9:22, 44; 18:32–33.

<sup>6</sup> For works on the atonement in Matthew’s Gospel, consult Mark Randall Jackson, “Atonement in Matthew’s Gospel” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), especially his bibliography. See also Jonathan T. Pennington, “Matthew and Mark,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 631–37.

(“for”), which immediately precedes *pollōn* (“many”) at the end of the sentence, clearly denotes substitution. The intentional sense of this verse is to express the purpose of Christ’s dying.

Matthew introduces his Gospel identifying Jesus as the Messiah who is both “the Son of David” and “the Son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1). Matthew, as do all four Gospel writers, focuses attention on Jesus’s obedience to God in the fulfillment of the saving mission. The repeated references to Jesus’s silence (26:63; 27:14) and innocence (27:4, 18–19, 23–24) in Matthew’s passion account indicate Jesus’s fulfillment of His role as God’s Servant, reminiscent of Isa 53:7.<sup>7</sup>

### *Mark*<sup>8</sup>

Four key passages in Mark’s Gospel speak to the atonement. Three are predictions of Jesus’s death (8:31; 9:31; 10:32–34), and the fourth is the famous “ransom saying” in 10:45. Like Matthew, Mark recounts “the ‘divine must’” of the atonement as connected with the OT prophecies concerning Christ’s death, and he associates the events of the Passion Week with OT prophecies and promises.<sup>9</sup>

Mark 10:45 is the key atonement verse in Mark’s Gospel. It is deliberately placed at the end of Jesus’s public ministry and again in the account of the Last Supper in Mark 14:22–25, which includes Jesus’s final discourse to the disciples before His crucifixion. Mark’s purpose appears to be at least twofold: (1) to show Jesus as grounding, emphasizing, and interpreting His death as universal for all humanity in connection with Isaiah 53 (and also most likely in connection with the covenant sacrifice of Exod 24:8) and (2) with the use of the Greek preposition *anti* (“for,” as in Matt 20:28) to emphasize the substitutionary nature of His sacrifice.

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<sup>7</sup> Joel B. Green, “Death of Jesus,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, IVP Bible Dictionary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 156.

<sup>8</sup> For works on the atonement in Mark’s Gospel, consult Peter G. Bolt, *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark’s Gospel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 18 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Green, “Death of Jesus,” 158.

The word *many* (Gk. *pollōn*, as in Matt 20:28) in the text is a Hebraism from Isaiah 53 in the inclusive universal significance of the Greek word *polys*. The Hebrew term in Isaiah 53, *rabbim* (“the great,” v. 12), is used in the sense of the Greek *pas*, meaning “all.” When Jesus spoke of His intent “to give His life a ransom for many,” He meant “all; everyone.”<sup>10</sup> “The saying over the cup and the saying about ransom are connected by the universal service ‘for the many,’ in the sense of ‘for all.’”<sup>11</sup>

The prepositional phrase *for many* in Mark 14:24 employs the Greek *hyper*, which means “on behalf of” or “instead of”—i.e., in a substitutionary sense. Paul often employs it in this sense as well.

### *Luke*<sup>12</sup>

In Luke 9:30–31 we learn that Jesus’s death will be redemptive. At the Last Supper, Jesus clearly indicated that His coming death on the cross would be the inauguration of the new covenant in fulfillment of OT passages like Jer 31:31–33 and Isaiah 53: “He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you’” (Luke 22:20). Luke’s account of the Lord’s Supper records these words of Jesus: “This is My body which is given for you.” The phrase “for you” (Gk. *hyper humōn*) clearly indicates substitutionary intent.<sup>13</sup>

The tax collector in Jesus’s parable prays, “God, be merciful to me a sinner!” (18:13). *Be merciful* (Gk. *hilasthēti*) here is the translation of the

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Hengel, *The Atonement*, 50, 70 (see “Introduction,” n. 2). This is how John Calvin understood the meaning of *many* as well, both in Isaiah 53 and Mark 10:45: “He declares that His life was the price of our redemption. From this it follows that our reconciliation with God is free. . . . ‘Many’ is used, not for a definite number, but for a large number. . . . And this is its meaning also in Rom 5:15, where Paul is not talking of a part of mankind but of the whole human race” (John Calvin, *Commentary on A Harmony of the Evangelists: Matthew, Mark, and Luke*,” trans. William Pringle, Calvin’s Commentaries 16 [1844; repr., Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 427).

<sup>11</sup> Hengel, *The Atonement*, 73. See also the discussion of Isa 53:12–13 above.

<sup>12</sup> For works on the atonement in Luke’s Gospel, consult John Kimball, *The Atonement in Lukan Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014) and his bibliography. See also Darrell L. Bock, *A Theology of Luke and Acts*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Patterson, “The Work of Christ,” 561.

Greek verb “to be propitiated.” Jesus asserted that this man was “justified” (18:14).

Jesus viewed His own death as the fulfillment of the Suffering Servant in Isa 53:12. He quoted directly from the Servant Song: “For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors.’ For the things concerning Me have an end” (Luke 22:37). As Isaiah 53 reveals, Jesus’s death would be representative, sacrificial, and substitutionary.

That Jesus viewed the work He would accomplish on the cross as the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 is demonstrated in Luke 4:16 at the beginning of His ministry and again in Luke 22:37 on the eve of His crucifixion. In Luke 24:25–27, Jesus identifies His mission on the cross as the fulfillment of the Suffering Servant prophecy of Isaiah 53:

The significance of the identification of Jesus’ passion as that of the Suffering Servant for Luke is threefold. First, it indicates how Luke can emphasize the salvation-historical necessity of the cross and spotlight Jesus’ exaltation or vindication as the salvific event. . . . Second, Luke’s emphasis on the Servant provides a framework for drawing out the universal implications of Jesus’ mission. . . . Third, by portraying Jesus’ career, and especially his death and exaltation, as that of the Suffering Servant, Luke demonstrates in the ultimate manner his understanding of the way of salvation.<sup>14</sup>

I have argued elsewhere that Luke presents Jesus as the high priest in at least three ways in his Gospel.<sup>15</sup> First, Jesus prayed for Peter that his “faith should not fail” (Luke 22:32). Here the intercessory ministry of Jesus the High Priest highlighted in Hebrews is given tangible example in the earthly life of Jesus. Second, Luke records that at the crucifixion Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Daube argues that this prayer has a thoroughly Jewish background and was for the Jews primarily and not the Romans (though they

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<sup>14</sup> Green, “Death of Jesus,” 161.

<sup>15</sup> See David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 204–12. Some of the material in this section on Luke appears previously in *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*.

may have been included).<sup>16</sup> Of interest here is the connection that Daube makes between Num 15:25–26, a reference to the liturgy on the Day of Atonement (in which an unwitting offence by the community is forgiven), and Heb 5:2, which describes the Jewish high priest, to whom Jesus is compared, as having “compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray.”<sup>17</sup> Throughout Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is portrayed with the priestly attributes of sympathy, compassion, and mercy.

Finally, in Luke’s account of the ascension, Jesus “lifted up His hands and blessed” the disciples (24:50–51). While Jesus was engaged in this act, He was “carried up into heaven” (v. 51). Talbert explains the scene: “This act of blessing is like that of the high priest, Simon, in *Sir* 50:19–20. With a priestly act the risen Jesus puts his disciples under the protection of God before he leaves them . . . Just as the gospel began with the ministry of the priest Zechariah, so it ends with Jesus acting as priest for his flock (cf. Heb 2:17; 3:1; 6:19–20).”<sup>18</sup> Luke highlights the sacrificial aspect of Jesus’s death by locating it within the Passover time frame, thus pointing to the sacrificial character of His death (Luke 22:1, 7–8, 11, 13, 15; cp. Exod 12:14, 25, 27).<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, as Carpinelli has demonstrated, Jesus’s words over the bread and cup at the Last Supper clearly express the sacrificial nature of

<sup>16</sup> David Daube, “‘For They Know Not What They Do’: Luke 23:24,” *Studia Patristica* 4, no. 2 (1961): 58–70.

<sup>17</sup> Daube, 65–67.

<sup>18</sup> Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Luke: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Third Gospel* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 233. This has been argued beyond a reasonable doubt by Andrews George Mekkattukunnel, *The Priestly Blessing of the Risen Christ: An Exegetico-Theological Analysis of Luke 24, 50–53*, European University Studies 714 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2001). Cp. E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, 7th ed., The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 279; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGCT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 908–09; and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke NTC* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 43. See Dennis D. Sylva, “The Temple Curtain and Jesus’ Death in the Gospel of Luke,” *JBL* 105 (1986): 239–50. Those who see this as specifically a high-priestly blessing include P. A. van Stempvoort, “The Interpretation of the Ascension in Luke and Acts,” *NTS* 5 (1957–58): 30–42; Marshall, *Luke*, 908–09; Robert J. Karris, “Luke 23:47 and the Lucan View of Jesus’ Death,” *JBL* 105 (1986): 65–74.

<sup>19</sup> “The emphatic way in which Luke presents Jesus as the ‘firstborn’ (2:7, 23) reminds us of the Passover lamb which was the ransom [*sic*] for the deliverance of the Israelites['] first-born children” (Mekkattukunnel, *The Priestly Blessing*, 177).

His death.<sup>20</sup> Observe, in the Lukan account of the Last Supper, the allusion to the “new covenant” of Jer 31:31–34, an allusion not found in the other Gospels.<sup>21</sup> This new covenant allusion is “unmistakable,” according to Rata.<sup>22</sup>

Mekkattukunnel argues that Luke views Jesus’s death on the cross as fulfilling and surpassing the OT temple and priesthood. For Luke, Jesus is the supreme high priest and perfect mediator between God and humanity.<sup>23</sup> Carpinelli reaches the same conclusion:

As Jesus ascends, Luke depicts him giving Aaron’s blessing as the high priest would after sacrifice on the Feast of Atonement. The sacrificial and expiatory interpretation of the cup connects with the Lucan running allusion to Sirach 50, where the glory and function of the high priest in the liturgy of the Day of Atonement are magnified. . . . In Luke 22:14–23 and 24:50–53 Jesus is thus depicted functioning as a priest. The bread as memorial and the cup as the token of the covenant in Jesus’ blood lay the narrative base for depicting the ascending Jesus completing the liturgy of the Day of Atonement. Jesus’ giving the cup as new covenant in his blood and imparting Aaron’s blessing bring narratively to full view Luke’s image of Jesus’ relation to the temple.<sup>24</sup>

Stempvoort, along with others, has cited the *inclusio* formed by the failed priestly blessing of Zechariah in the birth narratives with the completed blessing given by the new High Priest in the final scene of Luke’s Gospel. This blessing was an essential element at the conclusion of every temple service, including that of the incense offering, over which Zechariah was officiating, according to Luke 1:5–25. Zechariah’s “service” (v.

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<sup>20</sup> Francis Giordano Carpinelli, “‘Do This as My Memorial’ (Luke 22:19): Lucan Soteriology of Atonement,” *CBQ* 61 (1999): 74–91.

<sup>21</sup> Jeremiah 31:31–34 is, nonetheless, a foundational OT passage for Hebrews 8–9.

<sup>22</sup> Tiberius Rata, *The Covenant Motif in Jeremiah’s Book of Comfort: Textual and Intertextual Studies of Jeremiah 30–33*, Studies in Biblical Literature 105 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 125.

<sup>23</sup> Mekkattukunnel, *The Priestly Blessing*, 180–81.

<sup>24</sup> Carpinelli, “‘Do This as My Memorial,’” 90.

23) was an “unfinished *leitourgia*,” but at the conclusion of Luke’s Gospel there is the “finished *leitourgia*” given by the priest Jesus (24:50).<sup>25</sup>

Since the priestly blessing in the OT (and other Jewish literature) commonly occurred only after the completion of sacrifice(s), Kacic concludes that the priestly blessing confirmed for the people that the sacrifice was accepted and their sins were forgiven. Thus, the benediction was more than just an option in the Jewish liturgy but rather functioned as “a necessary conclusion to the priestly atoning activity.”<sup>26</sup> Kacic’s understanding of Luke’s pastoral intention at this point is accurate in my view: “The people of God were consistently reminded, through this blessing, of *God’s presence and faithfulness* despite their sins, and it was this blessing that would become such a comfort to those weary and exiled believers who questioned if their God had forgotten them.”<sup>27</sup>

Kacic further points out that the motif of blessing continues in Acts and plays a vital role at the conclusion of Peter’s second sermon after Pentecost: “You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities” (Acts 3:25–26). With respect to Luke’s understanding here, “Blessing has reached a climax with the incarnation, and now preaching points specifically to the personified Benediction for salvation.”<sup>28</sup> Peter’s statement in Acts 3:26 also suggests that the intent of the atonement is to

<sup>25</sup> Van Stempvoort, “The Interpretation of the Ascension,” 35, 39. See also Mikeal C. Parsons, *The Departure of Jesus in Luke-Acts: The Ascension Narratives in Context* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 69–111; Arie W. Zwiep, *The Ascension of the Messiah in Lukan Christology* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 88. Both Brown and Schweizer have argued that this priestly blessing completes Zechariah’s inability to bless the congregation at the beginning of the Gospel (Luke 1:21–22). See Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 281–82; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Luke*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1984), 378–79. This *inclusio* (sandwich structure) functions as a literary device that Luke uses to highlight this event and to indicate the priestly activity of Jesus.

<sup>26</sup> Kelly M. Kacic, “Receiving Christ’s Priestly Benediction: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Exploration of Luke 24:50–53,” *WTJ* 67 (2005): 259.

<sup>27</sup> Kacic, 252; emphasis original.

<sup>28</sup> Kacic, 253.

address the sin problem (“turning . . . from your iniquities”) and the extent of the atonement is unlimited (“every one of you”).

Kapic connects Luke’s portrait of Jesus’s ascension with passages in Hebrews: “Jesus departs and blesses his disciples at the same time; he had made the perfect and final sacrifice, securing the forgiveness of sins for his people (Heb 7:26–27; 10:12).”<sup>29</sup> Recall the author’s benediction in Heb 13:20–21, connecting atonement with blessing as does Luke in his Gospel and Acts.

Hamm has argued that seven places in Luke–Acts allude to the Jewish Tamid service:<sup>30</sup>

- Zechariah in the temple (Luke 1:5–25)
- Peter and John at the temple at the ninth hour (Acts 3:1)
- Cornelius praying at the ninth hour (Acts 10)
- The Pharisee and the tax collector at the temple (Luke 18:9–14)
- Jesus’s death at the ninth hour and the centurion’s response
- Jesus’s statement, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19)
- Jesus’s benediction before His ascension (Luke 24:50–53).<sup>31</sup>

Hamm correctly concludes that Zechariah’s priestly work in the temple as recorded in Luke 1:5–22 was the carrying out of the incense portion of the afternoon Tamid service.<sup>32</sup> For Hamm, Zechariah’s temple activity and Jesus’s benediction in Luke 24 “frame the Third Gospel and suggest that the Tamid service functions as an important symbolic background in Luke’s narrative theology.”<sup>33</sup> The significance of all this is summarized by Mekkattukunnel:

The priestly blessing fits in well at the finale of the Gospel narrative. For it is here that the risen Christ, after his one-for-all

<sup>29</sup> Kapic, 252.

<sup>30</sup> The Tamid service occurred at 3:00 p.m. daily in the temple and included the sacrifice of the second lamb of the day for atonement and sanctification of the Jewish people.

<sup>31</sup> Dennis Hamm, “The Tamid Service in Luke–Acts: The Cultic Background behind Luke’s Theology of Worship (Luke 1:5–25; 18:9–14; 24:50–53; Acts 3:1; 10:3, 30),” *CBQ* 65 (2003): 215–31.

<sup>32</sup> Hamm, 221.

<sup>33</sup> Hamm, 231.



sacrifice on the cross, appears in glory to his disciples. Luke is thus alluding to the fact which the author of the Letter to the Hebrews states explicitly in 8–9. The then existing cultic system was intrinsically incapable of effecting the mediation between God and humankind. For the Jewish high priest did not enter God’s dwelling on the Day of Atonement but entered a material human building (Heb 9:1, 8, 24) in which the Most High does not dwell (Acts 7:48; 17:24). Christ’s sacrifice changes the situation completely, surpassing the old system of sacrifice. Christ’s sacrificial offering in his own blood through “the greater and more perfect tent” (Heb 9:11; Luke 23:45) made him “mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 9:11–15; Luke 22:20; Jer 31:31–34). So Luke is all the more justified in depicting Christ after his passion and resurrection in a priestly manner.<sup>34</sup>

### **John**<sup>35</sup>

Early on in John’s Gospel we hear John the Baptist declare concerning Jesus: “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). This reference is an allusion to the Passover of Exodus 12 and to Isaiah 53.<sup>36</sup> This verse emphasizes two things: (1) the sacrificial character of the death of Jesus, in line with Isaiah 53; and (2) the fact that His death is for the sins of the entire world, understood as atoning for all the sins of all people.

The death of Christ is mentioned in the following places in the Gospel of John: 1:29; 2:19; 3:14–16; 6:5; 10:11; 11:49–52; 12:24; and 15:13. In Revelation the death of Christ is mentioned in 1:5; 5:9; 7:14; and 13:8. John 3:16 links the incarnation of Jesus to the cross and the offer of eternal

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<sup>34</sup> Mekkattukunnel, *The Priestly Blessing*, 207–08.

<sup>35</sup> For a good survey of the atonement in John’s Gospel and of works on the atonement in John’s Gospel, consult Leon Morris, “The Atonement in John’s Gospel,” *Criswell Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (1988): 49–64. See also Edward W. Klink III, “Gospel of John,” *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 515–21; and D. A. Carson, “Adumbrations of Atonement Theology in the Fourth Gospel,” *JETS* 57, no. 3 (2014): 513–22.

<sup>36</sup> Green, “Death of Jesus,” 162.

life for those who believe on Him. Like the Synoptic Gospel authors, John employs the Greek preposition *hyper* (“on behalf of”) to underscore the redemptive nature of the cross in 6:51; 10:11, 15; 11:50–52; 18:14.<sup>37</sup>

When Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19), obviously He was speaking metaphorically of His body in death. But even more is going on here. The temple is the place where sinners meet with God. In the death and resurrection of Christ, sinners are able to meet with God and have their sins forgiven. “Tying Jesus’ death and resurrection to the temple and its destruction and replacement associates the cross with sacrifice and expiation for anyone familiar with OT and early Christian thought,” as D. A. Carson notes.<sup>38</sup>

John 3:16 is perhaps the most well-known verse in all the Bible. Occurring at the end of the Nicodemus pericope, here Jesus asserts several key points in connection with the atonement. First, the motivation for atonement is the love of God. Second, the scope of God’s love is “the world,” a reference that includes all people without exception. Third, the atonement is viewed as initiated by God, and Christ is a gift to humanity, where “gave” signifies not just incarnation but crucifixion. Fourth, the benefits of the atonement (escape from judgment and eternal life) are available to any and all who will believe in Christ.

John places the death of Jesus within the context of the sacrificial lamb at the Jewish Passover in John 19:14, 36, as does Luke. This, connected with how Jesus Himself links His death with Isaiah 53, indicates the sacrificial and substitutionary nature of the atonement as well as John’s perspective that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah 53.

### *Acts*<sup>39</sup>

There are very few direct references to the atonement in Acts, although it is clear that apostolic preaching was grounded in the death and resurrection

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<sup>37</sup> Green, 162.

<sup>38</sup> Carson, “Adumbrations of Atonement Theology,” 515.

<sup>39</sup> For surveys of the theology of atonement in Acts, consult Joel B. Green, “Theologies of the Atonement in the New Testament,” *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 119–23; and I. Howard Marshall, “Acts (Book of),” *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, 361–64.

of Christ. We may summarize the concept of the atonement in Acts as follows:

- The atonement was a divine necessity. Jesus “was delivered up according to God’s determined plan and foreknowledge” (2:23).
- The atonement is viewed as the fulfillment of OT prophecy (3:18; 13:27; 17:3; 26:22–23).
- The basis of gospel preaching is the death and resurrection of Christ. This is evident from a survey of the content of the sermons in Acts.
- In Acts 8:32–35, Jesus is identified with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. Other references to Jesus as the Lord’s “Servant” and “the Just” indicate a background of Isaiah 53 (Acts 3:13–14, 26; 4:27, 29–30; 7:52; 22:14–15).
- The first explicit reference to the atonement in Acts appears in Paul’s address to the Ephesians elders (20:28). Paul exhorts the elders “to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” Here the atonement is described as something “purchased,” but Paul does not mean to intimate crass commercialism. Rather, he is using a metaphor to describe the fact that salvation comes at great cost—the blood of Christ shed on the cross.
- In Paul’s defense before King Agrippa, he linked the content of his preaching with what the prophets and Moses said would take place concerning the Messiah—“that the Christ would suffer, that He would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23). This is likely an allusion to Isaiah 53.

Green identifies three key texts that speak of salvation in connection with Jesus’s death and resurrection: Acts 2:14–40; Acts 5:31; and Acts 10:43. He wrongly claims that these three texts ground Luke’s soteriology more on the ascension of Christ than on His death on the cross. However, Green admits that Luke 22:19–20 and Acts 20:28 demonstrate Luke’s adherence to a more traditional concept of the atonement.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Green, “Theologies of the Atonement,” 120–21.

### *Pauline Letters*

Biblically speaking, more references to the atonement occur in the Pauline letters than in the letters of any other NT writer. “For Paul the question of the meaning of the cross is first a question about God—*theology*—and only then a question about anthropology and soteriology.”<sup>41</sup> It is also a question about practical theology in that Paul’s dominant topic in his preaching was the crucifixion—Paul referred to it as “the message [preaching] of the cross” in 1 Cor 1:18, and in 1 Cor 2:2 he stated, “I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” The gospel of Christ—His death and resurrection—is the central platform of Paul’s preaching (1 Cor 1:18, 15:1; 2:2; Gal 1:11; 1 Tim 1:3, 11; 2 Tim 2:8).

One does not have to read far into the Pauline letters to discover that Paul treats the death of Christ on the cross in something of a dualistic fashion with respect to the roles of God and Christ. First, God is the one who initiates the coming of Christ to die on the cross. God is the one who “gives up” Christ to die on the cross in Rom 4:25 and 8:32. Christ also is the subject who “gave Himself” for others (Gal 1:4; 2:20; Eph 5:2, 25; Titus 2:14; 1 Tim 2:6). Second, Paul employs terminology that Christ died “for us” in places like Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 5:7; Eph 5:2; 1 Thess 5:10; Titus 2:14 (cp. 1 Cor 8:11; 2 Cor 5:14–15; Gal 2:21).

Paul’s dependence on Isaiah 53 and its influence on him are also evident, as can be discerned in 1 Cor 15:3–4 and Rom 4:25. Second Corinthians 5:21 makes direct reference to Isa 53:6, as do Phil 2:7–8 and Rom 5:19. In Rom 10:16 and 15:21, Paul quotes directly from Isa 52:13–53:12. Paul also makes use of a wide variety of atonement metaphors in his letters. As to why there are so many Pauline images for atonement, Green suggests three reasons: (1) Atonement language is metaphorical. (2) Atonement language is pastoral. (3) Atonement language must account for wide cultural considerations.<sup>42</sup> The most complete presentation of atonement theology is found in the Pauline literature, and the centerpiece is found in Romans.

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<sup>41</sup> Green, “Death of Christ, 205; emphasis original.

<sup>42</sup> Green, “Theologies of the Atonement,” 130.

*Romans 3:21–26*

Many scholars consider Rom 3:21–26 to be the heart of the letter and the apex of Paul’s teaching on the atonement.<sup>43</sup>

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

This paragraph functions in the overall discourse of Romans as the major point or principle of the first eleven chapters and is the central unit to which nearly all of Romans 1–11 relates.<sup>44</sup> As such and because it is also considered to be one of the most, if not the most, important foundational

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 178. Michael F. Bird calls it the “epicenter” of Paul’s gospel (*Romans*, The Story of God Bible Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016], 110). Leon Morris suggests that Rom 3:21–26 may be “the most important single paragraph ever written” (Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 173). Hultgren notes: “Moreover, every atonement theory in the history of theology has had to come to terms with what Paul says in these verses” (Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011], 151). The passage is replete with exegetical difficulties. In reference to Rom 3:21–26, Denney remarks, “Every syllable of this has been contested, and the most various meanings forced into the words, or forced out of them” (Denney, *Studies in Theology*, 116 [see “Introduction,” n. 10]). For details concerning the exegetical debates that occur over these verses, consult the exegetical commentaries and see D. A. Carson, “Atonement in Romans 3:21–26,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 119–39; and Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 481–92.

<sup>44</sup> Ellis W. Deibler, *A Semantic Structural Analysis of Romans* (Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1998), 93.

passages in the NT on the atonement, I will examine it more thoroughly than space permits for other NT passages.

This paragraph initiates the second major division of Romans, following 1:18–3:20, where Paul has focused on proving the case that all people—Jews and Gentiles—are separated from God due to sin and are rightfully recipients of His wrath and judgment because of their sin (Rom 1:18). Romans 3:21–26 explains what constitutes God’s provision for the sin problem. The paragraph is composed of two sentences in the Greek text: 3:21–22a; 22b–26.

The first sentence (vv. 21–22a) states the fact that God has revealed He can declare people righteous so their sins can be forgiven and they can be brought back into a right relationship with God. The second sentence is comprised of two parts, 3:22b–24 and 3:22b–26. The first part states that God declares righteous people who put their faith in Christ. The second part explains how God can do this: Christ has atoned for the sins of all humanity by His death on the cross.<sup>45</sup>

The initial conjunctive phrase “But now” in verse 21 (and again in verse 26, creating an *inclusio*) marks a total reversal from 1:18–3:20, which focuses on all humanity lying under the wrath and judgment of God because of sin. The wrath of God is now counterbalanced by the righteousness of God.<sup>46</sup> God’s solution to the sin problem is His revelation and offer of righteousness—a right standing before Him, made available to sinners through the atonement provided by God through Christ.<sup>47</sup> Hultgren defines God’s “righteousness” as “God’s [saving] activity by which he justifies, or sets relationships right, between humanity and himself. As a consequence, humanity has been set free from the power of sin (3:9), a freedom that

<sup>45</sup> For a careful analysis of the semantic structure of this paragraph, consult Deibler, *A Semantic and Structural Analysis of Romans*, 92–97.

<sup>46</sup> Stott sees in this introductory phrase a threefold reference—logical (the developing argument), chronological (the present time), and eschatological (the new age has arrived). See John Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 108.

<sup>47</sup> In this passage, Paul likely has in mind the Day of Atonement ritual of Leviticus 16. See Douglas J. Moo, *Romans 1–8*, 220 (see chap. 1, n. 22); and Joel B. Green, “Death of Christ,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, IVP Bible Dictionary Series, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 208.

is received proleptically by faith (3:25).<sup>48</sup> This righteousness combines God's righteous character, His saving initiative, and the resultant right standing before Him when a person believes.<sup>49</sup>

Paul stresses God's saving initiative in the provision of the atonement and righteousness for fallen humanity by stating that this righteousness is "from God." Paul's logic is summarized by Green: "This logic introduces Christ's dual role in his death—his substitution *for humanity* before God and in the face of God's justice, but also his substitution *for God* in the face of human sin."<sup>50</sup>

The noun "righteousness" or its verbal form "to make righteous; to justify" occurs seven times in this paragraph.<sup>51</sup> This righteousness made available is not something totally new in that even the OT Law and Prophets spoke about it.<sup>52</sup> Paul further declares that this "right standing" before God is acquired by means of faith in Christ.<sup>53</sup> It is a right standing avail-

<sup>48</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 149.

<sup>49</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 109.

<sup>50</sup> Green, "Death of Christ," 208.

<sup>51</sup> Moo, *Romans 1–8*, 219. Moo says, "It occurs four times (vv. 21, 22, 25, 26 [‘His righteousness’ in the last two]) which the related verb ‘justify’ [*dikaioō*] is found twice . . . and the adjective ‘just’ [*dikaios*] once" (Moo, 219). Moo also argues the case for two meanings of "righteousness" in the passage: "We are presuming that ‘righteousness of God,’ which refers in vv. 21–22 to the justifying act of God, means something different in vv. 25–26—the ‘integrity’ of God, His always acting in complete accordance with His own character. We are convinced that this shift in meaning, though widely denied in our day, is required by the data of the text, and, indeed, gives to the text its extraordinary power and significance" (Moo, 219). See also Cousar on "the righteousness of God" (*A Theology of the Cross*, 117, n. 21 [see "Preface," n. 1]).

<sup>52</sup> In the OT, particularly the Psalms and the prophets, the righteousness of God is a major theme. As James Luther Mays notes, the Hebrew *tsedaqa* (usually translated "righteousness") is a "relational concept" based on the covenant rather than an "absolute ethical norm" (James Luther Mays, *Amos: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library [Philadelphia: WJK, 1969], 92). But we should note that God's righteousness as expressed in the OT is also an "absolute ethical norm."

<sup>53</sup> There is considerable difference of opinion as to whether the genitive construction in Greek in verse 22 should be interpreted as an objective genitive or a subjective genitive. Moo explains, "Context alone, then, can determine the force of the genitive, and contextual considerations overwhelmingly favor the objective genitive in Rom. 3:22." Moo notes "the consistent use of *pistis* [“faith”] throughout 3:21–4:25 to designate the faith exercised by people in God or Christ as the sole means of justification" (Moo, *Romans 1–8*, 224–25). Moo continues: "If *dia pisteos Iesou Christou* denotes faith in Jesus Christ, why has Paul added the clause *eis pantas taus pisteuontas*? . . . Paul's purpose is probably to highlight the universal availability of God's righteousness. . . . [, which] is available only through faith

able to “all” without any distinction or exception. “Justification is the act whereby God creates a new people, with a new status, in the new covenant, as part of the new age.”<sup>54</sup>

This righteousness is not automatically bestowed on anyone. The condition for its reception is faith in Christ. All are sinners, a universal category. All may be made righteous by meeting the one condition: faith in Christ. J. B. Lightfoot makes the important point that the concept of God’s righteousness in this context is twofold: It is something inherent in God, and it is something communicated to the believer. “There is thus both the external act, what is done for us, and the inherent change, what is done in us.”<sup>55</sup> Likewise Schreiner correctly notes “that God’s righteousness has two dimensions. On the one hand, it refers to God’s work in history that was manifested in the atoning work of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the righteousness of God is also subjectively appropriated in the present by faith.”<sup>56</sup>

Paul emphasizes the way in which this righteousness of God is received—“through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe” (Rom 3:22)—by the double reference to “faith” and “believe.” Paul is also emphasizing the universality of redemption, the universal availability of God’s righteousness to all people. It is available only through faith in

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in Christ, but it is available to *anyone* who has faith in Christ” (225). On “through faith in Jesus” vs. “through the faith of Jesus,” see also Hultgren (*Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 150) and Bird (*Romans*, 112–15), both of whom opt for the translation “through faith in Jesus.” Bird attempts to capture something of both meanings when he paraphrases: “God’s righteousness comes to humanity through faith in his saving action revealed in Jesus’ faithfulness, death, and resurrection for everyone who believes in him” (115).

<sup>54</sup> Bird, 115–16. We cannot here enter into the current debates within Pauline studies on the meaning of justification and concomitantly the imputation of Christ’s active and/or passive obedience to the believer. For an accessible overview, consult Peter T. O’Brien, “Justification in Paul and Some Crucial Issues of the Last Two Decades,” in *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 69–81. See also D. A. Carson, “The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields,” in *Justification: What’s at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007); and Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 469–77.

<sup>55</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul from Unpublished Commentaries* (New York: Macmillan, 1895; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 270.

<sup>56</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 184.



Christ, but it is available to anyone who exercises faith in Christ. The “all” is emphasized by the following phrase, “For there is no difference.” God shows no partiality as Paul established in Rom 2:11.<sup>57</sup>

This revealed righteousness is not something that would have come as a surprise to Moses and the prophets. The promises God made through the Law and the Prophets have now come to fulfillment in Christ.<sup>58</sup> In interesting fashion, Paul declares that this righteousness offered to sinners is simultaneously continuous and discontinuous with the law. Obedience to the law is not, and never was, the basis for access to salvation.<sup>59</sup> The law does, however possess a prophetic function for Paul.<sup>60</sup> The promise of the Law and the Prophets is seen many times throughout the OT. “This promise periodically emerges in the scenes of the biblical story like a flashing light pointing people to an emergency exit. This salvific promise is tacitly mentioned, elsewhere typified by example, and even explicitly prophesied in an array of verses, visions, victims, and victories in the biblical discourse.”<sup>61</sup>

Paul continues by connecting this “righteousness” from God with justification.<sup>62</sup> Believers are “justified freely” and by God’s “grace” (Rom 3:22–24). The means for this justification is “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (v. 24). God Himself “set forth” Christ as a “propitiation.” Notice the connection between the propitiation or atoning sacrifice of Christ and “His blood,” signifying His sacrificial and substitutionary death on the cross.

In doing so, God demonstrated His own righteousness in “passing over” the sins of humanity prior to the final sacrifice for sins by Christ on

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<sup>57</sup> Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 155.

<sup>58</sup> Hultgren, 154.

<sup>59</sup> “The law of God contemplated no atonement, and anticipated no reparation of its dishonor, apart from the punishment of personal transgressors” (Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 223 [see chap. 1, n. 4]).

<sup>60</sup> Bird, *Romans*, 111–12. See also Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 135–58.

<sup>61</sup> Bird, *Romans*, 112. Bird also compares it to billboards on the road to salvation pointing the way to Christ.

<sup>62</sup> For an excellent discussion on Paul’s theology of justification, consult Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification*, NSBT 9, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

the cross (v. 25). Appeal can be made to Acts 17:30, which expresses the idea that the demonstration of God's righteousness through Christ's cross was necessary because sins had been passed over, meaning they had not been permanently forgiven.<sup>63</sup> Until the time of Christ's atonement, God had initiated a stay of execution, so to speak. He temporarily withheld His full and final judgment against sin. Until the cross, sins committed from Adam and Eve onward "were neither punished as they deserved nor atoned for as they were going to be."<sup>64</sup>

Paul is answering the question articulated by John Stott: How can the unrighteous of all sinners before the death of Christ on the cross be declared righteous by God without compromising His own righteous character or condoning our unrighteousness?<sup>65</sup> "At the present time," i.e., at the time of Paul's writing, God had "demonstrated" His righteousness by fully and finally dealing with the sin problem in the cross of Christ. Now, God Himself can justly declare as righteous anyone who has faith in Jesus because of the objective atonement in history.

This offer of a right standing before God is based on God's saving initiative coupled with His righteous character and grounded in the atonement of Christ. The offer is to all because (1) atonement has been made for all, and (2) a right standing before God is needed by all.

When Paul speaks of "justification," he is speaking of pardon for sin in the sense that sin is forgiven because the penalty for sin has been met. But that is not all. Justification is the bestowal of a righteous status in a legal sense. But that, too, is not all. Justification includes a sinner's reinstatement into fellowship with God. It is not just a matter of the judge saying to the guilty party, "You are free. Your debt is paid." In this case, God says

<sup>63</sup> Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*, 273.

<sup>64</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans 1–8*, 2 vols., ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 1975), 1:212. As Otto Weber notes, the OT sacrifices provide no more than the maintenance of the divine forbearance as in Rom 3:25 (Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell L. Guder, 2 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 2:201).

<sup>65</sup> John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 112. Or, as articulated by Bird: "So what happens when God's impartiality as a cosmic judge of the world meets with God's covenantal faithfulness to bring salvation to the world through Israel? How does God's punitive justice comport with God's saving justice? . . . Paul's answer is given in 3:21–4:25" (Bird, *Romans*, 110).

to the sinner, “You are now in a new relationship with Me through My love—a relationship I have made possible by paying your penalty.”<sup>66</sup>

John Stott helpfully summarizes what is happening in Rom 3:21–26. He notes that the source of our justification is God and His grace; the ground for our justification is Christ and His cross; and the means of our justification is our faith in Christ.<sup>67</sup>

This text employs several key atonement terms. First, on the cross Christ provided “redemption” (24b). Second, Christ provided “propitiation” (25a). Third, Christ provided justification (25b–26). The Greek word translated “redemption” (*apolytrōseōs*) is a commercial term borrowed from the marketplace. While “redemption” is the translation most often used, the word has a range of meanings including “acquittal,” “release,” and “deliverance.” In the OT, the term was used of slaves set free from bondage and Israel redeemed (set free) from Egyptian captivity. In some NT texts, *apolytrōsis* does not specifically include the payment of a price, but “invariably the notion of ‘cost’ is present,” and the main focus is on deliverance through payment of a price.<sup>68</sup> The word appears in Rom 3:24 and in Luke 21:28; Rom 8:23; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:7, 14; Col 1:14; and Heb 9:15; 11:35. “In this particular case [Rom 3:24] it signifies being set free from the power of sin as the dominating condition of humanity (Rom 3:9) and, as a consequence, being set free from the divine wrath at the final judgment (Rom 5:9).”<sup>69</sup>

This redemption is “in Christ Jesus.” Paul often uses this phrase to refer to believers who have experienced redemption and are thus in union with Christ, hence, redemption viewed from the perspective of having been both accomplished and applied. Such is not the case in Rom 3:24. Here Paul is using the instrumental case in Greek—the phrase addresses the means whereby God has accomplished redemption, irrespective of its application. Other examples of this usage in Paul include Rom 6:23;

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<sup>66</sup> See Marcus L. Loane, *This Surpassing Excellence: Textual Studies in the Epistles to the Churches of Galatia and Philippi* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1969), 94, as noted by Stott, *Romans*, 110.

<sup>67</sup> Stott, *Romans*, 111–18.

<sup>68</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 190.

<sup>69</sup> Hultgren, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 156.

1 Cor 1:4; 15:22; 2 Cor 5:19; Gal 3:14; and here in Rom 3:24.<sup>70</sup> In Rom 3:24, Paul is affirming “justification occurs *through* redemption and *in* Christ Jesus. Grace is the efficient cause of justification, but its instrumental cause is redemption.”<sup>71</sup>

The Greek word translated “propitiation” (*hilastērion*, the only use in the Pauline corpus) is capable of three possible meanings: (1) “mercy seat” (Hb. *kapporet*, Exod 25:17–22), alluding to the golden slab atop the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies in the tabernacle and later the temple;<sup>72</sup> (2) expiation of sin on the basis of sacrifice; (3) propitiation (including expiation of sin).<sup>73</sup> No doubt all three meanings inhere in Paul’s usage (we do not need to succumb to the false dichotomy of whether Paul intends “propitiation” or “expiation”), but “propitiation” is the best translation for the Greek word. Usage of *hilastērion* and its cognates includes the notion of God’s wrath and expiation of sin. The previous context of Rom 1:18–3:20 makes this clear. God’s wrath is the result of human sin (1:18), and the judgment of God against sin involves His wrath (2:5; 3:5–6).<sup>74</sup> As Stott so aptly puts it: “Thus God himself gave himself to save us from himself.”<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Hultgren, 156.

<sup>71</sup> Bird, *Romans*, 117, footnoting Constantine Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 74, 114–15.

<sup>72</sup> For a good case for this rendering, consult Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 486–89. *Hilastērion* designates the place of atonement, never the sacrificial victim, according to Daniel P. Bailey, “Jesus as the Mercy Seat: The Semantics and Theology of Paul’s Use of *Hilasterion* in Romans 3:25” (PhD diss., Cambridge University, 1999).

<sup>73</sup> Schreiner accurately perceives the interpretive false dichotomies that are often asserted with respect to this text: “Indeed, a common interpretive error in this text is to posit either-or solutions: either martyr traditions or Lev. 16 functions as the background, either propitiation or expiation is in view, and if Jesus is the sacrifice then he cannot be portrayed as the place where the blood is sprinkled. I have argued that all of these conceptions are present in Rom. 3:21–26. What Jesus accomplished on the cross transcended previous categories and constituted their fulfillment” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 194).

<sup>74</sup> Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 144–213 (see chap. 1, n. 6); 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), 23–48; Schreiner, *Romans*, 191. As Green points out, “[F]or Paul, wrath is not a divine property or essential attribute of God. As he develops this concept in Romans 1, ‘wrath’ is, rather, the active presence of God’s judgment toward ‘all ungodliness and wickedness’ (Rom 1:18)” (see Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross*, 54 [see “Introduction,” n. 26]).

<sup>75</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 115.

This act of atonement was also a “demonstration” of divine forbearance in the OT that postponed judgment and illustrated divine justice in the NT, which exacted justice in fulfillment of the Law. Hence God is said to be both “just and the justifier” (Rom 3:26).<sup>76</sup> As Schreiner notes, the question is not “How can God justly punish people for their sins?” but “How can God justly forgive anyone?”<sup>77</sup> Paul’s answer is that God’s forgiveness does not obscure His righteousness; it displays His righteousness. Pendleton expresses it well: “In short, the atonement of Christ exerts so important an influence on the throne of God, as to make its occupant ‘just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.’ Rom. iii. 26. . . . Without the atonement we should have heard of God as just and the condemner—with it we hear of him as ‘just and the justifier.’”<sup>78</sup>

The means of this justification is three times stated to be faith in Christ, a necessity for the application of the benefits of the atonement. The atonement is not *ipso facto* applied to anyone. There is a condition of faith which must be met, a condition annexed by God Himself.

Some have questioned why the phrase “by His blood, through faith” (Rom 3:25) is mentioned at this point in the argument. They suggest that the best interpretation of the context is to construe the meaning of “through faith” as a parallel expression to “by His blood,” thus denoting not the human response for the reception of grace, as in the previous reference, but here the faithfulness of Jesus demonstrated in His obedience to the cross. While this is a possible interpretation, Schreiner’s rationale for taking the phrase as a reference to believer’s faith in Christ wins the day.<sup>79</sup>

In verse 24, the phrase “being justified” must refer back to the “all” in 3:23. The “all” is an inclusive group that can hardly be qualified, according

<sup>76</sup> Schreiner suggests that the Greek conjunction *kai* connecting the two clauses is probably concessive, thus applied to the CSB translation, would be rendered “so that He would be righteous even in declaring righteous the one who has faith in Jesus” (Schreiner, *Romans*, 198).

<sup>77</sup> Schreiner, 198.

<sup>78</sup> Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 227–28.

<sup>79</sup> Schreiner, *Romans*, 185. Moo comments, “It is harder to know whether . . . (*en to autou haimati*, ‘in his blood’) is the object of *pisteos*—‘faith in his blood’—or a further modifier of *hilasterion*—‘a propitiation in blood’. . . the latter is preferable. The *en* in this case is probably instrumental, singling out Christ’s blood as the means by which God’s wrath is propitiated” (Moo, *Romans*, 238).

to Cousar.<sup>80</sup> The present tense participle translated “being justified” indicates that Paul is stating a principle and not speaking of actual individuals who have experienced God’s justifying act. The stress is on the way in which God justifies—He does so “freely by His grace.”<sup>81</sup> However, “be . . . the justifier of” in 3:26 (the same Greek verb, *dikaioō*, translated as “being justified” in v. 24) does not refer to the “all” who have sinned (v. 23) but to “the one who has faith in Jesus.” Paul moves from the principle of justification, which is possible for the “all” who have sinned to the specific individual who is declared righteous or is justified because he has expressed faith in Jesus. Faith is the condition for justification to occur.

Hultgren notes that there are two types of statements of God’s justifying activity in the Pauline letters. One type does not mention faith but expresses or implies the justification of all humanity (Rom 3:24; 5:6–9). These texts are found in strongly theocentric contexts. The Christological grounding is found in Rom 5:12–21, where the universal availability and offer of grace in Christ exceeds the universality of Adam’s sin.<sup>82</sup> Unless Christ died for the sins of all, the universality of grace cannot surpass the universality of Adam’s sin. God does not act prejudicially, with arbitrary love, toward only some and not all people. Christ is available to save anyone and everyone who believes because atonement has been made for the sins of everyone. God offers the same grace to all; “For there is no difference” (Rom 3:22)—a statement that does not mean there are no ethnic distinctions, which would be obviously false. Rather, there is no distinction in

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<sup>80</sup> Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross*, 59 (see “Preface,” n. 1).

<sup>81</sup> See Sam K. Williams, *Jesus’ Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept*, HDR 2 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975), 15. Beale interprets the Greek participle as “indicating a concessive idea” in connection with v. 23 (“all have sinned, though they are justified,” see Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 483, n. 22), but the semantic structure does not justify this. Better is to take the participle as semantically encoding a parenthetical amplification of v. 22a (God declares people righteous) and functioning as the result of the means of redemption in v. 24b. Thus, the meaning is “God declares every person who trusts in Christ as righteous” (v. 22a) on the grounds of v. 22b (“since there is no difference”), followed by v. 23 (“for all have sinned”), which grounds the conclusion of v. 22a (“God declares people righteous”). He does this by means of redeeming them through His death (v. 24b). See Deibler, *A Semantic Structural Analysis of Romans*, 92–95.

<sup>82</sup> Arland J. Hultgren, *Christ and His Benefits: Christology and Redemption in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 54.

terms of preferring one and neglecting the other. “All have sinned” makes any distinction moot.<sup>83</sup>

The second type of statement explicitly mentions faith (either as a verb or noun) and tends toward a forensic interpretation of God’s justifying activity (Rom 3:22,26; 5:1; 10:4). Hultgren makes the point that the two statements need to be distinguished but seen as related. Methodologically, the universal statements demand prior consideration. “Only in light of them should the more specialized statements of justification by faith be taken up. In turn, each type has its particular function to perform in the strategy of the letters.”<sup>84</sup>

Paul speaks of Christ’s death as providing “redemption” (Rom 3:24), which is released from bondage through the payment of a price. This price, which was paid at the cross, was the blood of Christ shed for the sins of the world. However, like justification, the effect of “redemption” is not ipso facto liberating to anyone. It must first be applied to each person, and the condition of its application is faith in Christ, as Paul reiterates three times in Rom 3:21–26.

In the Greek text, verses 25–26 comprise one long clause, the first five words of which comprise the main proposition: “God presented Him as a propitiation.” The means by which God justifies sinners is Christ’s death on the cross as a “redemption” and “propitiation.” On the lexical meaning and usage of these terms, see chapter 1, “Atonement: Terminology and Concepts.”

In Rom 3:24–26, God’s action with respect to human sin is, first, universal in scope. The death of Jesus effects a complete change in the situation between sinful humanity and God. In the context, grace that is available to all and offered to all on the grounds of an atonement for the sins of all is essential to Paul’s argument that with God there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles. Because there is no distinction, therefore there is no difference in the provision of the atonement for the sins of all and the offer of salvation to all people.

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<sup>83</sup> Adolf Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 95.

<sup>84</sup> Hultgren, *Christ and His Benefits*, 61. The death of Christ gains atonement for sins, but it does not yet deliver salvation to individuals. These two are carefully separated from each other in Paul’s theology” (Timo Eskola, *Theodicy and Predestination in Pauline Soteriology*, in *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*, 2. Reihe, ed. Martin Hengel and Otfried Hofius [Mohr Siebeck, 1998/Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017], 185–86).

To summarize, justification is by the death of Christ, in so far as its *basis* is concerned; it is by the grace of God, in so far as its *cause* is concerned; it is by faith, in so far as its *application* is concerned.<sup>85</sup> Paul asserts three key points in this paragraph: (1) All human beings are equal in their confirmed sin state and are in need of salvation. (2) Christ has provided an atonement for the sins of all people through His own death on the cross. (3) All people have equal access to God's righteousness through faith in Christ. There is an equality between Jews and Gentiles (i.e., all humanity) in terms of judgment, according to Rom 1:18–3:20, and there is an equality between Jews and Gentiles (i.e., all humanity) in the possibility of salvation, as stated in Rom 3:21–26 and again, in summary fashion, in Romans 9–11, especially 11:32.

What does this paragraph say about the intent, extent, and application of the atonement? Concerning *intent*, atonement is necessary for God to accomplish His goal of providing His righteousness to people. Also, God apparently desires that all people avail themselves of His provision of righteousness. "There is no difference," according to Rom 3:22. According to some, nevertheless, God makes a distinction between the elect and the reprobate with respect to His intention to save. The elect are elect unconditionally by God in eternity past. Reasons for this election are not stated in Scripture. For reasons known only to Himself, God has no special intention of saving the non-elect.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, this text makes no mention of election in relationship to the atonement and people who have faith in Christ. A question worth asking is: How can God be said to be righteous if He arbitrarily selects some to save from their sins yet passes over others? If He chooses to save all or none, His righteousness would not be called into question. But if He chooses some to be saved and some to be reprobated, it is difficult to see how His divine character can fail to be impugned on this point.

Concerning the *extent* of the atonement, the clear implication is that it has been accomplished for all people and not for only some. This comports

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<sup>85</sup> Hultgren, 61.

<sup>86</sup> While it is true that some Calvinists even say that God "intends" the salvation of all, they mean this in terms of God's so-called "revealed" or "preceptive will," not in His "secret" or "decretal will."



with many other texts that affirm in a straightforward manner the unlimited extent of the atonement as being for the sins of all people (Mark 10:45; John 1:29; 3:16; Rom 5:8, 18–19; 1 Cor 15:3–4; 2 Cor 5:14–21; 1 Tim 2:4–6; Titus 2:14; Heb 2:9; 2 Pet 2:1; 1 John 2:2).

Those who affirm limited atonement assert that, with respect to the extent of the atonement, God has distinguished two categories of the human race—those for whose sins Jesus died and those for whose sins He did not die. Limitarians believe that Christ eventually justifies (declares righteous) only those for whom He died. Romans 3:21–26 does not say this. God declares righteous everyone who believes in Christ. The thrust of the text is the assertion of a righteousness available to all on the grounds of atonement and on condition of faith, the latter point being mentioned three times by Paul. The “all” who have sinned can be justified freely by God’s grace. There is no limitation or conditionality with respect to the provision of the atonement itself. Christ does not become a propitiation only when people believe in Him. He is the propitiation for all sin and all sinners, whether believers or unbelievers (1 John 2:2). The only conditionality concerns the application of the atonement to an individual sinner, and that condition is clearly stated to be faith in Christ. As all are sinners, so all may be made righteous if they meet God’s condition for salvation—faith in Christ. This passage places no limitation in the atonement itself. The limitation has to do with the *application* of the atonement. The application is limited by a condition that must necessarily be fulfilled for salvation (justification, forgiveness, redemption) to occur: faith.

God declares people righteous by means of providing redemption for them. He does this by means of His atonement for them (v. 24). Justification (being declared righteous by God) is grounded in redemption (release through payment of the price of the cross—i.e., the death of Jesus), is conditioned on faith in Christ, and occurs on the grounds of and by means of atonement (the satisfaction of the wrath of God via the expiation of sin). The application of the atonement is based on meeting God’s required condition: faith. God justifies all who believe on Christ.

*Romans 5:6–11*

For when we were still without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

Christ “died for” the ungodly. This means He died for the sins of the ungodly in the way described in 3:21–26. Since all unbelieving humanity is “ungodly,” the implication here is that Christ died for all the ungodly—a universal atonement.

Gathercole notes that Paul’s language in this passage echoes the language used frequently in non-Christian literature to describe substitutionary deaths.

In sum, it is not simply that Jesus’s death differs from these heroic Greek and Roman deaths. Many of the same elements are there. The theme of vicarious death overall, however, is radically subverted by Paul. In these examples from classical literature, there is first the relationship, and this relationship provides the context that makes the vicarious death at least understandable, even if it is still heroic. In the case of the Christ, however, his death does not conform to any existing philosophical norm. In Romans 5, Christ’s death creates a friendship where there had been enmity.<sup>87</sup>

For the first time in Romans, Paul employs the word *love* in connection with the atonement. Christ’s death is motivated by God’s love and is a

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<sup>87</sup> Simon Gathercole, *Defending Substitution: An Essay on Atonement in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 105–06.

demonstration of that love. The cross is the lens through which humanity is able to see and know God's love.

The death of Christ as that which reconciles God to sinners is a theological theme Paul develops in 2 Cor 5:14–21, in which reconciliation is something God has provided. We do not effect reconciliation with God. We receive His already accomplished reconciliation. The sinner receives what already exists as preceding whatever action he does. Paul is affirming a reconciliation that in one sense is objectively completed and is the grounds for subjective reconciliation when a person believes in Christ.

The term *reconciliation* presupposes prior hostile relations. Biblically, God is offended by the sin of humanity and of each particular human. He can justly damn all of us. However, in His mercy and grace, He has made a way whereby humans, unlike fallen angels, may be restored to fellowship with Him. He has done this in the legal accomplishment of the cross. Having satisfied His righteous requirements, He now stands ready to pardon any sinner who comes to Him on the terms of repentance and faith. As the Lutheran theologian Luthardt said in respect to Rom 5:10, "A change of attitude *on the part of God* is meant."<sup>88</sup> Yet we must be careful in speaking this way. Fleming Rutledge states, in reference to Rom 5:8–10,

God did not change his mind about us on account of the cross or on any other account. He did not need to have his mind changed. He was never opposed to us. It is not *his opposition to us* but *our opposition to him* that had to be overcome, and the only way it could be overcome was from God's side, by God's initiative, from inside human flesh—the human flesh of the Son. The divine hostility, or wrath of God, has always been an aspect of his love. It is not separate from God's love, it is not opposition to God's love, it is not something in God that had to be overcome.<sup>89</sup>

Bruce McCormack expresses a similar notion when he states,

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<sup>88</sup> Christoph Ernst Luthardt, cited by Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 4 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1951), 2:346; emphasis original.

<sup>89</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 323 (see "Introduction," n. 41). But in a sense His wrath is an extension of offended justice, which in fact did need to be "satisfied." This the cross accomplished.

God will not allow anything to stand in the way of his love. The holiness of the divine love is its irresistibility. God's will to love the creature will not be stopped by the will of the creature to resist that love. God's love will reach its goal, even if the path to that end lies through condemning, excluding, and annihilating all resistance to it. God's love turns to wrath when it is resisted, but not for a minute does it cease to be love even when it expresses itself as wrath.<sup>90</sup>

When we repent and believe, we are then restored to peaceful relations to God on just terms—reconciled. Once we receive this “reconciliation,” we are then reconciled to the God who already reconciled Himself to us previously in the all-sufficient atonement of the cross, which is why He came to us proclaiming a desire for peace. He has laid down His arms, as it were (the rigorous demands of the law), and now bids us to lay down our arms—our sinful weapons and hostility. As the Puritan Thomas Watson said, “Now God hangs forth the white flag and is willing to parley with sinners.”<sup>91</sup>

Think of it this way. God is the offended party. We are the offenders. God made a way to satisfy the legal requirements necessary for restored relations between Himself and us. This He did by means of the death of Christ on the cross. This is objective reconciliation. When we, the offenders, “receive” this offer of reconciliation, meeting God's condition for it, we may then be said to be “reconciled” to God. This is subjective reconciliation. This is Paul's point also in 2 Cor 5:14–21, as we will now discuss.

### *Romans 5:18–19*

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's

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<sup>90</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, *For Us and Our Salvation: Incarnation and Atonement in the Reformed Tradition*, Studies in Reformed Theology and History 1, no. 2 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Theological Seminary, 1993): 28–29.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Doctrine of Repentance* (1668; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 87.

disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

Paul refers to Christ's death as a "righteous act" and an act of "obedience" leading to justification. The two verses parallel each other—Adam's sin leads to condemnation for all humanity; Christ's death leads to a salvation available to all humanity.

What is the connection between the "all" (Gk. *pantas*) of verse 18 and the "many" (Gk. *polloi*) of verse 19? The passage cannot be interpreted as teaching either (1) universalism or (2) limited atonement. With respect to universalism, Longenecker states, concerning these verses:

The universalism of God's grace, which has been made effective 'through Jesus Christ our Lord,' has to do with what God has provided on behalf of all people. It does not, however, as seen in the future tense ('will be') of the verbs (both expressed and implied) in 5:18–19 and the subjunctive mood ('may' or 'might') of the verb in 5:21, assure inevitability, but rather speaks of what God has graciously provided, to which people need to respond positively.<sup>92</sup>

With respect to limited atonement, we have already demonstrated that the use of "many" here and elsewhere is a Hebrew idiom that means "all."<sup>93</sup> The parallelism Paul employs makes this clear as well. Paul has already established the necessity of faith before the atonement becomes effective.

When Paul says "to all men, resulting in justification of life" (Rom 5:18), he obviously does not mean to suggest that merely by virtue of the

<sup>92</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 601.

<sup>93</sup> As Longenecker states, "Cf. the equivalent uses of 'all' and 'many' in the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' healing the sick in Galilee, where Mark 1:32, 34 says people brought 'all who were sick' to Jesus and he healed 'many' of them; Matt 8:16 says they brought 'many' to him and he healed 'all' of them; and Luke 4:40 reads that they brought to him 'all' the sick and he healed 'everyone.' Note also the use of 'the many' (*οἱ πολλοί* [*hoi polloi*]) in Rom 5:19 for both (1) all those affected by Adam's sin and (2) all those who receive God's gift of grace through the obedience of Jesus" (Longenecker, 595, n. 50). On the use of "many" meaning "all" in the context of limited atonement, see also Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 694–95 (see chap. 1, n. 16).

atonement “all men” (i.e., all people) are actually justified. This would be universalism, a false doctrine. Redemption accomplished does not mean redemption applied. Paul is stating a principle: On the grounds of the atonement, justification is now possible for all people. Contextually, Rom 5:17 speaks of “those who receive,” implying that not all receive the gift of justification and that only those who do receive it will be saved from sin. Paul has already established in Romans 3 and 4 that salvation is only appropriated by faith.

With respect to Rom 5:18–19, William Lane Craig states,

Christ’s atoning sacrifice is here conceived as universal in its scope. The representative nature of Christ’s death becomes clear in Paul’s statement: “We are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all died” (II Cor 5.14). Christ did not simply die in my place: rather, what my representative did I did. Christ’s death was representatively our death. This is also the import of the author of Hebrews’ words: “that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one” (Heb 2.9).<sup>94</sup>

*Romans 8:32–34*

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

This passage states several truths concerning the atonement. First, as the subject who “delivered Him [Christ] up,” God is the one who initiated the atonement. Second, Paul says that Christ was “delivered . . . up” (Gk. *paredoken*), terminology that is sacrificial in nature.<sup>95</sup> Third, Christ was

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<sup>94</sup> Craig, *The Atonement*, 26 (see “Introduction,” n. 46).

<sup>95</sup> The use of this Greek verb in the LXX version of Isa 53:12 indicates its sacrificial nature in this context.

offered up “for us all.” In this context, Paul is addressing believers and their current status as having been justified because they have believed in Christ. The focus is on the status of believers who are now in relationship with Christ via justification.

Some have attempted to use this text to support limited atonement. Their argument is as follows. The “all” for whom Christ died, according to this passage, are given “all things.” The non-elect are not given all things; therefore, Christ did not die for them. This is a *modus tollens* argument as distinguished from a *modus ponens*<sup>96</sup> argument with an *a fortiori* (greater to the lesser) layer as well: (1) If Christ died for you (the greater thing), you will be given “all things,” including all consequent gifts (lesser things). (2) Some—i.e., the non-elect—are not given the lesser things. (3) Therefore, Christ did not die for some (the non-elect). If P (you are died-for; the greater thing), then Q (all things are given; the lesser things). Not Q (some are not given all things); therefore not P. The argument has a valid *modus tollens* form, but it is an *unsound* argument:

All the died-for receive all things.  
Some do not receive all things;  
Therefore, they are not died-for.

Here is the fallacy: The “us” (in “delivered Him up for us all,” Rom 8:32) is being converted into “all for whom Christ died,” when, contextually, the “us” refers to believers, not all for whom Christ died.

This line of reasoning fails to recognize that Paul is addressing believers and describing their status as believers in relation to God’s blessings. It confuses what Paul says to believers and about believers and extrapolates it into an abstraction concerning all the elect, whether believing or unbelieving. But this merely begs the question concerning the extent of the atonement. The “all” in this passage refers to all believers, as context

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<sup>96</sup> *Modus ponens* is a logical argument of the form “If A, then B; therefore, B.” *Modus Tollens* is a logical argument of the form “If A, then B; not B; therefore, not A.” Boruch A. Brody, “Logical Terms, Glossary of,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vols., ed. Paul Edwards, repr. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 5:69.

makes clear. To conclude from Rom 8:32 that Christ died only for believers and not for anyone else is to invoke the *negative inference fallacy*.<sup>97</sup>

Paul is not speaking about all the elect *qua* elect, considered as an abstract class (the as yet unborn elect and the living but unbelieving elect). Paul's point is that no condemnation accrues to believers for whom Christ died (the greatest gift) and that they will be given all things (the lesser gifts), not that Christ did not die for all unbelievers.<sup>98</sup>

### *1 Corinthians 15:3–4*

For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

This passage is considered to be the key text that comes nearest to a definition of the gospel in the NT. The atonement is described in the words “died for our sins.” What is important here is the use of the preposition “for” (Gk. *hyper*). Paul employs this preposition often in atonement contexts (e.g., Rom 5:6, 8; 14:15; 2 Cor 5:14; Gal 1:4; 2:20; 3:13; 1 Thess 5:10). The use of *for* here indicates “in the place of,” “as a substitute for.”<sup>99</sup> This definition of the gospel is couched in the context of Paul's standard *modus*

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<sup>97</sup> The proof of a given proposition does not disprove its converse. One cannot infer a negative (e.g., “Christ did not die for Group A”) from a positive statement (e.g., “Christ did die for Group B”).

<sup>98</sup> See Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 472. Paul's point in this passage is parallel to Rom 5:8–10. Christ died for sinners, and those who are now justified by His blood and reconciled to Him through faith shall be saved from God's wrath and receive all things with Christ. For a detailed analysis of this text and why it does not teach limited atonement, see David W. Ponter, “Romans 8:32 and the Argument for Limited Atonement,” *Calvin and Calvinism: An Elenchus for Classic-Moderate Calvinism* (blog), May 25, 2011, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=12487>; and “Romans 8:32 and the Argument for Limited Atonement (Revisited),” *Calvin and Calvinism: An Elenchus for Classic-Moderate Calvinism* (blog), October 25, 2012, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=12483>. On the significance of this text for the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, see Gathercole, *Defending Substitution*, 55–79.

<sup>99</sup> On the meaning and use of the Greek preposition *hyper*, see H. Riesenfeld, “ὕπερ,” *TDNT*, 8:507–16.



*operandi* when he came into a city for the first time to preach (see 1 Cor 15:11).

Unlike Rom 3:21–26, no conditions are attached. Like Rom 3:21–26, no reduction of scope is mentioned. As Cousar states, “An event occurred in the past, once-and-for-all, which has universal dimensions.”<sup>100</sup> Hultgren agrees: “It is not said that it happened for the sake of an elect or even for those who would come to believe in the death as atoning. Instead the ‘objective’ and ‘universal’ character of the atoning death of Christ is what constitutes the gospel as being truly good news.”<sup>101</sup> Indeed, unless the extent of the atonement is for the sins of all people, the gospel is certainly not good news to those for whose sins no atonement was made.

This text illustrates the vital connection between the atonement, the extent of the atonement, and preaching. When Paul summarizes the gospel in 1 Cor 15:3–4, he connects the content of the gospel with the content of his preaching when he first came to Corinth. Paul’s consistent practice was to enter a city and preach nothing less than “Christ died for our sins.” Here Paul is reminding the Corinthians of the message he preached to them when he first came to Corinth (Acts 18:1–18). He clearly affirms that the content of the gospel he preached in Corinth included the fact that “Christ died for our sins.” Notice carefully that Paul is saying that this is what he preached pre-conversion, not post-conversion. Thus, the “our” in his statement cannot be taken to refer to all the elect or merely the believing elect, which is what the high Calvinist is forced to argue. The entire pericope of 1 Cor 15:3–11 should be kept in mind. Notice how Paul, when he gets to verse 11 (“Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed”), comes back around to what he had said in verse 3: “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received.” The customary present tense in Greek<sup>102</sup> used by Paul when he says “so we preach,” along with the aorist tense in Greek for “believed,” makes it clear that Paul refers to a past point in time when they believed, as was his custom to preach that Christ died for their sins. What did Paul preach to them in his evangelistic

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<sup>100</sup> Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross*, 56.

<sup>101</sup> Hultgren, *Christ and His Benefits*, 50–51.

<sup>102</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 224–25.

efforts to win all of the unsaved to Christ? He preached the gospel indiscriminately to all, which included “Christ died for our sins.”

The assertion often made by some Calvinists that Paul did not preach a universal atonement and that he never told any unsaved audience “Christ died for your sins” is false, based on 1 Cor 15:3–11. One wonders if a reluctance to say “Christ died for you” implicitly expresses a reluctance to tell unsaved people that God is both willing and prepared on His part to save them all if they will repent and believe. The point is that God is prepared to save all by virtue of Christ’s unlimited satisfaction, even if a person does not believe. His objective preparation still exists on His part, no matter if a person believes or not. But He will only grant what is promised if that person receives it through faith.

### *2 Corinthians 5:14–21*

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Several important aspects of the atonement are taught in this passage. First, Paul affirms the universal scope of the atonement: “One died for

all” (v. 14).<sup>103</sup> Second, Paul affirms that Christ’s love is demonstrated in a universal atonement (vv. 14–15). The NEB translation gets at Paul’s point in the Greek text: “For the love of Christ leaves us no choice, when once we have reached the conclusion that one man died for all.” How can it be said that Jesus loves and seeks to save all people if He did not die for all people?

Third, through the death of Christ, God reconciled the world to Himself objectively (v. 19).<sup>104</sup> By the use of “world” (Gk. *kosmon*), Paul indicates once again the universal scope of the atonement. Nowhere in Scripture is the “world” (Gk. *kosmos*) used for the elect. God is “not imputing their trespasses to them.”

Fourth, in similar fashion to Rom 3:21–26, the result of this objective reconciliation for the unbelieving world is God’s “not counting their trespasses against them” in the sense of His not condemning the world but rather seeking their salvation (John 3:17).<sup>105</sup> This reference is to current unbelievers at the time of Paul’s writing and expresses the state of affairs that exists from the death of Christ on the cross to the present time for living unbelievers.

Fifth, though Christ died for all, only believers “in Christ,” are subjectively reconciled with God and thus experience salvation (vv. 17–18). God has “reconciled us to himself.” This use of “reconciliation” harks back to Rom 5:10–11.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Limitarians attempt to blunt the force of the “all” in this passage by restricting its meaning to “all the elect,” a move that is not exegetically feasible. See the key exegetical commentaries on 2 Corinthians regarding this passage.

<sup>104</sup> The concept of Christ being objectively reconciled to the world has a long lineage. Aquinas affirmed it, as did Calvin and other Reformers. See also the Lutheran theologian Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:347–51.

<sup>105</sup> “Stated negatively, God’s reconciling of the world involved ‘not counting their trespasses against them.’ God could act in this way because He placed those sins on Christ instead ([2 Cor] 5:21; Isa 53:6). In actual performance, therefore, God through Christ was involving Himself in the work of reconciling sinners, not the task of condemning them (cf. John 3:17, ‘For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world; but that the world should be saved through Him.’) The announcement of this tremendous act of grace on God’s part had been committed to Paul and the other apostles, and in a sense to every believer in the Great Commission” (Homer A. Kent, *A Heart Opened Wide: Studies in II Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982], 89–90).

<sup>106</sup> Paul also speaks of reconciliation in an atonement context in Col 1:20 with reference to the reconciliation of all things to God, and in Eph 2:16 with reference to the reconciliation

Sixth, the command to evangelize is grounded in a universal atonement (2 Cor 5:19b, 21): God has given to us the word of reconciliation (mandate for evangelism). As ambassadors for Christ, we plead with people to be reconciled to God (v. 20). Furthermore, Paul affirms that, as ambassadors for Christ, God appeals through us to all the unsaved (v. 20). Does God desire the salvation of all people? Yes! This truth is also reiterated in 1 Tim 2:4–6 and 2 Pet 3:9. Many commentators understand 2 Cor 5:20–21 as Paul appealing to the Corinthian church to be reconciled to God. But this is contextually problematic. Paul includes himself with the church as appealing to those unbelievers outside the church to be reconciled to God.<sup>107</sup>

Seventh, God made Christ “to be sin for us.” In His substitutionary atonement, Christ took our place and suffered the judgment of God for our sin. One must be careful here. This does not mean that somehow Christ Himself became guilty of sin. The phrase translated “sin for us” most likely should be understood as “a sin offering for us.” Paul’s probable allusion to Isaiah 53, the fact that the singular use of the Greek noun (*hamartia*, “sin”) in the Septuagint often has this meaning, and the impossibility of attributing sin to Christ, combine to make this meaning most likely.<sup>108</sup>

Our sin was imputed to Christ such that He was treated as a sinner. Our guilt was likewise imputed to Him, but not transferred to Him, as guilt is non-transferrable. In the same way, at the moment of our salvation, God’s righteousness was imputed to us such that we are accounted to be righteous, even though we have not had His righteousness imparted to us. Speaking of the profound truth of 2 Cor 5:21, James Denney remarks, “That meeting of contradictories, that union of logical and moral opposites, is here the very guarantee of truth.”<sup>109</sup>

We must ask the question: Does punishment imply guilt? Not necessarily. Someone can receive the punishment due others, though he himself is innocent. Jesus Himself did not become guilty when He took my place

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of Jews and Gentiles to God and one another as a result of the atonement applied.

<sup>107</sup> As rightly noted by Stanley E. Porter, “Peace, Reconciliation,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, IVP Bible Dictionary Series, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 696.

<sup>108</sup> See Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 472; and Scott J. Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 247–48.

<sup>109</sup> Denney, *Studies in Theology*, 111 (see “Introduction,” n. 10).

on the cross. Scripture always portrays Christ as guiltless, innocent, and without sin. The point to be made here is that guilt cannot be transferred as guilt. The punishment for another may be transferred, but guilt itself cannot be transferred. Jesus took the place of the guilty on the cross *as far as it involved penal consequences*. God treated Jesus on the cross *as if He were guilty*; but in the strictest sense, Jesus bore the penalty for our sins on the cross though He Himself was not guilty of sin.<sup>110</sup> One must distinguish between imputation and impartation, and one must avoid thinking of imputation in terms of transference of sin and guilt as if they were transferrable commodities.<sup>111</sup> Frederic Platt captures Paul's point:

These words [2 Cor 5:18–21] suggest the idea of such an identification of men "in Christ" that there is on God's part a general justification of mankind in the form of a non-imputation of sins, on the purely objective ground of God's satisfaction by self-giving in Him who knowing no sin was made sin on our behalf. Individual identification of man will follow, as, in response to God's entreat-  
ing, each man is reconciled to God.<sup>112</sup>

The act of *objective reconciliation* is in the past—accomplished at the cross. This sense of reconciliation cannot be equivalent to the pardoning or justifying of all who will believe, because not all those who will believe are currently pardoned! Subjective reconciliation is not an act already completed. Scripture speaks of no actual reconciliation between God and man except that which takes place at conversion. The passage, therefore, cannot refer to the actual and completed reconciliation of the world to God. If so, there would be no need for Paul to exhort people to be reconciled to God as He does in 2 Cor 5:20. What then is this reconciliation? It

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<sup>110</sup> Frederic Platt, "Atonement," in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, ed. James Hastings, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 1:114.

<sup>111</sup> See more on this in chapter 7 on the nature of the atonement.

<sup>112</sup> Platt, "Atonement," 117. "That all died in Christ is neither wholly subjective nor wholly objective. St. Paul's full doctrine requires both; their death is died by Him, and His death is died by them" (Platt, 117). Instead of saying there is a "general justification" of mankind, it is appropriate to say "general reconciliation" of mankind. "Justification," properly speaking, is a term in the NT reserved for "subjective reconciliation," not "objective reconciliation."

is the providing of means whereby people can be reconciled via Christ's death. God is not in a state of actual reconciliation (*subjective reconciliation*) with all people. He is in a state of (*objective reconciliation*) with all people. Because of the atonement, there are no barriers on God's part hindering the salvation of any person. The death of Christ objectively reconciled the world to God in the sense that His justice is satisfied, and He stands ready to pardon. The subjective side of reconciliation does not occur until the atonement is applied when the individual repents and believes in Christ. Lewis Sperry Chafer put it well:

According to 2 Corinthians 5:19 there is a reconciliation declared to be world-wide and wrought wholly of God; yet, in the verse which follows in the context, it is indicated that the individual sinner has the responsibility, in addition to the universal reconciliation wrought of God, to be reconciled himself to God. . . . Thus there is a reconciliation which of itself saves no one, but which is a basis for the reconciliation of any and all who will believe.<sup>113</sup>

Green summarizes several other truths in this passage that we cannot address at this point:

Even though reconciliation stands at the center of this passage (2 Cor 5:18, 19, 20), other categories are in the foreground: vicarious substitution ('for us,' 2 Cor 5:14, 15), representation (2 Cor 5:14, 21), sacrifice (2 Cor 5:21; cf. Dunn, 42–43), justification (implicitly, 2 Cor 5:19, 21), forgiveness (2 Cor 5:19) and new creation (2 Cor 5:16–17). Moreover, the cross and resurrection of Christ appear in tandem as salvific events (2 Cor 5:15).<sup>114</sup>

We may draw several theological and practical conclusions from this text. First, God's love for all people is the motivation for His Son's death

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<sup>113</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 4 vols. (Dallas, TX: Dallas Seminary Press, 1971), 3:192. Methodist theologian Thomas Oden likewise asserted the necessity of viewing reconciliation as objective and subjective. Salvation does not occur until sinners "receive the reconciling event already accomplished and become reconciled to God" (Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 2:356 [see chap. 1, n. 27]).

<sup>114</sup> Green, "Death of Christ," 204.

for the sins of all. Second, only those who have an atonement for their sins are “savable.” Third, only those who have an atonement for their sins are “offerable”—for how can forgiveness of sins and eternal life be offered to those for whom no atonement exists, as is the case according to those who assert limited atonement?<sup>115</sup>

What is the ground of faith for all people, and what is the ground of the gospel offer to all people? A universal atonement such that Christ died for the sins of all people—this is the clear teaching of Paul in these verses.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Technically, it is not the *gospel* that is offered to all, but what is *promised* in the gospel—namely, the forgiveness of sins and eternal life on condition of faith in Christ. The gospel is indiscriminately declared to all people, and the message of the gospel contains promises of what God will do when a person believes. He will forgive their sins and grant them all things in Christ, if they believe. Since the non-elect, on the limitarian scheme, have no satisfaction for their sins, they are not forgivable any more than are non-elect angels. It is a legal impossibility, assuming Christ made no satisfaction for them. The non-elect cannot be promised forgiveness, salvation, or any blessing that is in Christ since Christ accomplished no legal satisfaction for them.

<sup>116</sup> It is interesting to note that Augustine, Calvin, and Richard Baxter all affirmed that this text teaches unlimited atonement: “Thus all, without one exception, were dead in sins, . . . and for all the dead there died the one and only person lived, that is, who had no sin whatever, in order that they who live by the remission of their sins should live, not to themselves, but to Him who died for all” (Augustine, *The City of God* [*De civitate Dei*; 20.6], NPNF, 425). See also John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie, Calvin’s Commentaries 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 77–82. “When God says so expressly that Christ died for all [2 Cor 5:14–15], and tasted death for every man [Heb. 2:9], and is the ransom for all [1 Tim 2:6] and the propitiation for the sins of the whole world [1 John 2:2], it besseems every Christian rather to explain in what sense Christ died for all, than flatly to deny it” (The text has been modernized and brackets have been inserted by the author.) (Richard Baxter, *The Universal Redemption of Mankind* [London: Printed by John Salusbury, 1694], 286). See also Baxter’s annotations on 2 Cor 5:19 in *A Paraphrase on the New Testament, with Notes, Doctrinal and Practical* (London: Printed for B. Simmons, 1685; rev. and corrected ed., London: Richard Edwards, 1810), 415. Baxter’s description of the mistake many commentators make is still relevant today. He noted that verse 19 “is mistaken by many, as if by [the world] were meant only [the elect] because reconciliation, and not imputing trespasses, are mentioned: But the text most plainly tells us of a general reconciliation and non-imputation to mankind, and a particular to believers” (Baxter, *A Paraphrase*, 415, n. II).

*Galatians 2:20*

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

In Gal 2:20, Paul connects the personal love of God for himself (“loved me”) with the cross (“and gave Himself for me”). Paul is speaking as a believer about the relationship he now has with Christ as a result of his union with Christ. The focus in this verse is the connection between the love of God and the atonement of Christ. We have already seen verses like John 3:16 that point to God’s love for all people as His motivation for the atonement. According to these verses, the love of God is the reason for His giving Jesus to die on the cross for “the world” and for Paul before he became a believer.

*Galatians 3:10–14*

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” Yet the law is not of faith, but “the man who does them shall live by them.” Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, by becoming a curse for us (for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

This passage contains two explicit statements and one implicit truth about the atonement. Christ has provided (1) redemption (“redeemed us”) through the cross, and did so by means of (2) substitution (“for us”). The concept of sacrifice is implicit in this statement as well.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Green, “Death of Christ,” 204–05.



Paul asserts that everyone is living under the power of God's curse, because the law pronounces a curse upon all who do not fulfill its demands (Deut 27:26). It is impossible to be made right with God (justification) by the law because the law does not originate in faith. The law cannot give life, but faith is able to give life. God does the justifying of the sinner through Jesus Christ, who actually bore the curse of the law on the cross for us (Deut 21:23).<sup>118</sup> Thus, our identity is now derived not from observance of the law but from the gift of the Spirit through faith in Christ.<sup>119</sup>

#### *Galatians 4:4–5*

But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

This text affirms several things in relation to the atonement. First, it indicates God's purpose for the atonement: redemption and adoption as sons for those who believe in Christ. Second, the text emphasizes the incarnation and full humanity of Christ—He was “born of a woman.” Third, Christ came as one “born under the law” with the implication that He perfectly kept and fulfilled the law in His life and death so that He could become the Savior of all who believe in Him.

Man's ruin was brought on him by a violation of the divine law, and his recovery from that ruin, if effected at all, must take place in a manner consistent with the law. God, therefore, “when the fulness of time was come, sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law to redeem them that were under the law.” Gal. iv. 4, 5. . . . By his [Jesus's] obedience and death he . . . showed to the universe that it is a perfect law. He clothed it with a moral grandeur more sublime than it had before its violation. . . . He honored

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<sup>118</sup> “In the very process of fulfilling the law, he is broken by the law” (Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, 2:196). Weber continues: “Here the law which man has sinfully usurped reaches its end, and the law with which God wants to have man totally and completely for himself reaches its goal” (2:198).

<sup>119</sup> Rutledge has summarized this well—see *The Crucifixion*, 99–100.

the law by being born under it, honored it more by obeying it, and honored it in the highest degree by suffering its death-penalty.<sup>120</sup>

*Ephesians 1:7*

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.

In Christ, we have redemption through His blood. This is a past act, referring to the moment each of the Ephesians believed in Christ. In Eph 1:14, redemption is an eschatological act, when final redemption takes place. Redemption is connected with our “inheritance.” Paul connects redemption with the forgiveness of sins, grounded in God’s grace.

*Ephesians 5:1–2*

[A]s Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

First, Paul indicates that love was the motive for Christ’s atonement. Second, the substitutionary nature of the atonement is suggested by the addition of “for us.”<sup>121</sup> Third, Jesus is specifically called an “offering and a sacrifice,” indicating that the atonement is a sacrifice offered “to God.”

*Philippians 2:5–11*

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a

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<sup>120</sup> Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 223–24.

<sup>121</sup> This passage cannot be used to support limited atonement without invoking the negative inference fallacy. “It does not necessarily follow that if a proposition is true, a negative inference from that proposition is also true. The negative inference may be true; but this cannot be assumed, and in any case is never true *because* it is a negative inference” (D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984], 115; emphasis original). See also what follows under “The Extent of the Atonement.”

bondsman, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

This passage asserts the full deity and humanity of Jesus. Verse 8 emphasizes the fact that by virtue of the incarnation, Jesus was able to experience death on the cross; a death that He voluntarily chose to endure. The passage also emphasizes the humility of Jesus exhibited by His incarnation and crucifixion. The culmination of His incarnation is the crucifixion, and both exhibit His humility and suffering. Rejected at His birth in that there was no room for Him in the inn, He is rejected at the cross as well. “Crib and cross are of the same wood.”<sup>122</sup> Jesus loved sacrificially. “Out of the ivory palaces into a world of woe; only his great eternal love made my Savior go.”<sup>123</sup> Jesus is more than one who is socially concerned and who sent a tax-deductible check to make a payment to help us out. Jesus did not transfer money; He transferred Himself “from the shelter of his Logos home to the abyss of guilt, pain, and death.”<sup>124</sup>

### *Colossians 1:20–22*

[A]nd by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

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<sup>122</sup> Helmut Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God and of Christ* ed. and trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 383.

<sup>123</sup> Henry Barraclough, “Ivory Palaces” (1915).

<sup>124</sup> Thielicke, 384. See also Treat, *The Crucified King*, 116–19.

This text asserts that God's reconciliation of all things to Himself is based on the atonement—making peace through Christ's blood shed on the cross. Jesus has reconciled believers "in the body of His flesh through death." Finally, the text speaks of God's purpose or intent in this act of reconciliation based on atonement—to present believers faultless and blameless before him.

*Colossians 2:13–15*

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

This text explicitly lays out the triumph of the cross. Here the demonic powers were disarmed, divested of power, and defeated by the cancellation of the legal debt on the cross.<sup>125</sup> Galatians 3:23; Heb 2:14; and Rev 12:11 also assert the victory won over Satan and the demonic powers by Christ on the cross.

Some who wish to limit the atonement to the sins of only those who will ultimately believe interpret this verse wrongly. They argue in this fashion: Jesus canceled the sin debt for everyone who has ever lived. If He canceled the sin debt for everyone who ever lived, then how can unbelievers be eternally judged for their sin-debt that has been canceled, and how can God be just if He judges people whose sin-debt has already been paid? The text says that the sin-debt was canceled at the cross. If Jesus canceled the sin-debt for everyone who has ever lived, then universalism results because all sins are canceled. Therefore, according to this line of argument, Col 2:14 necessitates limited atonement.

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<sup>125</sup> Henri Blocher, "Agnus Victor: The Atonement as Victory and Vicarious Punishment," in *What Does It Mean to Be Saved? Broadening Evangelical Horizons of Salvation*, ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 86.

This argument fails at a number of points. First, notice that the text does not explicitly affirm limited atonement. The argument made is a *deduction* based on certain premises. But some of these premises are false, as we shall see. Second, Paul is addressing believers. Paul is not addressing the status of people outside of Christ. The argument collapses virtual union with Christ on the part of all those who will believe in the future and actual union with Christ, which only occurs at the moment of salvation. In the context, clearly Paul is talking to believers. He tells them about the legal basis of their forgiveness, but he is not telling them that “having wiped out” the certificate of debt is equivalent to forgiveness, any more than John the Baptist’s saying that Jesus “takes away the sin of the world” (which simply means carrying sin away, like the scapegoat of the Old Testament) *ipso facto* means forgiveness of sin. Again, redemption accomplished must be distinguished from redemption applied, as the NT does.

Third, the argument entails justification at the cross, an antinomian or hyper-Calvinist error. At the cross, Christ did indeed satisfy the legal debts all people have. But nowhere in Scripture are we told that at the point of the atonement we are *ipso facto* forgiven of our sins when Christ suffered the penalty we deserve.

Fourth, the argument overlooks the problem of how all those who ultimately believe that their sin-debt was canceled at the cross, can, while still in their unbelieving state, be under condemnation and threatened with eternal damnation, as Paul says they are in Eph 2:1–3? The argument entails that none of the unbelieving elect (those who *will* believe on Christ at some point) are in a damnable state,<sup>126</sup> at least since the time of the cross, which is simply false.

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<sup>126</sup> “God doth hate his elect in some sense before their actual reconciliation. God was placable before Christ, appeased by Christ. But till there be such conditions which God hath appointed in the creature, he hath no interest in this reconciliation of God; and whatsoever person he be in whom the condition is not found, he remains under the wrath of God, and therefore is in some sense under God’s hatred” (Stephen Charnock, “A Discourse of God’s Being the Author of Reconciliation,” in *The Works of Stephen Charnock*, 5 vols. [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986], 3:345). Charnock was a well-known Puritan who rejected limited atonement. Similarly, Manton said, “In themselves God’s elect differ nothing from the rest of the World, till grace prevent them; they were as bad as any in the World, of the same race of cursed mankind, not only living in the World, but after the fashions of the World; ‘dead in trespasses and sins,’ and obnoxious to the curse and wrath of God.” See

Fifth, the argument trades on a false commercial theory of the atonement. The language of sin as “debt” is wrongly interpreted along the lines of literal commercial debt, such that when the debt is paid, the obligation is discharged. This is not how atonement operates, as we will now demonstrate. The death of Christ does not buy things, as in commodities. No one is “paid” anything as a result of the death of Christ on the cross. Nowhere in Scripture are such things as “faith” said to be purchased by the death of Christ. People are the objects of redemption in Scripture. There is no transaction. The purchase is not literal in a commercial or pecuniary sense. Pecuniary language for the redemption of Christ must be understood metaphorically.

Sixth, the whole argument begs the question of the legitimacy of the double payment argument used to support limited atonement (see “Extent of the Atonement”).

*1 Timothy 2:4–6*

[W]ho desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

This passage is important for several reasons. First, Paul links God’s purpose and desire for the salvation of all people with the atonement as the means whereby that can be accomplished. The text explicitly teaches God’s universal saving will. God is not willing that any should perish in their sins but desires all to be saved (2 Pet 3:9). The Greek sentence that is expressed in verses 5–6 is introduced by the subordinating conjunction *gar*, which semantically gives the grounds for the statement in verse 4. Paul links the death of Christ “for all” with God’s stated desire for “all men to be saved.”

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Thomas Manton, “Sermon XXXIV,” in *Sermons upon 2 Corinthians V*, in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton, D.D.*, 22 vols. (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1873), 13:253.

Second, Jesus is said to be the “Mediator” between God and men.<sup>127</sup> Third, the use of the word “ransom” (Gk. *antilutron*) signifies the payment of a price to effect the release of captives.

Fourth, the text clearly affirms a universal atonement—Christ died “for all.” 1 Timothy 2:6 is a rewording of the saying of Jesus in Mark 10:45, with “all” replacing the “many” found in that text. The “many” of Mark 10:45 has been re-expressed using more idiomatic Greek to clarify that the original saying, and Paul’s intent, is to express a universal atonement.<sup>128</sup> In reference to 1 Tim 2:5–6, Pendleton states, “We may therefore say of the atonement that it is so general that all are saved who ‘come to God’ by Christ, and so limited that none are saved who do not ‘come to God’ through the Mediator, ‘the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.’”<sup>129</sup>

#### *Titus 2:11–14*

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

This text makes two affirmations concerning the atonement. First, the connection of the grace of God appearing “to all men” in Christ, who gave

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<sup>127</sup> The term in Greek (*mesitēs*) is used six times in the NT—Gal 3:19–20 (of Moses); Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24 (of Christ); and 1 Tim 2:5 (of Christ).

<sup>128</sup> As noted by I. Howard Marshall, “Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1995), 59. Marshall’s essay is an excellent exegetical refutation of understanding 1 Tim 2:4–6 as some of “all kinds of people” rather than all people universally. I will address this point in more detail in the section to follow on the extent of the atonement. See also I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 425–33 (on 1 Tim 2:4–6); Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 707–09.

<sup>129</sup> Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 245.

Himself to accomplish redemption, indicates that the atonement is unlimited in its extent. If God's grace through the death of Christ has appeared to all people, it stands to reason that the death of Christ on the cross must be for all people. Otherwise the intention expressed in verse 11 and the redemption that is accomplished do not match up. This verse speaks to the purpose or intent of God in the atonement: to bring salvation to all people. The verse indicates that salvation is a possibility for all on the grounds of the atonement that has been accomplished for all.

Second, this passage uses the word "redeem," one of the key words for atonement, indicating release by means of purchase with a price. Christ died for us in order that we might be set free to live righteously unto God (2 Cor 5:15, 17).

### *Summary of the Pauline Letters*

First, Paul understands and presents the death of Christ in sacrificial and substitutionary categories. Second, Paul never merges the objective atonement with its subjective effects.<sup>130</sup> Atonement accomplished must be distinguished from atonement applied. The cross in and of itself saves no one until it is appropriated by faith in Christ on the part of the believing sinner. As Simon Gathercole, among others, has demonstrated, Paul clearly incorporates the notion of penal substitution in atonement contexts in his letters.<sup>131</sup>

## **Hebrews**

Hebrews is unique in the NT in how it approaches the atoning work of Jesus, the great High Priest, who has "put away sin" (Heb 9:26) by offering "one sacrifice for sins forever" (Heb 10:12). His atonement cancels out our guilt and cleanses us from sin (Heb 1:3).

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<sup>130</sup> Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 720 (see chap. 1, n. 26).

<sup>131</sup> Gathercole, *Defending Substitution*, 109–13.



### *Hebrews 1:1–3*

The first direct reference to the atonement in Hebrews occurs in 1:3—“when He had by Himself purged our sins.” This particular clause is in many ways crucial for the author’s argument. Its use of temple language—*purged* (Gk. *katharismos*, “a cleansing or purification”)—implicitly refers to the high priestly work of Christ intimated through the Old Testament tabernacle. The bulk of the expositional sections of Hebrews further expands on this theologically with the author presenting the theme of the priesthood of Christ.<sup>132</sup>

The author’s use of *katharismos* is significant, given that this theme is developed extensively in the doctrinal sections of the epistle. The term is used for both physical as well as ritual cleansing (having to do with the tabernacle and temple practices) in the NT. The term occurs nineteen times in the LXX, with the focus on ritual purification (see Exod 29:36; Lev 15:13). Its use in Exod 30:10 concerning the Day of Atonement ritual is significant since the author develops the connection between Christ and the Day of Atonement in Heb 8:1–10:18. The word is also used, as here, for cleansing of sin through the death of Christ. This noun occurs seven times in the NT (five in the Gospels, once in Hebrews, once in 2 Peter) but never in Matthew’s Gospel or the Pauline Epistles.<sup>133</sup>

In the OT sacrificial economy, sin defiled the person and therefore necessitated a cleansing by the sprinkling of blood upon the altar from a sacrifice. The threefold result of the sacrificial offering was the objective removal of sin, forgiveness, and the cleansing of the sinner.<sup>134</sup> This is dealt with in detail by the author in Hebrews 9.

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<sup>132</sup> For commentary on the key atonement passages in Hebrews, see David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC 35 (Nashville: B&H, 2010).

<sup>133</sup> See *TDNTa*, 384. For bibliography on this word and the concept of “purification,” see H. Thyen, *EDNT*, 2:218. The verbal form occurs seventeen times in the Gospels, three times in Acts, three times in Paul’s letters, four times in Hebrews (where it is always linked to Christ’s death as a sacrifice), once in James, and twice in 1 John.

<sup>134</sup> Hermann Cremer compared the usage of *katharismos* in Heb 1:3 and 2 Pet 1:9. He explained that the focus in 1:3 is on the objective removal of sin, while in 2 Pet 1:9 the word denotes the purification accomplished in the subject (“and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins”). See Hermann Cremer, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*, trans. W. Ulrick, 4th ed. (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1895), 319.

Hebrews 1:3 says that “our sins” (*hamartiōn*) are cleansed (“purged”).<sup>135</sup> Both Exod 30:10 and Lev 16:30 are instructive for understanding the author’s concept of cleansing here and throughout Hebrews. Exodus 30:10 refers to the instructions that the Lord gave to Moses concerning the altar of incense on the Day of Atonement. The LXX rendering of this passage contains the Lord’s instructions to Moses for Aaron to “make atonement” on the horns of this altar annually on the Day of Atonement “with the blood of the sin offering of atonement.” In Lev 16:30, the Lord told Moses that on the Day of Atonement, Aaron was to make an atonement for the people “to cleanse you, that you may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.” It is a fundamental principle in the OT that both sin and its resultant impurity in the life of the individual must be dealt with if the worshiper is to approach God. Purification by sacrifice is necessary if one is to “draw near” to God as the author of Hebrews exhorts readers to do several times in the epistle (Heb 7:19; 10:22).

### *References to Atonement throughout Hebrews*

At the beginning of Hebrews, the author says that the Son has made purification for sins (implying His incarnation and high priestly role), but it remains for the author to explain later that the Son as high priest is also the one who became the sacrifice for sins. The next overt reference to the atonement—Heb 2:9—asserts that the incarnation was necessary for Christ to die or “taste death” for “everyone”: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.” Here we find the connection between the necessity of the incarnation for the atonement and a reference to the atonement as universal.

In Heb 2:14–15, one purpose for the death of Christ is to destroy the devil and free those who were held in slavery by their fear of death. Hebrews 2:17 also speaks to the necessity of the incarnation—His high priesthood and capacity to make atonement for sins depended on it. An important issue of translation as well as theology has to do with the correct

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<sup>135</sup> Although Hebrews uses this plural form of *hamartia* (Gk., “sin”) thirteen times—slightly more than the singular (ten times)—there is no discernible difference of meaning.

rendering of the word *hilaskomai* (“make atonement,” v. 17), which can denote either expiation or propitiation. We have already had opportunity to note Leon Morris’s magisterial study of this subject, which provides clear and irrefutable evidence that the verb *hilaskomai*, although a complex term that includes in it the idea of expiation of sin, nevertheless conveys the concept of averting divine wrath.<sup>136</sup> The difference between “expiation” and “propitiation” is that “expiation” signifies the cancellation of sin, whereas “propitiation” denotes the turning away of the wrath of God. It is the consistent view of Scripture that humanity’s sin has incurred the wrath of God and that this wrath is only averted by the substitutionary atonement that Christ has provided on the cross.

Hebrews 5:9 speaks of Christ “having been perfected,” a reference to His final sufferings on the cross. The cross fitted Christ to become “the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.” Hebrews 7:26–27 speaks of Christ’s offering on the cross as a once-for-all-time event. Hebrews 8:6 speaks of Jesus as the “Mediator of a better covenant” through His death on the cross. In Heb 9:12, Jesus, “with His own blood . . . entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” Verse 14 states that Christ’s blood will “cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Hebrews 9:22 is an important verse, asserting that “without [the] shedding of blood,” i.e., the death of a sacrifice, there can be no forgiveness of sin. Christ’s sacrifice is superior to the OT sacrifices because it actually takes away sin. The sacrifices prescribed in the OT were “a shadow” (10:1), but Christ’s sacrifice cannot be spiritualized into an analogy.<sup>137</sup> Hebrews 9:22 makes clear Christ’s sacrifice is not an analogy of the OT sacrifices. The OT sacrifices came first chronologically; *they* serve as the analogy for the final sacrifice of Christ.

Hebrews 9:26 speaks of Christ’s having come “to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” In a reference to Isaiah 53, Heb 9:27–28 states, “And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ

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<sup>136</sup> Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 155 (see chap. 1, n. 6); see especially pp. 125–60. The classic presentation of the view that the term should be translated “expiation” is C. H. Dodd, “ΙΛΑΣΚΕΣΘΑΙ [*Hilaskesthai*], Its Cognates, Derivatives, and Synonyms, in the Septuagint,” *JTS* 32 (1931): 352–60. This article also appeared in C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 82–95.

<sup>137</sup> Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, 297 (see “Introduction,” n. 13).

was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.” Christ was offered once, “to bear the sins of many.” As previously noted, the “many” here means “all.” Hebrews 10:10 states that “we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Hebrews 10:12 states Christ offered “one sacrifice for sins forever.” Hebrews 13:12 speaks of Jesus, who “suffered outside the gate” so “that He might sanctify the people with His own blood.”

We also find in Hebrews several specific statements about the atonement. Christ has “purged” our sins (1:3), made “propitiation” for sin (2:17), “put away sin” (9:26), borne sin (9:28), and offered “sacrifice for sins” (10:12). In all this, the author of Hebrews emphasizes the finality of the atoning work of Christ.<sup>138</sup>

These verses are all couched within the confines of the author’s development of the priesthood of Christ. The key characteristic function of the priest in Israel was to offer sacrifices for the sins of the people as a mediator between God and man. Thus, the fundamental idea of atonement (“at-one-ment”) is clearly pictured. If sinful people are ever to be brought into a right relationship with God, it must occur by means of a vicarious substitutionary offering in the place of the sinner—hence, the important statement: “Without shedding of blood there is no remission” (9:22). Unlike all the OT sacrificial system, Jesus became both the priest and the sacrifice. He and He alone has appeared “in these last days” (1:2) and “at the end of the ages “to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (9:26). As high priest, Jesus entered the heavenly holy of holies with His own blood and made atonement once and for all sinners before God (6:19–20; 7:26–27; 9:11–28; 10:12–14).

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<sup>138</sup> “The idea of finality is the characteristic conception that dominates the presentation of Christ’s redeeming work; it is ‘eternal’ in this sense. The ethical value of a sinless Offerer in perfect sympathy with His sinful brethren, for whom He presents His sacrifice perfect and without blemish, is a prominent characteristic in the doctrine of the atoning work” (Platt, “Atonement,” 118).

### *1 and 2 Peter*

Several points can be made concerning Peter's approach to the atonement in his writings. First, there is a certain focus on the moral quality of Christ's suffering on the cross. Second, when Peter refers to the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:2), he likely has in mind the idea of the covenant with its sacrificial implications. Third, the use of the word "redeemed" followed by the phrase "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet 1:19), may combine the idea of the sacrificial lamb at Passover with the statement about "ransom" in Mark 10:45. Fourth, Peter speaks of Christ suffering "for you," indicating the substitutionary nature of the atonement (1 Pet 1:20).

Joel Green finds the following themes of atonement in 1 Peter:

- Christ exemplifies innocent suffering (2:19–20; 3:16–17; 4:1–2, 3–16).
- Christ exemplifies effective suffering (1:2, 19; 3:18).
- Christ exemplifies the vindication of the suffering righteous (1:11; 2:20; 4:13–14; 5:1, 10).<sup>139</sup>

There is only one explicit statement in 2 Peter concerning the atonement:

But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. (2 Pet 2:1)

This text speaks of the atonement in terms of a purchase by the use of the word translated "bought" (Gk. *agorazō*, lexical form). The point of the text is that there will be false teachers in the church and that Christ died for the sins even of these false teachers.<sup>140</sup> The topic is false teachers who are unbelievers and who apparently remain in that unbelieving state.

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<sup>139</sup> Green, "Theologies of the Atonement," 132.

<sup>140</sup> For the tendentious attempts to defend limited atonement in the face of this text, see Dan G. McCartney, "Atonement in James, Peter, and Jude," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 178–79; Thomas R. Schreiner, "'Problematic Texts' for Definite Atonement in the Pastorals and General Epistles," in *From Heaven He*

### *1 John*

The letters of John continue the same theological trajectory laid out in the Gospel of John.<sup>141</sup> John's sacrificial and substitutionary language demonstrates his continuity with other NT writers on the subject of the atonement. In 1 John, the death of Christ is mentioned in 1:7; 2:2; 3:16; and 4:10. In 1 John 1:7, John attributes our cleansing from sin to the effect of "the blood of Jesus," a reference to the atonement. John employs the concept of "propitiation" in two crucial atonement passages:

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. (2:1–2)

In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (4:9–10)

Judicial satisfaction is assumed in the use of the term "propitiation" (Gk. *hilasmon*), expressing penal substitution. Furthermore, when John writes, "[Y]our sins are forgiven you for His name's sake" (2:12), the clear implication is that forgiveness is based on the cross and the idea of Christ's substitutionary death.

John links Christ's propitiation with divine love: "He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (4:10). John also connects

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*Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 390; and Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC 37 (Nashville: B&H, 2003), 331. McCartney and Schreiner reject the traditional interpretation that the word "bought" refers to Christ's death on the cross for the sins of false teachers. Schreiner opts for a "phenomenological" reading: "It appeared as if the Lord had purchased the false teachers with his blood (v. 1), though they actually did not truly belong to the Lord" (Schreiner, "'Problematic Texts' for Defining Atonement," 391). Schreiner feels the pinch of his own strained exegesis and asks, "Is this an artificial interpretation introduced to support a theological bias?" (Schreiner, 391).

<sup>141</sup> Compare John 1:29; 3:16; 10:11; 11:50; 13:10; 15:13; 17:19; and 19:34–35 with 1 John 2:1–2 and 4:9–10.

God's love with Christ's atoning death: "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us" (3:16).

These verses indicate that the purpose and goal of Christ's atonement is the propitiation and expiation of all sin. Furthermore, the atonement was motivated by the love of God and demonstrated by the cross. We should note that 1 John 2:2 is one of the clearest verses in Scripture affirming a universal atonement. Whenever John uses the term "world" (Gk. *kosmos*) in any salvation passage dealing with God's intent of the atonement or the extent of the atonement, "world" means all people; or, to be more nuanced depending on the passage, "world" signifies either all people, inclusive of believers and unbelievers, or all unbelievers, exclusive of believers (as in 1 John 5:19).<sup>142</sup>

### **Revelation**

References to the atonement in Revelation are sparse and have to do with the finished work of Christ as "the Lamb" of God<sup>143</sup> in His exalted state, yet with an emphasis on the cross: "a lamb as though it had been slain" (Rev 5:6). References to the "blood of the lamb" (7:14; 12:11) also hark back to the atonement. The key passages are:

[A]nd from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1:5–6)

And I looked, and behold, in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, Stood a Lamb

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<sup>142</sup> For a detailed discussion, see chapter 6. See also Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 702–03. Also consult the helpful material on 1 John 2:2 in Ben Witherington, *The Indelible Image: The Theological and Ethical Thought World of the New Testament*, vol. 1, *The Individual Witnesses* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 490–95. Regarding John's use of *kosmos*, Witherington notes, "For our purposes, what is important is that when the issue is about God's salvific intent and desire, the whole world is included, as John 1:29; 3:16–17; 4:42; 6:33, 51; 12:46–47; 1 John 2:2; 4:14 make evident" (491).

<sup>143</sup> Christ is called "Lamb" twenty-eight times in Revelation.

as though it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent out into all the earth. . . . And have redeemed us to God by Your blood. (5:6, 9)

So he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” (7:14)

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (12:11)

All those who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. (13:8)

Revelation 1:5 speaks of Christ washing us from our sins “in His own blood,” a reference connoting the sacrificial nature of Christ’s death and harking back to the OT sacrificial system of which Christ is the fulfillment. Revelation 5:6 speaks of Christ as the Lamb standing “as though it had been slain,” a reference to the crucifixion of Christ. Revelation 5:9, in the context of the praise of the Lamb as worthy, speaks of Him as the one who was “slain” and who “redeemed us to God by Your blood.” The use of the word translated “slain” (Gk. *esphagēs*) refers to the physical suffering and death of Christ on the cross. The Lamb is said to have “redeemed” (Gk. *agorazō*, lexical form—the same verb translated “bought” in 2 Pet 2:1) people for God by means of His blood, again a reference to the atonement. The redemption language, as we have seen, is a metaphor that should not be taken literally in a commercial sense. Rather, the word indicates the high price paid for salvation.

As we have seen, nowhere in Scripture are believers ever said to be redeemed “from God,” nor is Christ’s death ever said to be a ransom paid “to God” (or anyone else). Revelation 5:9 speaks of those who have been redeemed “to God” not “from God.” Notice also in Scripture that persons are always said to be “purchased;” never is “faith” or “salvation” something “purchased.” Notice that Rev 5:9 says nothing about the extent of the atonement but only about the application of the atonement to people of all



nations. Those who attempt to argue for limited atonement often use Rev 5:9 as a key text. But, as I have shown elsewhere,<sup>144</sup> the verse cannot be properly interpreted as limiting the extent of the atonement.

Revelation 7:14 speaks of those who “come out of the great tribulation” and who have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” Revelation 12:11 likewise speaks of “the blood of the Lamb.” In both cases, “the blood of the Lamb” references the atonement. Finally, Rev 13:8 speaks of “the Lamb slain,” again a clear reference to the atonement.

### **Summary of the New Testament Teaching on the Atonement**

We may now summarize in broad fashion the NT teaching on the atonement:

1. The atonement was God’s plan from eternity.
2. The incarnation of Christ was a necessity for the atonement. The atonement is rooted in Calvary, not Bethlehem; but Bethlehem was absolutely necessary for Calvary to occur.
3. By virtue of the virgin birth and incarnation, Jesus was sinless. He had to be sinless to make atonement for sins (2 Cor 5:21).
4. The atonement was a vicarious sacrifice.
5. The atonement was substitutionary. Christ took the place of and paid the penalty for sin for all humanity.
6. The atonement was a redemption, ransom, and purchase, which should be understood metaphorically. The price paid was the death of Christ.
7. The atonement was a propitiation and expiation (Rom 3:26). The wrath of God was propitiated and sins were expiated (taken away) by the cross.
8. The atonement was a defeat of Satan (Heb 2:14).

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<sup>144</sup> See Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 215, 436, 447, 599, 701, and 755. It is also noteworthy that the term “world” is not used in Rev 5:9, though some try to make that connection.

9. The atonement was a “once for all” completed event (Rom 6:10; 1 Pet 3:18; Heb 7:27; 9:12).
10. The atonement was for all sin, including the sins of those who die in an unbelieving state.

God, because of His love, by means of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice for all the sins of all humanity on the cross, coupled with His resurrection, creates the situation whereby humanity is objectively reconciled to Himself. Sin is propitiated and expiated, thereby making subjective reconciliation possible for all humanity and certain for all who believe in Christ. Sin, death, and Satan are defeated at the cross.<sup>145</sup> God effects cosmic eschatological reconciliation of all things by means of the cross. God saves us from sin and for fellowship with Himself.

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<sup>145</sup> For an excellent summary of Christ’s cosmic defeat of Satan at the cross and the last judgment, see John Peckham, *Theodicy of Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 119–125.

## CHAPTER 4

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### *The Necessity of the Atonement*

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Given the fact of human sin and the need for forgiveness and a restored relationship with God, the question is sometimes asked whether or not the atonement was necessary for God to forgive human sin.<sup>1</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup> This question has engendered significant theological discussion and debate in the history of the church. Theologians have also debated the issue as to whether or not the incarnation and death of Jesus would have been necessary if humanity had not sinned. The Socinians (seventeenth century) argued against the necessity of the atonement, contending that God did not send Christ for the purpose of actually atoning for sin. Within the early Reformed community, there was debate over the issue as well. John Calvin and Samuel Rutherford, for example, argued for a hypothetical necessity—i.e., that the atonement was only necessary because God decreed it to be so, but that God could have saved in another way had He chosen to do so. Francis Turretin and John Owen later argued that the atonement was absolutely necessary as a matter of divine justice. So, for example, Turretin asserted, “But since this justice is nothing else than the constant will of punishing sinners, which in God cannot be inefficient (to whom belongs supreme majesty and infinite power), it necessarily demands the infliction of punishment either on the sinner himself or on the surety substituted in his place” (Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger, 3 vols. [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994], 14.10.17; p. 2:422). From the early seventeenth century, the necessity of the atonement became the predominate view in Reformed theology, in opposition to Socinianism, which denied it (Heinrich Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, rev. and ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950], 469–71). Aquinas said the atonement was not necessitated by compulsion on either God’s or Christ’s part. Rather, the atonement “was necessary from the necessity of the end proposed,” in the sense that humanity could be redeemed only by faith in Christ who atoned for sin, and second, that Christ must provide atonement to fulfill Scripture that mandated a necessary atonement (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3.46.1). An excellent discussion of Aquinas’s view on the necessity of the atonement is J. B. Reeves, “The Speculative Development During the Scholastic Period,” in *The Atonement: Papers from the Summer School of Catholic Studies Held at Cambridge, July 31–Aug. 9, 1926*, ed. C. Lattey (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne, 1928), 166–97. James Denney speaks of this necessity as an “outward constraint,

question of whether the atonement would be necessary if humanity had not sinned or whether God could have provided atonement in some other way than the cross are moot points and would be mere speculation.<sup>2</sup> Forde asserts, “If God could, in fact, have done it some other way, then there is *no* justification for doing it the way it was done.”<sup>3</sup> “The necessity for atonement roots therefore in two things: our bondage and alienation, our unwillingness to be reconciled, and God’s decision to be true to himself, to be a God of steadfast mercy nevertheless.”<sup>4</sup>

Although Scripture never directly speaks of God’s having to be propitiated before He forgives sin, Scripture does speak of God’s requiring, of necessity, a substitutionary sacrifice before He forgives sin. The necessity of the atonement is expressed in Scripture in three ways: (1) direct statements to the fact, (2) indirect corroboration via statements of prophetic fulfillment, and (3) certain theological truths concerning the nature of God and His attributes, humanity, and sin.

### Humanity’s Need

The NT authors employ the Greek *dei*, “must,” in connection with Christ’s death in Matt 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 22:37; 24:7, 26, 44; John 3:14; 12:34; and Acts 17:3. Some of these statements are connected with prophecies made in the OT. The necessity as expressed by Jesus in the texts listed above is not one of any compulsion against His nature, but one of personal and willing surrender to the cross.

The necessity of the atonement proceeds from the fact of human sin. Scripture clearly describes all people as sinners and thus separated from

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inevitable due to circumstances;” and an “inward constraint, indispensable from the fact of God’s will and Christ’s will” (Denney, *The Death of Christ*, 32 [see chap. 1, n. 3]). An interesting debate on the atonement, including the issue of necessity, occurred in 1987 between Fisher Humphreys, then professor of theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and Paige Patterson, then president of The Criswell College. See Jason Duesing, “Humphreys/Patterson—1987: A Southern Baptist Debate on the Atonement,” *MWJT* 16, no. 2 (2017): 112–35.

<sup>2</sup> Athanasius, Thomas Aquinas, and John Calvin, answered in the negative. Others answered yes, arguing, though speculatively, that the incarnation would have occurred even if humans had never sinned.

<sup>3</sup> Forde, “Seventh Locus,” 2:59 (see chap. 1, n. 22).

<sup>4</sup> Forde, 69.

God. This condition renders all humanity guilty before God and condemned (Rom 5:16). Sin results in physical death, spiritual death, and eternal punishment. Sin is a violation of God's law; a matter of rebellion and disobedience; an act of unfaithfulness, and much more. Sin rebels against God's sovereignty and holiness; it perverts and distorts His word, His will, and His ways. Where God is righteousness, sin is unrighteousness. Where God is wise, sin chooses folly. Where God is sovereign, sin attempts to usurp that sovereignty. The narrative of human history, and more specifically biblical history, provides the sordid account of human sin and its destructive aftermath. Sin incurs God's wrath and condemnation. Because of sin, humanity stands helpless and hopeless before a holy God. Pendleton states it well: "Scripture portrays sin as responsible guilt for which atonement must be made. The necessity of atonement, therefore, arises from the fact that while the pardon of sin is indispensable to salvation, is so great an evil, and so justly deserving of punishment, as to be for ever unpardonable without an expiatory sacrifice."<sup>5</sup>

Sin is also an alien power enslaving all people (Rom 3:9–10).<sup>6</sup> A greater power than sin is needed to liberate humanity from sin's thralldom. The cross is Christ's victory over sin, death, hell, and Satan. "Unless we are to abandon the New Testament witness altogether, we must acknowledge that *the overcoming of sin* lies at the very heart of the meaning of the crucifixion."<sup>7</sup>

As the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 states,

In the beginning man was innocent of sin and was endowed by his Creator with freedom of choice. By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. Through the temptation of Satan man transgressed the command of God, and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. Therefore, as soon

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<sup>5</sup> Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 233 (see chap. 1, n. 4).

<sup>6</sup> Charles Cousar explicates Paul's twofold approach to sin in Romans 3: (1) Sin is a verb, and thus is something people do or engage in (Rom 3:23). (2) Sin is a noun, a dominion under which humanity exists (Rom 3:9). See Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross*, 57 (see "Preface," n. 1).

<sup>7</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 185; emphasis original (see "Introduction," n. 41).

as they are capable of moral action, they become transgressors and are under condemnation.<sup>8</sup>

Because of the sin of Adam and Eve, all people inherit a sin nature, which is so inclined to sin that when we are capable of moral action, we do indeed sin; we become transgressors of God's law and fall under His condemnation. There is a sense in which we are born guilty before God; but we are not guilty of Adam's sin—we are guilty of our own.

We must avoid two errors concerning the origin of sin. First, sin cannot be laid at the doorstep of God. Sin is humanity's doing, not God's. There are those who want to shackle God with the indirect or direct cause of human sin. To make God the author of sin in any fashion is a futile attempt to uphold the sovereignty of God and fails to understand the true nature of that sovereignty. To say that God is the cause of the brutal rape and murder of an innocent child, for example, is blasphemy.

The second error is to view sin as purely a matter of human choice and not an action that is based in or inherent to human nature. "People are not perfect; we just need to treat each other with respect; we just need to stop the bad behavior;" is common parlance with this error. "Views of atonement wrought by Christ that do not acknowledge the gravity of Sin are untruthful in two respects: they are untruthful about the human condition, and they are untruthful about the witness of Holy Scripture, Old and New Testament alike."<sup>9</sup>

The necessity of the atonement also proceeds from sinful humanity's need of redemption. If there is to be any redemption, any forgiveness of sins, any reconciliation with God, then atonement is the only means by which these can occur. The atonement is an objective event and is the ground and condition of salvation. Without the atonement, no salvation is possible. God has designed that sin can be taken away only by means of atonement. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb 9:22). "God does not justify us freely by His grace in such a way that He did

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<sup>8</sup> *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*, Southern Baptist Convention, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.

<sup>9</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 197.

not demand any atonement to be made (*for our sins*),” as Martin Luther noted.<sup>10</sup>

### God’s Character

The necessity of the atonement is rooted in and proceeds from the nature of God. Here we must be careful not to play off God’s attributes against one another as if His justice were more fundamental than His love or His love more fundamental than His justice. For example, A. H. Strong, one of the most important Baptist theologians of the twentieth century, stated, “No theory of the atonement will meet the demands of reason or conscience that does not ground its necessity in God’s righteousness, rather than his love.”<sup>11</sup> Others just as easily prejudice God’s love over other attributes as the primary attribute at play in the atonement.

That said however, Scripture does indicate by means of explicit statements that God’s love for unredeemed humanity is a major motivating factor for the atonement. The NT writers note that in the suffering and death of Christ for the sins of the world, God demonstrates His love (John 3:16; Rom 5:8; 1 John 4:10). Moreover, “The Lord is . . . not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). McDonald speaks of the necessity of the atonement in relation to the love of God:

The love of God is not in the New Testament a truth declared, so to speak, antecedent to the work of Christ. It is rather the uniform teaching that it is in relation to Christ’s coming and deed that his love is declared. It is the act of atonement itself as God’s judgment of our sin on Christ that is the chief reason for the announcement *God is love*. The death of Christ, by which he bore sin’s condemnation as an essential of the divine forgiveness, is at the same time a demonstration of the immensity and the holiness of God’s love. The fact that God has himself met in the death of his Son the requirement of his holy judgment on sin is the final manifestation

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), 78.

<sup>11</sup> Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 715 (see chap. 1, n. 26).

of his love. And it is a love that lies in a region other than mere words. It is a love that has its action in the atonement of Christ's death. God could not do justice to his love and his holiness in relation to sin in a way less awful than this: that the Son of God has taken for us the whole responsibility of it.<sup>12</sup>

Remember that the law is God's law, and the law of God is what it is because the nature of God is what it is. Therefore, the necessity of the atonement likewise proceeds from God's justice, and pardon for sin must be based on more than just mercy. One can reasonably conclude along with Pendleton: "If sin originates the wrath of God, it is morally certain that *that* wrath can never be turned away, unless some provision is made for the forgiveness of the sin that originates it."<sup>13</sup>

This is an argument made more recently by William Lane Craig who references an article written by Samuel Morison.<sup>14</sup> Morison's article is concerned with the justification that exists so that sins can be forgiven. Retributivists<sup>15</sup> hold to a view of pardon as exclusively an instrument of justice. The only justification for a pardon is to correct some injustice that has been done. For example, an innocent man wrongly convicted of a crime might be pardoned. A man who is convicted of acting illegally but under duress or self-defense might receive a pardon. In other words, a pardon is an instrument of justice to assure that justice is done to rectify injustice. In this sense pardons are not acts of mercy. To provide a pardon simply out of mercy alone would be unjust and immoral. Craig applies this thinking to Christ's atonement and suggests that for God to pardon us simply out of mercy would be unjust. Rather, for pardon to take place, God's justice must be satisfied. Therefore, the atonement was necessary.<sup>16</sup> In fact, penal

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<sup>12</sup> McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 30–31; emphasis original (see chap. 1, n. 11).

<sup>13</sup> Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 234; emphasis original.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel T. Morison, "The Politics of Grace: On the Moral Justification of Executive Clemency," *Buffalo Criminal Law Review* 9, no. 1 (November 2005): 1–138. See also Craig, *The Atonement*, 90–93 (see "Introduction," n. 46).

<sup>15</sup> A *retributivist* is one who holds to a policy or theory of criminal justice that advocates the punishment of criminals in retribution for the law they have broken.

<sup>16</sup> Craig notes that in these situations, all appeal exclusively to human limitations. For example, an offer of pardon to a criminal in order to elicit his testimony in court and



substitutionary atonement is necessary since both the demands of God's justice as well as His mercy are thereby met. Since the full demands of God's justice are met, God is able and willing out of His mercy to pardon people for their sins.

The necessity of the atonement ultimately resides within the nature and character of God Himself. Although God's nature refuses sin passively and opposes sin actively, in one sense, God was under no external or internal compulsion to save. His decision to save was self-determined. However, what does seem to be required is that God acts consistently with His unchanging nature, which includes His love and justice. "God's freedom is rooted in His unchanging love; He cannot act contrary to His own nature. For example, since God is truth, 'it is impossible for God to lie' (Heb. 6:18; cp. Titus 1:2), and since God is love, it is impossible for Him not to love whatever is good."<sup>17</sup> Geisler further noted, "Love and *necessity* are not contradictory, but love and *compulsion* are."<sup>18</sup>

We can only briefly speak to the necessity of the atonement in connection with the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ. Adonis Vidu summarizes the issue:

[I]t was necessary that Christ should die given that God elected to be united to Humanity in a redemptive way. An entailment of that union is that Christ would bear our death in God-forsakenness. Yet it is not his penal death which enables God to be with us redemptively as such. Moreover, the whole Trinity is active in the death of Jesus, not just the Father punishing the Son. The whole Trinity is present to us in a new way in the human nature of the Son, taking upon itself, in this human nature, our penal death.<sup>19</sup>

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thereby convict other criminals does not change the issue since none of these human limitations apply to God.

<sup>17</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, *Sin, Salvation* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2004), 182. Thomas Oden states, "In speaking of the necessity of the cross, there is no intended implication that God is under an external necessity to resolve the dilemma caused by the history of sin. The moral necessity of atonement is a requirement of God's moral will. It is necessitated only by the freedom of the holy God to love rightly" (Oden, *Systematic Theology*, 2:373 [see chap. 1, n. 27]).

<sup>18</sup> Geisler, *Sin, Salvation*, 194.

<sup>19</sup> Adonis Vidu, "The Place of the Cross Among the Inseparable Operations of the Trinity," in *Locating Atonement: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp

The best foundation for the necessity of the atonement would seem to be in God and not man.

Anselm was one of the first theologians to begin to unpack an answer to the necessity question in his famous *Cur Deus Homo?* (*Why the God-Man?*). In essence, what Anselm concluded was rather simple: Man being what he is, sin being what it is, and God being who He is, the atonement is necessary. But is human need enough of a foundation upon which to rest the necessity of atonement? Moreover, does human need make it imperative that God's method of salvation be by Christ's death on the cross? Apparently, from God's perspective, as best we can determine in Scripture, sin's effect on humanity was such that it could be removed only by the cross. Furthermore, only by the cross could the law be fulfilled and justice carried out. But integrated with these factors must be God's love. Love being a part of God's nature, His love for humanity and desire to seek the good in His creation also necessitated the atonement. It is not unreasonable to conclude that in one sense, God could not refrain from providing an atonement without denying His own nature. This is sometimes referred to as the moral necessity of the atonement.<sup>20</sup> This reasoning, in various forms and levels of sophistication, has been propounded throughout church history.<sup>21</sup> Pendleton expresses the issue cogently:

It is inconsistent to say the atonement renders God propitious to sinners and stop there, but it is strictly true to say that it rendered him propitious to sinners *according to law and justice*. It follows, then, that the necessity of atonement originated in the obstacles interposed by the law and the justice of God to the salvation of sinners. The law, having been transgressed, demanded the execution of its penalty, and justice concurred in the demand.<sup>22</sup>

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and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 42.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:19–20 (see "Introduction," n. 21).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Thomas H. Hughes, *The Atonement: Modern Theories of Doctrine* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1949).

<sup>22</sup> Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 229.

As John Stott puts it, the atonement is an inherent and intrinsic necessity.<sup>23</sup> Why did God not choose a means other than Himself to accomplish atonement? Because the atonement is not simply a matter of overcoming our sin in a just manner but of reconciling the broken relationship between us and God that our sin caused. Sin is both a personal matter and a legal matter. It is a personal affront to the holiness of God. It is a violation of the law of God. For justice to be served, the payment for sin must equal the debt. God forgives sin out of His love, mercy, and grace based on Christ's atonement. The atonement brings about a changed situation with respect to God and His relationship to sin and sinners, as 2 Cor 5:14–21 demonstrates.

At this point we need to consider the meaning of the word "grace" with respect to salvation since this is crucial to the concept of the necessity of the atonement.<sup>24</sup> We should not stretch the word "grace," as do some theologians, to mean everything that God does, including creation, providence, and redemption. Much of this approach stems from Barth's concept of the covenant of grace that precedes and embraces all works of God, including creation. Here "grace" is used in its broadest possible sense of "gift" or "divine assistance." But this usage obscures the grace of redemption. Saving grace is unique when compared to the other works of God. Roman Catholic theologians distinguish between "natural grace" (creation and providence) and "supernatural grace" (saving grace). Likewise Reformed theology makes a similar distinction between "common grace" and "special grace." Within Reformed theology, saving grace is particular only to the elect via the doctrine of unconditional election. However, although those within Reformed theology who affirm an unlimited atonement agree that God's grace is extended to the non-elect in the sense that Christ died for their sins, they also contend that this saving grace is

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<sup>23</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 124 (see chap. 3, n. 65). Stott also cites three reasons for what he calls the "inevitability" of the atonement—"the hostility of the Jewish national leaders, Old Testament teachings about the Messiah, and his own deliberate choice" (Stott, 29–32).

<sup>24</sup> In this section, I am heavily dependent upon the excellent material in Jack Cottrell, *What the Bible Says about God the Redeemer*, vol. 3, *The Doctrine of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 377–400. I find his discussion of the issues to be very helpful.

withheld in the effectual call based on election so that only the elect are given the gift of faith.

The principal basis for the view that grace is restricted to the elect is that God is free to choose whether or not to show grace to people. God is free to choose who will be the objects of His grace. If grace is truly a gift, then it must be free. God cannot be under any compulsion to give it. The sovereignty of God determines on whom He will shower His grace and from whom He will withhold it.

However, as Cottrell notes, this view is a combination of truth and error. Grace is free from the standpoint of the sinner—the sinner has no claim on it. Nothing in the sinner obligates God to extend grace. Grace is free also in the sense that God does not require us to pay for it with our works. But from the standpoint of God Himself, to say that grace is free, that it is optional with God, is to reflect an inconsistent and unbiblical view of God.

First, asserting the freedom of God's grace severs God's will from His nature. It assumes that God's nature in no way impinges on His choices. "It is one thing to say that God's grace is free and spontaneous in the sense that it is uninfluenced or uncaused by anything in the *creature*, but it is quite another to say that it is arbitrary and optional and thus uninfluenced even by God's own nature."<sup>25</sup> This approach is built on a false dichotomy: Either God must be influenced by something within humanity, or He must be free to bestow saving grace on whom He pleases. But this false choice leaves out a third alternative—that God's grace is influenced by His own nature.

If love is the very nature of God, how can we at the same time say that the exercise of his love is a matter of His will—free and optional? Divine sovereignty does not mean that God is free to do anything He wants without being influenced by His nature. As the author of Hebrews states, "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb 6:18). "If it is God's nature to be gracious in his attitude toward sinners, then it is his nature to be gracious in His attitude toward *all* sinners. Particularism at this level is completely unbiblical."<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, moderate Calvinists see the exegetical data supporting

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<sup>25</sup> Cottrell, 385.

<sup>26</sup> Cottrell, 386.

unlimited atonement so clearly but do not see that the same problems of God's omnibenevolence that accrue to the limited atonement position also are entailed in their doctrine of unconditional election and defense of the freedom of God to bestow grace on whom He will.

Next, the question will logically be asked: If God *must*, because of His very nature, be gracious to *all* sinners, does this not entail universalism—that God would save everyone in the end? The answer is no. The universality of God's gracious attitude does not imply or require a universal application to every individual. Why? Because God has created humanity with a measure of libertarian freedom (which, of course, all Reformed theologians deny). Thus, with respect to the application of God's grace, God is not free, and this by His own choice, as Cottrell states.<sup>27</sup>

Just as God is not free, by His own nature, not to desire the salvation of all people (as all Orthodox Calvinists affirm), because such a *desire* for universal salvation is grounded in His nature (and expressed by Calvinists in God's so-called "revealed will"), also by choice, God is not free to apply His grace to anyone who rejects Him. By God's own design, He has created humanity with the freedom to accept His gift of grace or to reject it. Of course, it must be clearly stated that apart from God's enabling grace, no one could ever choose God's offer of salvation. *Pelagianism* and *Semi-Pelagianism*<sup>28</sup> are false doctrines, though sometimes non-Calvinists are falsely accused of one or the other.

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<sup>27</sup> Cottrell, 387.

<sup>28</sup> *Pelagianism*: "Its theological outlook was characterized by: an insistence on the adequacy of created human nature, essentially unimpaired by Adam's fall, to fulfill the will of God; the denial of original sin as either guilt or corruption transmitted from Adam to all humankind; the highest moral and spiritual expectations of the baptized Christian who must be capable of a life of perfect holiness, because God commands him thereto; and an understanding of the gifts of grace that excludes, or at best drastically minimizes, that enabling power without whose inner working we can do nothing acceptable to God" (David F. Wright, "Pelagianism," in *New Dictionary of Theology: Historical and Systematic*, ed. Martin Davie, Tim Grass, Stephen R. Holmes, John McDowell, and T. A. Noble [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016], 657–58). *Semi-Pelagianism*: "A theological position named after Pelagius, the fifth-century monk who debated Augustine, which asserts that faith was begun by human choice but that grace assisted that faith" (David F. Wright, "Semi-Pelagianism," in Davie et al., eds., *New Dictionary of Theology*, 833–34). On the misuse of this term, see D. L. Allen, "Claims, Clarity, Charity—Why the Traditional Baptist Statement on Soteriology is not and cannot be Semi pelagian," <http://drdavidlallen.com/baptist/claims-clarity-charity-why-the-traditional-baptist-statement-on-soteriology-is-not-and-cannot-be-semipelagian/#comments>.

What about the question as to whether God's grace is conditional or unconditional? Biblically speaking, it is both. It is unconditional in that God freely and unconditionally offers salvation on the grounds of a universal atonement. But it is conditional in that God has decreed that the application of His grace to individuals is conditioned upon their repentance of sin and faith in Christ. In other words, *grace* is unconditional but *salvation* is conditional.

We must also avoid the error of conflating the terms "unmerited" and "unconditional." The conditions for receiving grace are not works. The sinner does not offer a payment to God to purchase forgiveness. Grace is totally unmerited. But its reception is conditioned upon faith in Christ. Geisler summarizes the issue well:

It is true that there is nothing *in sinners* that prompts God to save us. Rather, as rightly objected, justice must condemn us in our sinfulness. However, it is also true that there is something *in God* that prompts Him to save us: His love. Since God is essentially omnibenevolent, He must try to save His fallen creatures. Therefore, God does not have to show love *because we deserve it* (we don't), but *because His nature demands it*. Love is not an *arbitrary* attribute of God, but is rooted in His *necessary* nature. Hence, if He is all loving, then He must love all.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Geisler, *Sin, Salvation*, 197; emphasis original. Though Geisler does not say specifically whether he affirms that there are any arbitrary attributes of God, theologically it is problematic to make that claim. We should not imply that there are any arbitrary attributes in God's nature. Notice also that Geisler does not claim that love is the necessary nature of God but that it is *rooted* in that necessary nature. A Calvinist might respond to Geisler by asking, "If what you say is true, why has God not done anything for the salvation of the devil and demons?" The fact is Scripture simply does not answer this question; any answer would be speculative. Reformed theology often appeals to God's "complacent love," whereby God takes pleasure and delight in that which He approves, and His "benevolent love," which is a love that seeks to save—a gracious and merciful love. There is a certain freeness in benevolent love. Thus, can it be said that it is necessary for God to be gracious and merciful toward sinful creatures? One might make the case that Geisler cannot consistently say "no," according to his statement. If what Geisler is saying is true, then God must, by a necessity of His nature, pursue the salvation of the human race. He is not free to do otherwise. His work to save humanity is "rooted in his necessary nature." And if that is the case for fallen humanity, then why is it not also true of fallen angels? Again, Scripture simply does not answer this question. I have often wondered if the Reformed distinction between God's complacent love and benevolent love is less tied to any direct

Thiselton explains the necessity of the atonement in terms of the confluence of God's nature, will, and promise:

“God must. . .” or “Jesus must. . .” is always to be explicated in terms of a conditional clause: “If God wills to be true to his promise, he has committed himself already to follow this course of action.” If Jesus wills to live out the role assigned to him by his Father and to embody the suffering-vindication pattern of the Scriptures, his only course is to go all the way to the cross.<sup>30</sup>

In this sense we appear to be on safe and solid ground with respect to the question of the necessity of the atonement.

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biblical teaching that asserts such a distinction and more tied to the Reformed notion of unconditional election. God's love winds up being limited under the category of election in a way that reverses Geisler's idea: God is necessarily loving to the elect while being arbitrarily loving toward the non-elect. The language of “necessity,” if applied to His nature or acts, must be carefully employed so as not to limit God. Such language may, unintentionally, challenge His aseity. Both creation and redemption are free and loving acts of God. Language of divine necessity (what His nature demands of Him) often creates unnecessary problems.

<sup>30</sup> Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 347 (see chap. 1, n. 22).





## CHAPTER 5

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### *Atonement and Christology*

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**T**hough the atonement is a category within soteriology, discussion best begins with Christology. We shall consider the atonement and the Trinity, the incarnation, the threefold office of Christ, and covenant.

#### **Atonement and the Trinity**

The early church fathers located the discussion of the atonement within the broader framework of the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>1</sup> Systematic theologians of all denominations have highlighted the role of the Trinity in atonement.<sup>2</sup> Modern works on the atonement and salvation recognize and emphasize this point. I. Howard Marshall states, “There is an indissoluble unity between Father, Son, and Spirit in the work of redemption.”<sup>3</sup> According to John Webster, “The bedrock of soteriology is the doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>4</sup> Adam Johnson describes the trinitarian shape of the doctrine

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Gregory of Nazianzus, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius*, trans. Frederick J. Williams and Lionel R. Wickham, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 96.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Baptist theologians like Augustus H. Strong, Wayne Grudem, Millard Erickson, and James Leo Garrett. E.g., Methodist theologian William Pope notes that the atonement exhibits the name and attributes of the triune God. See William B. Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical*, 3 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1879), 2:279.

<sup>3</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity* (London: Paternoster, 2007), 56.

<sup>4</sup> John B. Webster, “‘It Was the Will of the Lord to Bruise Him’: Soteriology and the Doctrine of God,” in *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 18.

of the atonement: “The one God willed to send himself by means of a threefold willing: as Father he willed to sacrifice; as Son he willed to be sacrificed; and as Spirit he willed to accompany and enable the sacrifice.”<sup>5</sup> I am not fond of the way Johnson words this. It almost sounds like the heresy of modalism. I would prefer that he said, “. . . the Father willed to sacrifice his Son; the Son willed to be sacrificed; and the Spirit willed to accompany and enable the sacrifice.” Worded this way, the distinction of persons is clearly maintained instead of sounding like Father, Son, and Spirit are just the modes of the one Person who is one God (i.e., modalistic Monarchianism). Of course, Johnson rejects modalistic Monarchianism: “Any time we speak of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as though they were opposed, we do so at the expense of the doctrine of the Trinity and therefore at the expense of the Gospel—and this is just as true of those critical of the tradition as it is of its overzealous adherents.”<sup>6</sup> Johnson further explains: “Because it is *God’s* work of reclaiming *God’s* creation by means of *God’s* own life and act, for the accomplishment of *God’s* purposes, the shape of the doctrine of the atonement is essentially Trinitarian.”<sup>7</sup>

What is God’s relationship to the atonement of Christ on the cross? Does God in Jesus do it for us, or does Jesus do it for God on our behalf? The questions illustrate one of many false dichotomies that are erected when we discuss the atonement. In a sense, the answer to both questions is “Yes.”

Scripture presents atonement and salvation as a trinitarian event. Ephesians 1:3–6 affirms that God is the author of salvation. Ephesians 1:7–12 indicates that Christ provided atonement for sins. Ephesians 1:13–14 states that the Holy Spirit applies and preserves salvation for the believer. In atonement, the Father gave the Son; but the Son also gave Himself. The Father sent the Son; but the Son Himself came. The Father did not require the Son to take up a cross that He was unwilling to bear. The Son did not “extract from the Father a salvation he was reluctant to bestow.”<sup>8</sup> In perfect

<sup>5</sup> Adam J. Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Bloomsbury Guides for the Perplexed (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 72.

<sup>6</sup> Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 74.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, “Atonement: The Shape and State of the Doctrine,” 6; emphasis original (see “Introduction,” n. 7).

<sup>8</sup> Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 151 (see chap. 3, n. 65).

trinitarian harmony, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work together to atone for human sin and bring about salvation.

As Eph 1:3–14 makes clear, atonement is about God giving Himself in His Son for our sins. The initiative is from God; the response must be from us. God first moves toward us so that we can move toward Him.

The saving work of God is, then, the atoning work of the Son; and the redeeming work of the Father is the saving work of Christ. By his cross and passion in gracious fulfillment of the loving purpose of the Father, Jesus Christ the Son of God has once and for all, on behalf of and instead of sinful man, made a full and perfect atonement for the sins of the world, whereby the broken relationship between God and man should be restored and the barrier to communion with God removed. Without this reality of the cross there is no sure word of redemption for man. This is the divine “transaction”—there need be no hesitation about admitting the word—that makes Christianity not just another religion, not simply another suggested path by which man can rise to God, but a revelation from God of the one gospel of Christ for the world.<sup>9</sup>

The trinitarian focus on the atonement helps us to see the cross as an expression of the love of the Father for us as well as of the love of the Son, as H. Wheeler Robinson notes, “The more we appeal to the love of Christ for man, in life and in death, as revealing the love of the Father, the more we seem driven to ascribe the sacrificial quality of that love, its very essence and core, to the Father as well as to the Son.”<sup>10</sup>

Contemporary work on the relationship of the Trinity to the atonement has included discussion on the concept of divine simplicity.<sup>11</sup> As Vidu

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<sup>9</sup> McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 20–21 (see chap. 1, n. 11).

<sup>10</sup> H. Wheeler Robinson, *Suffering: Human and Divine* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 157.

<sup>11</sup> God is not like a human agent. He has a unique relation to His actions. His actions spring uniquely from His nature. Divine attributes, while truly distinguishable, are identical to God’s being rather than components or parts of it. God’s actions exhibit a particular kind of perfection. Divine simplicity is an entailment of divine aseity. See, for example, Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement*; Thomas H. McCall, *Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why It Matters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012); Adonis Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker,

notes, the history of atonement theories is really a debate about the nature of God, especially the relationship between the two attributes of justice and love.<sup>12</sup> With respect to the atonement, God's action through Christ on the cross is grounded in divine simplicity (the unity of divine attributes simultaneously in action). Thus, it is never the case that God is more loving than just, or vice versa. Thomas McCall correctly points out that divine simplicity makes a conflict between love and wrath impossible.<sup>13</sup> James Pendleton poignantly states, "There is a cordial co-operation of the divine attributes in the salvation of the guilty."<sup>14</sup>

A trinitarian rendering of penal substitution is important. I. Howard Marshall expresses this well, "There is an indissoluble unity between Father, Son, and Spirit in the work of redemption. The recognition that it is God the Son, that is to say quite simply God, who suffers and dies on the cross, settles the question finally. This is God himself bearing the consequences of sin, not the abuse of some cosmic child."<sup>15</sup>

Vidu likewise is on target:

Moreover, the condemnation that Jesus suffered is just as much an expression of divine love as is his resurrection and glorification. The rule of simplicity cashes out here again: it is not that the crucifixion produced a change in God, from which point God was enabled to engage in another particular action. Rather, crucifixion, resurrection, glorification . . . all are elements of a single, all-encompassing, utterly uncontradictable action, whose success depends in no measure on anything needing to happen from the human side that would somehow escape his control. God is fully himself in all of his actions . . . The crucifixion does not *enable* God to so adjust his attributes that he is now able to receive us.<sup>16</sup>

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2014); Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God: How the Trinity Changes Everything*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017); Sanders, "These Three Atone," 19–34 (see "Introduction," n. 9).

<sup>12</sup> Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, 236–39.

<sup>13</sup> McCall, *Forsaken*, 80.

<sup>14</sup> Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 230 (see chap. 1, n. 4).

<sup>15</sup> Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement*, 56.

<sup>16</sup> Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, 260; emphasis original.

There is a sense in which God is not moved from wrath to mercy. But there is again a sense in which God is moved from wrath to mercy. What has objectively changed as a result of the atonement? God's treatment of sinners has changed. But His disposition toward humanity has not changed. God's wrath is a contingent expression of His holiness. The Mosaic law is an expression of God's holiness and His condemnation of sin in concrete institutional forms.<sup>17</sup> The wrath of God is His holy love contingently expressed against sin.<sup>18</sup>

Paul makes an important trinitarian statement with respect to the atonement in 2 Cor 5:19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself." The nature of the Trinity itself, not to mention the revelation of Scripture, indicates that God's salvation plan for humanity has both an individual and a corporate dimension. Salvation should not be approached only on the personal level, though it begins at that level. God's intent in salvation is to create community. As we are individually brought into a right relationship with God, so we are brought into a right relationship with those in the church and even, in a sense, with those outside the church.<sup>19</sup>

At this point it is important to consider how to understand Jesus's cry of dereliction: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). Does this mean that in some way the intra-trinitarian relationship between the Father and Son was somehow "ruptured" or "broken" at this point? Though some have answered "yes," McCall surveys the positions on both sides, including the patristic writers, and concludes the answer should be "no."<sup>20</sup> McCall notes that concepts such as "rejection" or "completely abandoned" are not found in the NT concerning the action of the Father toward the Son when Jesus was on the cross. In what sense was

<sup>17</sup> Vidu, 269.

<sup>18</sup> Vidu, 270, where he references McCall, *Forsaken*, 88.

<sup>19</sup> "Affirming from the beginning the trinitarian shape of salvation argues against reducing salvation to an individual event or to an objective corporate event. Salvation is not merely getting into a subjectively experienced relationship between oneself and God. Neither is salvation strictly about belonging to a church of like-minded people. Salvation concerns individuals-in-community. Covenant language throughout the Scriptures underscores this tension inherent in God's actions of salvation. God's acts of restoring us into a covenant relationship with him also puts us into a differently ordered (i.e., covenantal) relationship with all others who are reconciled to God" (Lints, "Soteriology," 264 [see "Introduction," n. 24]).

<sup>20</sup> McCall, *Forsaken*, 13–47.

the Son “forsaken”? The Father left him to die. He was abandoned to the death of the cross.<sup>21</sup>

Jesus’s words are a direct quotation of Ps 22:1. Though not everyone agrees, Jesus’s quotation of the first verse of this psalm likely was meant to bring to mind the entire psalm as a prophetic expression of what was taking place at the cross. This becomes even more likely when we realize that both Matthew and Mark make use of other parts of Psalm 22 in their passion narratives (Matt 27:27–31, 38–44; Mark 15:16–20, 25–32). Matthew and Mark expect their readers to see Psalm 22 as the interpretive key for the cross.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, McCall concludes, rightly in my view, that the Trinity was in no way “fractured,” “broken,” or “ruptured” when Christ died on the cross:

Did the Father “turn his face away from his Son?” No, the only text of Scripture that we can understand to address this question directly, Psalm 22:24, says that the Father did *not* hide his face from his Son. To the contrary, he has “listened to his cry for help.” Was the eternal communion between the Father and Son somehow ruptured on that terrible day? Was the Trinity broken? The answers to such questions should be resoundingly negative: careful study of the biblical text makes such a view unnecessary, and orthodox trinitarian theology makes it impossible.<sup>23</sup>

Herman Bavinck expresses a similar view:

Also on the cross Jesus remained the beloved Son, the Son of his Father’s good pleasure (Matt 3:17; 17:5). Precisely in his suffering and death, Christ offered his greatest, most complete obedience to the will of the Father . . . and Jesus himself tells us that the hour would come when all his disciples would abandon him, but that he himself would not be alone for the Father was with him (John 16:32).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> McCall, 43–44.

<sup>22</sup> McCall, 39–42.

<sup>23</sup> McCall, 43; emphasis original.

<sup>24</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 389.

Christ's eternal Trinitarian union with the Father as well as the incarnational union with humanity remained unbroken at the cross.

We need look no further than the doyen of nineteenth-century Wesleyan theologians, William Burt Pope, who has helpfully summarized the relationship between the Trinity and the atonement:

There is nothing that belongs to our conception of the Divine nature which is not manifested in His Son, Who both in His active and in His passive righteousness reveals all that is in the Father. Man, in fact, knows God only as a God of redemption; nor will He ever by man be otherwise known. Throughout the Scriptures of truth we have a gradual revelation of the Divine Being which is not finished until it is finished in Christ; God also, as well as man, is ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένος [*en autō peplērōmenos*], COMPLETE IN HIM. It is not enough to say that the Trinity Whom Christians adore is made known in Jesus, and that this the other or [*sic*] attribute which theology ascribes to Him is illustrated in His work. God Himself, with every idea we form of His nature, is given to us by the revelation of Christ. The gracious and awful Being Who is presented in the Christian Scriptures is not in all respects such a Deity as human reason would devise or tolerate when presented. But to us there is but ONE GOD; and we must receive Him as He is made known to us through the mystery of the Atoning Mediation of His Son. His Name is proclaimed only in the Cross; there we have His Divine and only Benediction; and every Doxology in Revelation derives its strength and fervour from the Atonement.<sup>25</sup>

### Atonement and Incarnation

The purpose of the incarnation was for Christ to take on human flesh. Jesus possesses both God's nature and man's nature in what theologians call the *hypostatic union*. This does not mean that the two natures are operating independently of each other or that the divine nature overpowers the human

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<sup>25</sup> Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology*, 2:279.

nature. Both divine and human natures of Christ cooperate in the work of atonement.<sup>26</sup> As Davidson notes, “But there is no sense in which his humanity is calmly steered through the world by divine autopilot.”<sup>27</sup>

Scripture indicates that the incarnation was for the purpose of atonement (Phil 2:5–11; Heb 2:9–18). “He had to be made like his brethren.” (Heb 2:17). The incarnation is always presented in Scripture in connection with God’s salvation plan. Whatever other motives may exist for the incarnation in the mind of God,<sup>28</sup> Scripture does not indicate,<sup>29</sup> and we would do well not to speculate.

Ivor Davidson rightly notes the universal significance of the incarnation: “In its particularity, his fleshly reality is of universal consequence. This is true at several levels. In the divine taking of human flesh, all human flesh is affirmed as immeasurably precious to God: in all its stages and conditions, in its most vulnerable and marginal of forms, in a mother’s womb, in a silent tomb.”<sup>30</sup>

How are we to construe the relationship of the two natures of Christ—His human nature and His divine nature—at the time of His suffering on the cross? McCall correctly reminds us that “when considering the suffering of Christ, we must maintain the distinction between the divinity and humanity of Christ. His divinity was not subject to suffering as was his humanity, so there is a way in which his divinity is impassible while

<sup>26</sup> See Kenneth J. Foreman, *Identification: Human and Divine* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), 91–113.

<sup>27</sup> Ivor Davidson, “Atonement and Incarnation,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 47.

<sup>28</sup> Several motives for the incarnation have been discussed throughout church history. Bloesch summarizes them as follows: (1) “to save us from death and corruptibility and to unite us with the divine nature”; (2) “to prepare the way for the reunion of the soul with God”; (3) “to save us from sin and the divine judgment”; (4) “to reconcile and unite sinful humanity to God”; (5) to save us “from the demonic powers of darkness”; (6) “to demonstrate and reveal God’s love for us” (Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior & Lord*, Christian Foundations [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997], 145–48).

<sup>29</sup> As Berkouwer notes with respect to the purpose of the incarnation that “the Church never knew of any other motive, neither hypothetical nor as secondary motive, besides this motive of Christ’s coming unto salvation” (*The Work of Christ*, 33 [see “Introduction,” n. 13]).

<sup>30</sup> Davidson, “Atonement and Incarnation,” 45.



his humanity suffers.”<sup>31</sup> Here, the doctrine of impassibility coheres with divine simplicity.<sup>32</sup>

### Atonement and the Three Offices of Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King

Theologians since the Reformation have spoken and written about the three offices of Christ: prophet, priest, and king.<sup>33</sup> Though some have argued this threefold approach to the person and work of Christ is somewhat artificial and lacks specific support from Scripture,<sup>34</sup> there is merit in the division to be found in Heb 1:1–4 where Jesus is the greatest prophet (“God . . . has . . . spoken to us by His Son”), high priest (“when He had . . . purged our sins”), and king (“He . . . sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”). Jesus in a sense fulfills the offices: He becomes God’s great prophet, priest, and king. The great factors in the Jewish communion—the kingly, the priestly, and the prophetic—served as the means for projecting the messianic ideal. The NT authors were following OT thought molds in representing Christ in the threefold office.<sup>35</sup> New Testa-

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<sup>31</sup> McCall, *Forsaken*, 69.

<sup>32</sup> McCall, 73–79.

<sup>33</sup> Referred to in theological terms as the *munus triplex*, the threefold designation as a Christological category was apparently first used by Martin Bucer in the 1520s and likewise by Andreas Osiander, then shortly thereafter by Calvin in his Genevan Catechism (1545), and later in his 1559 edition of the *Institutes*, 2.15.6. Reformed theologians have followed suit ever since, and many non-Reformed theologians have as well. Helpful works include Geoffrey Wainwright, *For Our Salvation: Two Approaches to the Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Robert Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet* (see “Introduction,” n. 37); Adam J. Johnson, “*Munus Triplex*,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 655–58; and Johnson, “The Servant Lord: The Role of the *Munus Triplex* in the Theology of Karl Barth,” *SJT* 65, no. 2 (2012): 159–73.

<sup>34</sup> As, for example, the Lutheran scholar, Gerhard O. Forde, “Seventh Locust,” 2:43–44 (see chap. 1, n. 22). Forde writes, “Christ’s three-fold office seems to be an artificial scheme that does not contribute essentially to the understanding of Christ’s Work” (Forde, 2:43). More accurate is Sheldon: “While the threefold distinction in Christ’s offices is in no wise artificial, it can easily be pushed into artificiality by being overdrawn” (Henry C. Sheldon, *System of Christian Doctrine* [Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye; New York: Eaton and Mains, 1903], 360).

<sup>35</sup> Sheldon, 360.

ment thought was flowing into prepared molds when it represented Christ as prophet, priest, and king.

Less evident is Sherman's thesis that the threefold designation is "biblically appropriate, theologically evocative, and pastorally helpful to associate these three models and offices with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, respectively."<sup>36</sup> Sherman is concerned that theologically "it may be inappropriate to emphasize one of Christ's offices, one model of the atonement, or one person of the Trinity to the exclusion of the others."<sup>37</sup> True enough, but the NT emphasis is surely on the role of the Second Person of the Trinity as prophet, priest, and king. Furthermore, the three offices are interrelated, such that

Christ is Prophet in a priestly and royal manner; Priest in a prophetic and royal way; King, but King as priest and prophet. The three offices can be distinguished; they cannot be separated. At every moment Christ acts in all three capacities. . . . It is, therefore, not permissible to emphasize one of the three offices to such an extent that the other two are forgotten.<sup>38</sup>

The role of Christ as priest is most dominant in the letter to the Hebrews.<sup>39</sup> Hebrews refers to Jesus as "priest" 6 times and "high priest" 10 times. Priesthood and sacrifice are inextricably linked in Hebrews. In Hebrews, the OT priesthood is contrasted to the priesthood of Christ. Christ differs in His role as High Priest at one crucial point: The OT priest is a man like other men and must make an offering for himself as well as those he serves. Not so Christ. As the sinless priest, He offers sacrifice only for the sins of others, not His own sins (Heb 5:1–10). Another difference is that the OT priests offered the sacrifices, but Christ is both priest and sacrifice. A third distinction is that the priests continually had to offer sacrifices

<sup>36</sup> See Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> Sherman, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Willem A. Visser 't Hooft, *The Kingship of Christ* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 16–17; cited in Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 21.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, John M. Scholer, *Proleptic Priests: Priesthood in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); Gerald O'Collins and Michael K. Jones, *Jesus Our Priest: A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Allen, *Hebrews* (see chap. 3, n. 129).

and the high priest annually offered the sacrifice for the entire nation of Israel on the Day of Atonement. But Christ our great High Priest has offered the sacrifice “once for all” thus accomplishing “eternal redemption.” Hebrews focuses on the once-for-all character of Christ’s sacrifice (7:27; 9:12, 28; 10:10, 18). Christ is “High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (6:20; cp. 5:6, 10). Melchizedekian priesthood is superior to the Levitical (7:1–28). By virtue of Christ’s priestly work, He has brought about “eternal redemption” (9:12) and “eternal salvation” (5:9).

We may summarize the biblical presentation of Christ’s priesthood in the following manner. Jesus became a high priest when He assumed humanity in the incarnation. As priest, Jesus experienced all things human, including trials, testing, and physical death. Jesus exemplified His priesthood at the Last Supper and consummated His atoning work as priest on the cross. Jesus inaugurated the new covenant in His death on the cross for the sins of the world. The resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Christ initiated His eternal intercessory ministry for the world and for believers.

### Atonement and Covenant<sup>40</sup>

Covenant is a major OT and NT theme. “If Christ’s work is painted in many different colors, covenant is the canvas on which they are painted.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> See R. Larry Shelton, *Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission* (Tyrone, GA: Paternoster, 2006); Scott W. Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Michael J. Gorman, *The Death of the Messiah and the Birth of the New Covenant: A (Not So) New Model of the Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014); Jeremy R. Treat, “Covenant,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 431–35; and in more detail, Treat, “Atonement and Covenant: Binding Together Aspects of Christ’s Work,” in *Locating Atonement: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 101–17. As Treat rightly notes, “Reformed ‘covenant theologians’ are not the only ones appealing to covenant to understand atonement. Scholars who are Methodist, Anabaptist, Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish have recently called for the importance of covenant in understanding atonement” (Treat, “Atonement and Covenant,” 101, n. 2).

<sup>41</sup> Treat, “Atonement and Covenant,” 116.

The first explicit mention of a covenant in Scripture is God's covenant with Abraham in Gen 12:1–3.<sup>42</sup> The other covenants explicitly mentioned in Scripture are the Mosaic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant. Of these four covenants, the only one that is said to be temporary is the Mosaic covenant. Of these four covenants, the only one that has specific reference to God's plan of redemption for humanity is the new covenant.

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<sup>42</sup> Many within the Reformed tradition posit two covenants prior to the Abrahamic Covenant—(1) a Covenant of Works made before the Fall, at the time of creation (also called by some, the Covenant of Creation), in which salvation is based on works; and (2) a Covenant of Grace made after the Fall, in which salvation is based on grace. The idea of a third covenant, a pre-temporal pact between the Father and the Son to redeem the elect, often called the Covenant of Redemption, has been traced back to Caspar Olevianus in 1585 (see Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996], 107–12). Interestingly, this coincided with Theodore Beza's articulation of limited atonement. This Covenant of Redemption was further developed by Johannes Cocceius (AD 1603–1669). There is no mention in Scripture of any "Covenant of Redemption." Likewise, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms of 1643–1649 make no mention of a "Covenant of Redemption." In fact, in Scripture, all covenants that God initiates are between God and people, never between members of the Godhead. The so-called Covenant of Redemption remains a figment of Reformed dogmatics, and several Reformed theologians reject the notion. Karl Barth called the notion of a "Covenant of Redemption" a contract that is "mythology," which has no place in a correct understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. For Barth, the Covenant of Redemption introduces an unbiblical dualism into the Godhead. How can there be an antecedent logical moment where God is somehow not capable of being both righteous and merciful? Barth also argued that the construct of the first two divine persons in the Godhead as two legal subjects is problematic because it jeopardizes the unity of the Godhead and suggests disunity of will within the Godhead (Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 4.1, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956], 54–66). For the position that the Covenant of Redemption faces substantial objections but remains possible "to direct us to something indispensable in soteriology," see Webster, "Soteriology and the Doctrine of God," 28–31. See also the work on the Covenant of Redemption by J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2016). For the history of covenant theology, see David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); and Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012).

Likewise, the fact that neither term—"Covenant of Works" or "Covenant of Grace"—can be found in Scripture has led some Reformed theologians to question the terms' legitimacy. John Murray questions the propriety of the label "Covenant of Works" (see John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace: A Biblico-Theological Study, The Tyndale Biblical Theology Lecture* [London: Tyndale, 1953]), as did Karl Barth. However, even the label "Covenant of Grace" has been questioned by proponents of New Covenant Theology and Progressive Covenantalism (see below). Scripture speaks of the new covenant, which God inaugurates through Christ for the salvation of the world, and this is certainly a covenant based in grace, as are all the biblical covenants.

Hebrews 8 makes clear that the Mosaic covenant has been fulfilled and superseded by the new covenant.<sup>43</sup> This understanding that the Mosaic covenant would be temporary had already been expressed in the OT (Jer 31:31–34). The heart of the new covenant is the atonement where God through Christ effects reconciliation for the world. Jesus described His coming death on the cross and the shedding of His blood as the inauguration and fulfillment of this new covenant promise in Jeremiah (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). Of the three Synoptic Gospel writers, only Luke explicitly quotes Jesus's reference to the "new covenant" in His blood (Luke 22:20). Likewise, the author of Hebrews describes Christ

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<sup>43</sup> God's relationship with Israel is understood in three different ways in theology. First, *supersessionism* or *replacement theology* views covenant promises regarding Israel as having been fulfilled in Christ and the church such that Christ, the church, or both replace Israel in the plan of God, thereby becoming "a new Israel." This leaves no future for an ethnic, national, or territorial Israel as featured in the biblical covenants. Second, some find the future fulfillment of Israel's covenant promises in the expectation that a large number of ethnic Jews will be saved in the future but without any literal fulfillment of the national or territorial aspects of covenant promise. Obviously, this view is also supersessionist with respect to the full scope of covenant blessing. Third, others expect a literal fulfillment of the ethnic, national, and territorial covenant promises to Israel in terms of a regathered nation under the future rule of Christ (in both the future millennium and for eternity). Reformed theology has typically embraced the first or second of these views, whereas the third view is associated with various forms of *dispensationalism*. Space does not permit an explication of the movements known as *Progressive Covenantalism* (a part of the New Covenant Theology movement) and *Progressive Dispensationalism*. The former is supersessionist, whereas the latter is not. Key players in the dialogue include Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum (Progressive Covenantalism). On Progressive Dispensationalism, see Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993, 2000); Blaising and Bock, eds., *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). Progressive Dispensationalism presents a view of the kingdom of God that is greater than Israel per se and is the integrating theme of biblical theology. Consequently, Progressive Dispensationalism has also been called *Redemptive Kingdom Theology* (see Craig Blaising, "A Theology of Israel and the Church," in *Israel, the Church and the Middle East: A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 85–100. On Progressive Covenantalism, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012); Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, eds., *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016). Blaising and Bock have also offered substantive critiques of Gentry and Wellum. See Craig Blaising, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Hermeneutical-Theological Response*," *MSJ* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 111–27; Darrell L. Bock, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's, *Kingdom through Covenant: A New Testament Perspective*," *MSJ* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2015): 139–45.

as one who inaugurates this new covenant by His atoning sacrifice on the cross (Heb 8:6–13). Jesus is “the Mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 9:15), and it is “the everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20). Paul understood the Lord’s Supper to be a memorial fellowship feast celebrating Christ’s inauguration of the new covenant (1 Cor 11:25).

Treat summarizes the relationship of covenant to atonement in three theses. First, covenant is indispensable for the context of atonement. This occurs in two ways: redemptive-historical and relational. In the OT, God is a covenant-making God who enters into covenant relationship with Israel for the purpose of providing atonement for the sins of all people, both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>44</sup> Christ died to bring sinners into relationship with God. Second, covenant is intrinsic to the definition of atonement in that Christ’s death is the grounds for bringing God and sinners into a covenant relationship. Third, covenant is integrative in the doctrine of atonement. “The integrating power of covenant has the potential to repair many common false dichotomies that plague atonement theology and thereby demonstrate, for example, that Christ’s atoning work is relational *and* juridical, individual *and* corporate, and restorative *and* retributive.”<sup>45</sup>

The cross is a covenantal event. “*Jesus’ death saves because it is the necessary and sufficient condition for restoring ‘right covenantal relations’ between God and humanity. . . . Jesus’ death saves because it achieves covenantal (not mere legal) rightness and covenantal (not mere interpersonal) relationship. . . . The judicial and the interpersonal are equally ultimate, for the cross is equally the fulfillment of both sides of the covenant—law and promise, justice and love—though the initiative belongs exclusively to God’s love.*”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Treat is ambiguous as to whether he views the death of Christ as an atonement for the sins of all people (unlimited atonement) or for the sins of only “his people,” which within a Reformed context means only “the elect.” Treat’s ambiguity is evidenced in his alternating use of the terms “his people” and “sinners.” Treat states that “a covenant is about God binding himself to his people” (Treat, “Covenant,” 434). This can be interpreted in two ways. Either Treat understands the atonement to be accomplished only for “his people” (limited atonement), or he understands the atonement to be accomplished for the sins of all people but that God intends for it to be efficaciously applied only to the elect. See the section to follow on the intent and extent of the atonement.

<sup>45</sup> Treat, “Covenant,” 435; emphasis original.

<sup>46</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 390–91; emphasis original (see “Introduction,” n. 32). See also Vanhoozer, “The Atonement in Postmodernity; Guilt, Goats, and Gifts,” in *The Glory of the Atonement*, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 398–401.

## CHAPTER 6

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### *The Intent, Extent, and Application of the Atonement*

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In broad terms, and in terms that most Christians of any theological persuasion would accept, we might describe God’s purpose for the atonement as His plan to deal effectively and finally with human sin so as to redeem and forgive sinners, reconcile them to Himself, and deliver them from sin’s penalty, power, and ultimately its presence. The concept of reconciliation is of major import with respect to God’s purpose in the atonement: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18); “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself” (2 Cor 5:19); “when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son” (Rom 5:10). Reconciliation with God is described as the redeemed sinner now having peace with God (Rom 5:1) and access to God (Rom. 5:2; Eph 2:18; Heb 4:14–16; 10:19–22). This reconciliation is threefold: reconciliation to God (Rom 5:1), reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles through the cross (Eph 2:18), and cosmic eschatological reconciliation (Col 1:20).

Another purpose of the atonement was to establish a new covenant through which this reconciliation could be effected. Jeremiah 31:31–34 speaks of this new covenant, and Jesus described His coming death on the cross and the shedding of His blood as the inauguration and fulfillment of this new covenant promise in Jeremiah (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in chapter 5 under “Atonement and Covenant,” Hebrews describes Christ as “the Mediator of the new covenant” (Heb 9:15), who inaugurates this new covenant at the cross (Heb 8:6–13). The new covenant is “everlasting” (Heb 13:20).

God's purpose for the atonement is also designed to bring about spiritual renewal to empower believers to live godly lives. This is expressed in detail by Paul in Romans 6–8. Notice how Paul speaks in Rom 8:3–4: Christ “condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.” The same concept is expressed in 2 Cor 5:15: “He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” Titus 2:14 declares that Christ “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.” Hebrews 9:14 explains that the death of Christ cleanses one's “conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Also note the purpose clause of 1 Pet 2:24, according to which Christ “Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness.”

### **Intent of the Atonement**

What does Scripture teach concerning God's intention and desire with respect to the salvation of people? Is there any statement in Scripture that indicates God's intention or desire is *not* to save some people? There is none. Two important NT texts affirm God's universal desire that all people be saved:

[W]ho desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. (1 Tim 2:4–6)

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Pet 3:9)

In 1 Tim 2:4–6, notice that God's desire for all to be saved is connected with an unlimited atonement He has provided for the salvation of all people. In 2 Pet 3:9, Peter informs us that God does not want “any” to perish eternally; but, on the contrary, He desires “all” to come to repentance and



experience salvation. These two verses, the first by direct statement and the second by implication, speak to God's desire and intent concerning the salvation of all people as a reason why He provided an atonement for the sins of all people.

B. H. Carroll, the founder and first president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wrote concerning these two verses:

“The Lord is willing that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). This scripture expresses not an irresistible decree, but the attitude of the divine mind toward all men. . . . The emphasis should be placed on “willing” and “all.” The Lord is willing; is the sinner willing? The willingness of God is toward all, excluding no nation, no class, no individual: “How often would I have gathered you but ye would not,” “Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life,” “Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” No view of the divine decrees, no interpretation of the doctrines of election and predestination should be allowed to obscure the brightness, or limit the broadness, of this attitude of the divine mind toward sinners. Our own hearts should be full of it when we preach or teach the gospel to lost men. And we should prayerfully and diligently labor to possess their minds with the conviction that if everything else in the universe be a lie, it remains true that “God wishes all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). We must not, dare not, doubt his sincerity, nor impugn his veracity, when he says, “As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> B. H. Carroll, *An Interpretation of the English Bible, The Four Gospels; Part 1*, ed. J. B. Cranfill (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1947; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1948), 4:193–94. Carroll continued to explain what he meant: “This willingness of God that all should come to repentance is evident (a) by his abundant provision of mercy—‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life,’ (John 3:16); ‘That by the grace of God he should taste death for every man,’ (Heb. 2:9); ‘He is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world,’ (1 John 2:2). (b) It is evident in that the terms of this mercy are simple and easy repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 1:15; Acts 20:21; Rom. 10:8–9). (c) It is evident in that, by the church and ministry, he has provided for a perpetual and worldwide publication of this mercy and its terms (Luke

Calvinists usually speak of the ultimate purpose of the cross as the revelation of the glory of God and the “special” or “distinctive” purpose as satisfaction for sins.<sup>3</sup> It is certainly true that in one sense the ultimate purpose of the atonement, as all things, is the glory of God. But when speaking of the purpose of the atonement, the NT does so predominately as a provision of salvation for humanity motivated by the love of God, not the glory of God. When Scripture is read through the lens of the Westminster Confession, as in the Reformed tradition, the primary *Scriptural* purpose of the atonement may be overshadowed—*theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) is in danger of being eclipsed by *theologia gloria* (theology of glory).

Biblically speaking, the atonement was intended to *provide* a payment for sin for all people as well as to *apply* salvation only to those who believe. This position is held by all Christendom with the exception of some in the Reformed community, i.e., Calvinists. Reformed theology asserts that God’s *intention* in the atonement, the sense of His electing purpose, is to save only the elect. This view, of course, presupposes the Reformed understanding of unconditional election. All Calvinists affirm this single saving intention for the atonement in connection with the elect.

However, from the very beginning of Reformed theology in the sixteenth century, there have been those who see from Scripture a multi-intentioned purpose for the atonement.<sup>4</sup> These Calvinists affirm that God’s intention is to save only the elect (as distinguished from His revealed desire that all be saved), but they also believe that Scripture teaches it was God’s intention that Christ die for the sins of all people. Thus, within Calvinism,

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24:47; Matt. 28:19; Acts 17:30). (d) It is evident by the earnestness and broadness of his gracious invitations (Isa. 55:1; Matt. 11:28; Rev. 22:17). (e) It is evident by his suspension of the death penalty, assessed against the sinner, that space for repentance may be allowed (Gen. 6:3; Matt. 3:10; Luke 13:6–9; Rom. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9, 15; Rev. 2:21). (f) It is evident by his joyous welcome to the penitent (Luke 15:20, 24) who returns in this space; (g) It is evident by his sincere grief over the finally impenitent who allow the space to pass away unimproved (Luke 19:41–44). What mighty motives are in all these thoughts! What an inexhaustible supply of sermon themes! What preacher has drawn all the water out of these wells of salvation?” (Carroll, 194–95).

<sup>3</sup> Johannes Wollebius, “Compendium Theologiae Christianae,” in *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. and trans. John W. Beardslee III (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 103.

<sup>4</sup> See Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement* (see chap. 1, n. 16); and Gary L. Shultz Jr., *A Multi-Intentioned View of the Extent of the Atonement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013).

there are two kinds of Calvinists with respect to the actual extent of the atonement *vis à vis* God's *intent* in the atonement: (1) Calvinists who assert that Christ died *only* for the sins of the elect, and (2) Calvinists who assert that Christ died for the sins of all people.

Calvinists who affirm limited atonement (see what follows on limited atonement) usually set up a false dichotomy, wrongly assuming either that there was only one intention for the atonement—to procure salvation for the elect only—or that somehow God's purposes, intentions, or will would be thwarted if some, for whose sins Jesus died, were not saved. These Calvinists assert, along with all other non-Calvinists, that God desires the salvation of all people<sup>5</sup> (in what they refer to as God's *revealed* will in distinction from God's *decretal* or *hidden* will—a distinction Scripture does not make); therefore He intended (willed) that Christ would die to provide salvation for all people. All non-Calvinists find the notions of unconditional election, as defined by the Council of Dort (1618–1619) and the Reformed Confessions, and of God's *two wills* to be lacking in any biblical support.

Setting aside for the moment the debate over the nature of election, interestingly no *atonement* text in Scripture states that Christ died only for the “elect” (contra high and hyper-Calvinists). There is no *atonement* text in Scripture stating that God intends to save only the elect (contra all

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<sup>5</sup> The majority of the Calvinists who affirm limited atonement also believe in the concept of God's universal saving will. This is considered the orthodox view of Reformed theology and is reflected in most Reformed confessions in their teaching on the sincere offer of the gospel. All hyper-Calvinists reject the notion of God's universal saving will or the well-meant offer as contradictory to limited atonement and God's intent to save only the elect. Curt Daniel says, “Secondly, there's the universal saving desire of God; that God, in the preaching of the gospel, desires that all those that hear the gospel repent and believe and be saved. That's part of the free offer. Historic Calvinists believe in that; hyper-Calvinists do not believe in that” (Curt D. Daniel, “The Calvinism Debate” [lecture, Faith Bible Church, Springfield, IL, November 3, 2013], accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=11313202106>). Daniel also explains, “Mainline Calvinists have repeatedly taught God sincerely desires the salvation of all lost sinners, especially those that hear the gospel. But since some Calvinists deny this, they are going beyond the mainstream. Therefore, on this point, they are hyper-Calvinists. They have gone too far, not only out of the mainstream, but out against what Scripture itself teaches” (Curt D. Daniel, “What is Hyper-Calvinism?” [lecture, Faith Bible Church, Springfield, IL, February 24, 2013], accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=3181392882>).

Calvinists). There is no *atonement* text in Scripture stating that God wills only the salvation of the elect (contra all hyper-Calvinists who deny God's universal saving will). If unconditional election as defined in Reformed theology is true, it cannot be supported from any *atonement* text in Scripture. Those texts that do speak in any way to the intention of the atonement as a sacrifice for sins never limit the recipients in terms of God's intent to save or in terms of the extent of the atonement. This is a very important point.<sup>6</sup>

We conclude that God's primary purpose for the atonement is to deal effectively and finally with human sin so as to redeem and forgive all sinners who believe in Christ, to reconcile them to Himself, and to deliver them from sin's penalty, power, and ultimately its presence.

### **Extent of the Atonement<sup>7</sup>**

The question concerning the extent of the atonement was never really an issue until the Reformation era. Prior to that time, in the entire history of the church, there is evidence of only three people who seriously questioned that Christ died for the sins of all people and posited what has come to be called "limited atonement."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For how Calvinists and non-Calvinists view key texts in these discussions, see David Gibson and Jonathan Gibson, eds., *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her: Definite Atonement in Historical, Biblical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013); and Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*.

<sup>7</sup> I have written extensively on this subject. See Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*; David L. Allen, "The Extent of the Atonement: Limited or Universal?," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, ed. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 61–108. I am grateful to B&H Academic for permission to use significant portions of this volume, especially in this section.

<sup>8</sup> See Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 23–26. From the entire patristic era, only one name can be marshalled in support of limited atonement, and then only in a very tentative and temporary way. As a result of the fifth-century Council of Arles, Lucian, who had leaned toward limited atonement, changed his view to unlimited atonement. It seems that an extreme form of predestinarianism may have raised the possibility of limited atonement in Lucian's mind. Later, Gottschalk of Orbais, a ninth-century monk and strong disciple of Augustinianism, took Augustine's teaching on predestination and moved well beyond Augustine, concluding that God did not desire the salvation of the non-elect; hence, the atonement was strictly limited to the elect. He and his views were condemned by three French councils. Fesko correctly notes that with Gottschalk we have the "first extant articulation of definite [limited] atonement in church history" (John V. Fesko, *Diversity within*

The extent of the atonement was not a question among the first generation of the Reformers on the continent or in England. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli, along with all their colleagues and followers, held to unlimited atonement. Likewise, the Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation all affirmed unlimited atonement. Not until Theodore Beza and William Perkins in the late sixteenth century do we find limited atonement being clearly advocated.<sup>9</sup> The earliest English Baptists affirmed an unlimited atonement, but within thirty years, a group of Baptists called “Particular Baptists” arose; they were more Calvinistic in theology, and many of them, though not all, affirmed limited atonement.<sup>10</sup>

What exactly is the question we are asking concerning the extent of the atonement? The question is: “For whose sins did Christ die?” There are only two options: (1) for the elect alone (limited atonement) or (2) for all of humanity.<sup>11</sup> Theologically speaking, *limited atonement* is the view that Christ bore the punishment due for the sins of the elect alone. Other synonyms for limited atonement used by Calvinists include *definite atonement*, *particular redemption*, *strict particularism*, and *particularism*. *Unlimited atonement* is the view that Christ bore the punishment due for

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*the Reformed Tradition: Supra- and Infralapsarianism in Calvin, Dort, and Westminster* [Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 2001], 32). A third advocate for limited atonement was Florence of Lyons, a contemporary of Gottschalk.

<sup>9</sup> Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 102–06. Although Perkins was strict in his views on the atonement, he was a transitional figure, and so we still find remnants of the older, classic-moderate language in some of his writings. For instance, he said, “For I do willingly acknowledge and teach universal redemption and grace, so far as it is possible by the word” (William Perkins, *A Christian and Plaine Treatise of the Manner and Order of Predestination and of the Largeness of God’s Grace*, trans. Francis Cacot and Thomas Tuke [London: Printed by F. Kingston, 1606], F8<sup>v</sup>; some spelling corrected; section 10 of online text accessed August 14, 2018, at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A09386.0001.001/1:4?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>).

<sup>10</sup> Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 459–67. For a complete survey of the differences regarding the extent of the atonement among Baptists from the early seventeenth century until today, including a chapter on the Southern Baptist Convention, see Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 457–653.

<sup>11</sup> The second option may be further divided into (a) those Calvinists who believe Christ died for the sins of all people in terms of extent, but who believe that God’s effectual will or intention is to save only the elect; and (b) Arminians and non-Calvinists who believe Christ equally wills to save all through the death of Christ, which is an atonement made for the sins of all people. On the extent question, these two groups are in agreement. Where they differ is over the question of intent.

the sins of all humanity, dead and living. This should not be confused with the theological error known as *universalism*, which teaches that in the end there will be universal salvation—i.e., that all people will be saved.

That Christ died for the sins of all people is clearly taught in Scripture in numerous places. The key passages asserting unlimited atonement include Isa 53:6; Mark 10:45; John 1:29; 3:14–16; Rom 5:18–19; 1 Cor 15:3–11; 2 Cor 5:14–21; 1 Tim 2:4–6; 4:10; Titus 2:11–14; Heb 2:9; 9:28; 2 Pet 2:1; and 1 John 2:1–2. There are other texts that implicitly affirm unlimited atonement: Luke 22:20–23; John 17:21,23; Acts 3:26; 10:34; Rom 1:16; 2:11; 3:21–26; 5:15; 11:32; 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11–12; 2 Pet 3:9; Jude 4; and Rev 22:17.<sup>12</sup>

Why, in the light of these texts, would anyone deny that Christ died for the sins of all people and affirm a strictly limited atonement? The answer is difficult to find in any exegetical evidence in Scripture. In fact, there is no single text of Scripture asserting Jesus died only for the sins of the elect. Limited atonement is a doctrine in search of a text. Limited atonement is mostly a theological deduction based primarily upon a certain understanding of predestination and election.<sup>13</sup> Of interest is the fact that almost all the arguments against unlimited atonement and for limited atonement are logical and deductive in nature. I treat all of these at length in *The Extent of the Atonement*.

The typology of the OT indicates an unlimited atonement. First Corinthians 5:7 indicates that the OT Passover was a type of the death of

<sup>12</sup> For the arguments that these texts teach unlimited atonement and the arguments against this reading, consult the “Scriptural Index” for page numbers to the corresponding texts in Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 815–20.

<sup>13</sup> It is common among limitarians to sidestep the exegetical evidence that clearly supports unlimited atonement and appeal to broader theological issues, which, we are told, should be considered in deciding the issue. For example, Scott Swain states: “This facet of theological interpretation is particularly important because many debates in atonement theology (e.g., questions about the ‘extent’ of the atonement) cannot be resolved simply through recourse to different texts where God’s reconciling work is in view but only when a broader constellation of biblical themes such as Trinity, union with Christ, and covenant representation is considered (Gibson, chapter 13)” (Scott Swain, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson [New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017], 777). In other words, the clear texts that affirm unlimited atonement do not teach unlimited atonement and must be filtered through deductive theological arguments.

Christ. According to Exodus 12, was the firstborn of the home protected from death merely because the lamb had been slain? No. God did not say, “When I see that the lamb has been slain, I will pass over you.” Rather, He said, “When I see the blood [on the two doorposts and on the lintel], I will pass over you” (Exod 12:7, 13). The lamb had to be slain in order to provide salvation for the firstborn, but the blood also had to be *applied* before the provision became effective on his behalf. Peter shows that the “sprinkling of the blood,” in fulfillment of the type, speaks of the “obedience” of faith, the personal application, by faith, of Christ’s death (1 Pet 1:2).

Isaiah 53:6 also suggests that the atonement was unlimited in nature:

All we like sheep have gone astray;  
 We have turned, every one, to his own way;  
 And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah parallels the universal sin problem with the universal sin solution in the atoning death of the Messiah.

The texts that are used to deduce limited atonement include Isa 53:11–12; Matt 1:21; Mark 10:45; John 6:37–40, 44; 10:15; 17:9, 21, 23; Acts 20:28; Rom 8:32–34; Eph 5:25; Col 2:13–14; and Rev 5:9–10.<sup>14</sup> The first, and most important, thing to note about each of these texts is that not a single one says that Christ died for the sins *only* of “His people,” “the sheep,” “the church,” or “friends.” Since these texts mention a limited group for whom salvation was intended, or for whom Christ died, the assumption is made that these texts affirm Christ intended to bring salvation *only* to these groups, or that he died *only* for these people. This line of argument is logically flawed because it invokes the *negative inference fallacy*, which says the proof of a proposition does not disprove its converse. When Paul says, “Christ . . . gave Himself [died] for me” in Gal 2:20, we cannot infer that He died only for Paul. This is the logical mistake made by all Calvinists

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<sup>14</sup> For a critique of the arguments used by limitarians regarding these texts from non-Calvinists and Calvinists alike, see the “Scriptural Index” for page numbers to the corresponding texts in Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 815–20, and see chapter 8, “A Critical Review of *From Heaven He Came and Sought Her*,” (Allen, 657–764). Criticism of limited atonement may also be found in I. Howard Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement*, 62–63 (see chap. 5, n. 3).

who assert limited atonement. There is no statement in Scripture that says Jesus died only for the sins of the elect. This is the crucial point.

As we see above, in the NT, two kinds of texts play a key role in the question of extent: (1) texts that use words like “all” and “world” with reference to the death of Christ and (2) texts that speak of Christ dying for His “sheep” or for the “church.” So far, so good. But then those who support limited atonement claim that the second set of texts must be contextually understood to refer to Christ dying only for the sins of those mentioned in the restricted group. The first set of texts are either speaking of the gospel offer, which is for all the world, or using terms like “world” and “all” to refer to (1) all the elect (where the elect believing and unbelieving throughout history are meant), (2) Jews and Gentiles, or (3) all kinds or groups of people in the world. This is where it becomes obvious that these texts are being treated from the preconceived notion of limited atonement.

Of course it is true that in writing to the church, NT authors speak of the atonement in reference to their audience. To find them saying things like “Christ died for the church,” etc., is not surprising. Why would we require the biblical authors to note in every instance when they speak of the death of Christ in relationship to believers that they also mean to affirm that Christ died for the sins of all people? Why would we assume that such is the case unless we bring a preconceived theology to the text?

First John 2:2 is one of the most important verses affirming universal atonement: “And He Himself is the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” John is writing to believers. He asserts that Christ *is* the propitiation for their sins. But that is not all he says. He also affirms that Christ is the propitiation for the sins of “the whole world.” What is the meaning of the phrase “the whole world”?

John makes constant use of “world” in his Gospel and letters. But the phrase “the whole world” occurs in only two places in all of John’s writings: 1 John 2:2 and 1 John 5:19—“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” Here John contrasts two groups of people: believers and all unbelievers living on earth at the time of his writing. The entire world of people living on earth at a given time, all people without exception, fall into one of two groups: those who are believers and those who are not. John’s phrase “the whole world”



clearly means all unbelieving people, without exception, who are alive at the time of his writing. Believers were once a part of that unbelieving world, but have been brought out of it through faith in Christ (John 15:19; 17:14, 16; 1 John 5:4–5). Thus, clearly 1 John 2:2 states that Christ died for the sins of all people without exception.

In spite of this clear meaning, those who support limited atonement attempt to find ways to limit the meaning of “the whole world” to something less than all unbelievers living on earth at the time of John’s writing. Three different approaches are found with respect to the meaning of “the whole world”: (1) the elect, (2) the world of Gentiles and/or Jews and Gentiles, and (3) all kinds of people in the world—i.e., all people “without distinction” (race, ethnicity, gender, etc.), not all people “without exception.” These interpretations overlap, and those who support limited atonement usually argue that for John, “world” means all the elect (usually the believing elect) without distinction from among both Jews and Gentiles.

Contextually, none of the three suggested meanings for “the whole world” corresponds with what John says in the text. As to world meaning “the elect,” D. A. Carson rightly notes that the Greek word translated “world” (*kosmos*) never means all of “the elect” collectively anywhere in the NT at least within the Johannine corpus.<sup>15</sup> As to world signifying

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<sup>15</sup> Commenting on John 3:16, Carson notes how some take the “world” as the elect. He rejects such a notion and says, “All the evidence of the usage of the word in John’s Gospel is against the suggestion” (D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000], 17; emphasis mine). He rejects the “rigid interpretation” that takes “world” to refer to the elect, in the sense of “all those the Father has given to the Son.” “There is no warrant for taking the word that way” (D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], 174). He warns, “Do not let people deceive you into thinking that ‘world’ there [in John 3:16] means the elect” (D. A. Carson, “Chosen by God (Romans 8:28–30; 9:1–29)–part 1” [lecture, January 1, 2000, available online, <https://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/chosen-by-god-romans-8-28-30-9-1-29-part-1>] see minute marks 12:59–13:03). Carson seems to mainly interpret the “world” to mean “the created order (especially human beings and human affairs) in rebellion against its Maker.” It refers to the “society of rebels” (See D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 123–24, see also pp. 151, 204–06, 525; *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996], 240). He notes on John 6:33 that the “world” gets expanded from the Jews to the world, i.e. to lost men and women without distinction (*The Gospel According to John*, 287). When discussing the “world,” Carson frequently distinguishes between “all without exception” and “all without distinction.” The “world” cannot mean “all without exception” because believers are

Gentiles, or Jews and Gentiles—this meaning is, likewise, never found anywhere in the NT. But since the Jews divided all people into two groups, Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles), then even this distinction semantically is a reference to all unbelieving people without exception. Moreover, John cannot mean the “Gentiles” alone in 1 John 2:2 because in 1 John 5:19, both the unbelieving Gentile world and unbelieving Jews live under the power of Satan. As to world meaning “all kinds of people without distinction,” the same holds true. This is a distinction without a difference. If I say, “I love all kinds of ice cream,” then my statement means there is no ice cream I do not love. Similarly, When Paul, by the Spirit, commands the church to pray for all people (1 Tim 2:1–2), he is saying that we should not exclude any rank or class of person from our prayers. All without distinction semantically means all without exception.

With respect to the word “propitiation” (Gk. *hilasmos*), it is important to note that John uses the noun form of the word and states that Christ is the propitiation for our sins and for the sins of the whole world. As scholars have demonstrated, “propitiation” includes “expiation.” Advocates of limited atonement often make a serious mistake when they make an invalid noun-to-verb conversion of the noun “propitiation.”<sup>16</sup> Nouns and verbs are distinct for a reason. Nouns speak to what a thing is or what it

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distinguished from the “world.” He notes, “The world is not made up of those who believe and those who do not. In fact, the ‘world’ in John’s usage comprises *no believers at all*. Those who come to faith are no longer of this world; they have been chosen out of the world” (*The Gospel According to John*, 123–24; emphasis mine). The “world” as the mass of lost humanity is distinguished from Jesus’s disciples. Those drawn out of the world constitute a new entity, set over against the world (*The Gospel According to John*, 461; see also his careful qualifications on pp. 560–61, 566–67). However, when Carson takes the world as “all without distinction,” he does not mean “some of all without distinction,” which is commonly how Calvinists today make “world” to mean “all of the elect” (or at least “the *believing* elect” in some instances, such as in 1 John 2:2). Carson’s understanding of “world” seems to consistently mean “all of *unbelieving* humanity without distinction,” which includes both elect and non-elect, whether Jew or Gentile. This also seems to be his preferred interpretation of “world” in John 1:29 (*The Gospel According to John*, 151; *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*, 164, 187–88) and 1 John 2:2 (*The Gaggling of God*, 122, 289; *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, 17), which thus corresponds to the sense of “world” in 1 John 2:15–17 and 1 John 5:19. He may further clarify his interpretation(s) of “world” in his forthcoming commentary on the Johannine Epistles in the NIGTC.

<sup>16</sup> I am indebted to the excellent analysis of this text by David Ponter, “1 John 2:2 and the Argument for Limited Atonement,” *Calvin and Calvinism: An Elenchus for*

does. Verbs speak to what a thing is doing or has done or shall do. Unlike verbs, nouns do not have tense. The result is to read “propitiation” as if it is speaking about atonement as both accomplished *and* applied—or accomplished with intent to apply effectually only to the elect. Christ is viewed as actually propitiating and *forgiving*, and *reconciling* those for whom the propitiation was made. But this is emphatically not what the verse says.

Once the illegitimate noun-to-verb transfer is made, then syllogistic arguments follow. For example, if “world” means all people, this would entail that all humanity’s sin has been propitiated and expiated (as an accomplished action with resulting salvation, according to limitarians); but given that it is not the case and that the sins of all humanity have been expiated, “world,” therefore, cannot denote all humanity. In other words:

1. If Christ has propitiated the wrath of God for a man (hypothetically named “Smith”), then that man cannot fail to be saved.
2. Christ has propitiated the wrath of God for Smith.
3. Therefore, Smith cannot fail to be saved.

Or, to rephrase the syllogism into a *Modus Tollens* argument:

If Christ died for the whole world, then the whole world will necessarily be saved.

It is not the case that the whole world is saved;

Therefore, it is not the case that Christ died for the whole world.

The syllogisms are formally valid but not logically sound because the first premise works only on the noun-to-verb conversion. However, the noun *hilasmus* (“propitiation”), does not refer to an accomplished past-tense action but to *function*—i.e., how something is accomplished. “Propitiation” points back to Christ’s sacrifice for sin *as a means for sinners to find forgiveness*. The cross is the *means* whereby one may find forgiveness—via an accomplished propitiation/expiation (noun) for sin, not to an already

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*Classic-Moderate Calvinism* (blog), February 16, 2015, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=15807>. I have essentially summarized his points.

accomplished application of the benefits of the atonement as a subjective effect already completed.

Consider 1 John 2:1 as a parallel example and comparable in structure to 1 John 2:2. John says, “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate.” Here, *Advocate* (Gk. *paraklēton*) is a noun, and the sense is, if anyone seeks pardon for his sins, there *is* an advocate for them. The sense is not that Christ has already *advocated* (past tense verb indicating accomplished action) for them, but that He *is* their “Advocate” or the Counselor to whom they may go to find help and comfort. That is, if they confess their sin, He will advocate on their behalf. John is describing Christ’s office and function as Advocate—what He will accomplish with regard to those who confess their sins.

John’s point in 1 John 2:2 is that there is an accomplished, objective atonement that provides an ongoing means for subjective reconciliation to occur between a sinner and God when the sinner comes to God through Christ by faith. Propitiation accomplished does not, and cannot, ipso facto mean propitiation applied. Without repentance there can be no advocacy applied (1 John 2:1), and without faith in Christ there can be no propitiation applied. Christ’s death on the cross has made propitiation for the sins of all people and is objectively available—conditionally as to its efficacy to all who will come to God through Christ by faith. If any person confesses his sin, he will find in Christ an Advocate, because Christ is “the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

David Ponter summarizes the issue well at the conclusion of his excellent essay on the meaning of 1 John 2:2, from which I have drawn heavily:

Once one truly understands the import of John’s ‘world’ in his first letter, the wheels of the limited satisfaction wagon . . . truly fall off. For there is no credible way to admit, on the one hand, that the language of 1 John 2:2 regards all the sins of believers and ‘the whole world,’ and yet, on the other hand, deny that the same language actually references all the sins of the whole world.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ponter, “1 John 2:2.”

The propitiation concerns the sins of all believers and “the world;” thus, the atonement can only be unlimited in nature and scope (but limited in application based upon the condition of faith).

### ***Answering Arguments against Unlimited Atonement***<sup>18</sup>

Five major arguments are often lodged against unlimited atonement:

1. Double Payment
2. Triple Choice
3. Trinitarian Disunity
4. Universalism Entailed
5. Christ’s Intercession Limited to the Elect

Of these five arguments, only the last appeals directly to any biblical text for support. The remaining four are attempted logical deductions if unlimited atonement were true. We can only summarize the arguments and point out why they fail.<sup>19</sup>

#### *Double Payment*

If the ransom is paid, justice demands that those for whom it is paid must go free. It cannot be said to be paid for any who are not eventually freed. Or to put it another way, if God punished the sins of someone on the cross and then punished the sinner again in hell, this would be unjust on God’s part. Thus, limited atonement is deduced.

There are numerous flaws with this argument. First, the concept of double payment is never asserted in Scripture. Second, the argument is based on a commercial understanding of the atonement. It fails to understand that the language of debt and ransom, when used of the atonement, is metaphorical and not literal. The argument assumes that if Christ died for someone, this is equivalent to saving that person. The mistake is viewing God as a creditor because sin is metaphorically described as a debt. Sin as

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<sup>18</sup> All of these arguments are laid out and answered in Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*.

<sup>19</sup> For a more detailed discussion, consult *The Extent of the Atonement*.

debt is about obligation, not about the death of Christ being a payment to a creditor (God). In fact, nowhere in Scripture is God ever viewed as the “creditor” who is paid a debt via the death of Christ.

The blood of Christ is metaphorically or analogically compared to pecuniary (commercial) transactions in Scripture via the use of debt language such as “ransom,” “redemption,” or “purchase.” Such language is not meant to describe the actual mechanism of how atonement works. Christ’s blood is not a literal commercial commodity. Sin is a debt, but it is more than a debt—it is a crime against God’s law with moral implications. Criminal debt is not equivalent to commercial debt. For example, suppose you and I are dining in a restaurant. When the bill arrives, I suddenly realize I have no money on me. In my embarrassing situation, you kindly agree to pay my bill. The restaurant owner does not care who pays the bill as long as the bill is paid. What I owed is settled because you paid my debt. This is an example of a commercial, pecuniary debt. But suppose, when the bill arrives and I don’t have the money to pay my debt, after you pay the bill for both of us, I get mad, lose my mind, rob the restaurant of \$500 in cash, and abscond into the night. You, in your kindness, pay back the \$500 I stole to the restaurant owner. Later, when I am apprehended, am I free to go because you paid my debt? No! Criminal debt is not equivalent to commercial debt. Sin and its payment are not matters of commercial debt, but of moral/legal debt.

Let’s alter the scenario slightly. Suppose that after I steal the \$500, you are suspected of the theft, charged, and serve six months jail time. Later, it is discovered that I actually committed the crime, and after being charged and found guilty, I am sent to jail to serve six months. I cannot say, “You can’t send me to jail, the debt has been paid! Someone else has paid for my crime!” No, criminal “debt” obligations do not work that way. Just because the debt has been paid by one who did not commit the crime, it does not follow that I am liberated from my criminal obligation before the law.

Or consider this illustration: Suppose the bank that holds your home mortgage is bought out by another bank. At that moment, your loan was paid in full by the new bank. The mortgage had been purchased by another. Are you therefore discharged from your mortgage? No. You now owe the balance to the new owners of the mortgage. The atonement does

not operate on a commercial basis such that the discharge of your sin debt ipso facto saves you. As John 5:22–23 states, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.” Jesus paid your sin-debt, but there is a condition for the benefit of that payment being applied to you: faith in Christ. All must still come to Christ in faith to receive the full discharge of their guilt.

Third, the double payment argument negates the principle of grace. As Charles Hodge states, “There is no grace in accepting a pecuniary satisfaction. It cannot be refused. It ipso facto liberates. The moment the debt is paid the debtor is free; and that without any condition. Nothing of this is true in the case of judicial satisfaction.”<sup>20</sup> The double payment argument undermines grace because salvation is “owed” to the elect.<sup>21</sup> The question must be asked how God can *justly* postpone the grant of faith (from a Calvinistic understanding of faith as a gift given only to the elect) to the people for whom Christ died, if Christ literally “purchased” faith for them.

Fourth, the double payment argument proves too much. The question must be asked, “Why are the elect not justified at the cross?”

Fifth, the argument undermines the role of faith by denying the need for any condition in salvation.<sup>22</sup> Salvation was not purchased to be given to anyone absolutely, whether they believed or not, but only upon the exercise of faith. God has designed that salvation comes with a condition that must be fulfilled on the part of the one who receives salvation. It is no injustice if salvation is not given to anyone who fails to fulfill God’s condition, even though payment for their sins has been made. If payment for sins has been made and one may obtain forgiveness on condition of faith in Christ and one does not fulfill the condition, there is no injustice with

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 2:557.

<sup>21</sup> A point well-made by Andrew Fuller: “But it [the view of Christ’s death as a literal payment of a debt] would be equally inconsistent with the free *forgiveness* of sin, and with sinners being directed to apply for mercy as *supplicants*, rather than as claimants” (Andrew Fuller, “The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation,” in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher, 3 vols. [Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1988], 2:373); emphasis original. See also Andrew Fuller, “The Gospel Its Own Witness,” in *The Complete Works*, 2:80–82.

<sup>22</sup> See Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 215–16.

God if He extracts payment in the form of eternal suffering on the part of the sinner.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, we might point out that sometimes those who reject substitutionary atonement do so on the grounds of the double payment argument. Examples include John McLeod Campbell in the nineteenth century and, more recently, the philosopher Eleonore Stump.<sup>24</sup>

### *Triple Choice (Trilemma Argument)*

John Owen famously propounded what has come to be called the “Triple Choice” dilemma against unlimited atonement: Christ died for either (1) all the sins of all men, (2) all the sins of some men, or (3) some sins of all men.<sup>25</sup> Owen concluded that options 1 and 3 are problematic. If option 1 is true, Owen queried whether unbelief was a sin atoned for by Christ’s death. If so, how can one suffer in hell for a sin already atoned for? But this raises a number of questions that Owen did not answer: Is substitution conceived quantitatively in Scripture? If unbelief is atoned for, why are the elect not saved at the cross? What is the relationship of unbelief to the unforgivable sin?

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<sup>23</sup> For a recent critique of the double payment argument from a Calvinist, consult Oliver D. Crisp, *Deviant Calvinism: Broadening Reformed Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014), 213–33. Crisp makes use of Robert Lewis Dabney’s criticisms of the double payment argument. See also Michael Lynch, “Not Satisfied: An Analysis and Response to Garry Williams on Penal Substitutionary Atonement and Definite Atonement” (unpublished paper, Calvin Theological Seminary, Spring 2015), 12–25. As Lynch rightly points out against Williams, “Reformed theologians have insisted on an infallibility of the application of Christ’s satisfaction to the elect, but this infallibility is not to be found in or grounded on the *nature* of satisfaction. To rest infallibility of application on the nature of Christ’s atoning work assumes not only a crass pecuniary logic regarding the satisfaction, but also collapses the distinction between election and the work of Christ” (Lynch, 18; emphasis original). This paper has been published recently as “*Quid Pro Quo* Satisfaction? An Analysis and Response to Garry Williams on Penal Substitutionary Atonement and Definite Atonement,” *EQ* 89, no. 1 (2018): 51–70.

<sup>24</sup> John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement and Its Relation to Remission of Sins and Eternal Life* (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1856; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Eleonore Stump, “Atonement and Justification,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, ed. Ronald Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 178–209.

<sup>25</sup> John Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 16 vols. (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1852), 10:173.



Owen's trilemma argument faces many of the same kinds of problems as the double payment argument, two of which appear to be insurmountable. The first is the problem of the issue of original sin. Notice it is not original "sins" but original "sin." If Christ died for original sin, then He died for at least one of the sins of all people, including the non-elect. If this is the case, then the argument is defeated as it would have to be admitted that Christ died for some of the sins (original sin) of all people.

The second problem concerns the issue of how imputation of sin works. Thinking of the imputation of sin to Christ as a transference of the guilt of specific transgressions is problematic in that it operates on a commercialistic mechanism. The trilemma argument undermines the true meaning of imputation and operates on the assumption of the transference of specific, quantifiable sins.<sup>26</sup>

Owen's argument defeats itself by proving too much, as Neil Chambers argues. In the next few paragraphs, I am heavily indebted to Chambers's assessment of Owen's trilemma argument.<sup>27</sup> If Christ died for all the sins of some people (the elect), then he must also have died for their unbelief. If this is the case, then why are the elect not saved at the cross? If Owen replies that it is because the benefits of Christ's death are not yet applied to them, then they remain in an unbelieving state and therefore cannot be spoken of as saved in any way. Paul confirms this in Eph 2:1–3, when he states that even the unbelieving elect remain under the wrath of God in their unbelieving state. But, according to Owen, since their penalty has been paid, they cannot be punished for that unbelief, as he has already stated that God will not exact a second payment for the one offense (double payment argument).

Owen has engaged in polemical reductionism in his consideration of "unbelief" because unbelief is not just an offense like any other; it is also

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<sup>26</sup> Alan Clifford has made a number of criticisms of this argument in relation to its impact on the guilt of unbelief, its depriving "general exhortations to believe of all significance," and the tension it establishes with Owen's commitment to common grace. See Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640–1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 111–12.

<sup>27</sup> Neil Andrew Chambers, "A Critical Examination of John Owen's Argument for Limited Atonement in 'The Death of Death in the Death of Christ'" (ThM thesis, Reformed Theological Seminary, 1998), 233–39. See also my dependence upon Chambers in Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 204–23.

a state, which must be dealt with not only by forgiveness but by regeneration. Chambers notes that Owen recognized this in relating the cross to the causal removal of unbelief as a state, but unbelief regarded as a sin and unbelief regarded as a state bear a different relation to the cross. Sin bears a direct relation to the cross, which is the enduring of the penalty for sin; the change of state from unregenerate to regenerate (from being lost to being saved) bears an indirect relation to the cross and is dependent upon preaching and regeneration by the Spirit. Chambers then points out that for Owen to acknowledge that reality he would have to say that Christ died for all the sin, including the unbelief, of those who believe, and for none of the sins of those who do not believe. But for the polemical force of his argument, Owen ignored the distinction that would place too much weight on human response and expose his argument to criticism.

The second tension is Owen's refusal to acknowledge "savability" as an intentional outcome of the cross. If the elect are not saved at the cross, then they at least must be regarded as savable in historical temporal terms because they are in a state of being able to be saved by the direct intention of God and the atonement of Christ on the cross for their sins. Thus, historically it must be true that there are some people for whom Christ died that they might be saved, even if, from a Calvinist perspective, eternal election, the covenant of redemption, and Christ's purchase of faith, makes their salvation inevitable.

Owen faces another problem in his attempt to accommodate the historical salvation of individuals who believe in Christ to the perspective of eternal intention/causality. The language of Scripture does not dwell in pre-temporal explanations of salvation. Rather, the language of the sufficiency of the atonement to save all people is the language that accommodates well to the historical realities of coming to faith through gospel preaching and the work of the Spirit. This language consistently speaks of the universal, inclusive, indefiniteness of the gospel offer and promises, including statements in atonement contexts that speak of God's intent of coming into the world and dying for sinners. Nowhere in Scripture are we told that Christ came to die only for "elect" sinners.

For these reasons, Chambers concludes that Owen's trilemma argument ultimately fails because it proves too much. Owen's argument entails

that the elect are spared from God's wrath whether they believe or do not believe. All that remains is to bring them into the subjective realization of their blessing through the preaching of the cross. Owen has committed himself to three unbiblical assumptions: (1) that the cross necessitates the salvation of the elect, (2) denial of the savability of some people,<sup>28</sup> and (3) subjugation of the temporal to eternal causality.

Owen's trilemma *necessarily* operates on the assumption that there was a *quantitative* imputation of sins to Christ. The biblical idea of imputation does not work that way. Just as believers are not imputed with something like so many particular acts of Christ's righteousness but rather with righteousness categorically, so also Christ was not imputed with all the particular sinful acts of some people, like so many "sin-bits," but rather with sin in a comprehensive way. He was treated as though He were sinful or categorically guilty of the sin of the whole human race.

The truth is that Christ died one death, which all sinners deserve under the law. In paying the penalty of what one sinner deserves, He paid the penalty of what every sinner deserves. He suffered the curse of the law as defined by the law. Owen's double payment and trilemma arguments undermine the true meaning of imputation and operate on the assumption of the transference of specific sins. Charles Hodge, in contrast, has retained the proper understanding of imputation:

What was suitable for one was suitable for all. The righteousness of Christ, the merit of his obedience and death, is needed for justification by each individual of our race, and therefore is needed by all. It is no more appropriate to one man than to another. Christ fulfilled the conditions of the covenant under which all men were placed. He rendered the obedience required of all, and suffered the penalty which all had incurred; and therefore his work is equally suited to all.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Owen has to deny, by implication, that all people are savable, or specifically that the non-elect are savable.

<sup>29</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:544–45.

*Trinitarian Disunity*

If unlimited atonement is true, then discord is introduced into the Trinity since God elects only some people to be saved, but Christ died for the sins of all people. But this argument also faces numerous problems. First, it assumes the Reformed understanding of election is true. Second, it assumes God could only have a single intent in the atonement. As the earliest Calvinists, including John Calvin, argued, God certainly intends to save the elect, but He also intended that Christ die for the sins of all people so that unbelievers (the reprobate) are “doubly culpable” at the final judgment for rejecting Christ.

Third, the argument ignores the fact that mainstream Calvinists themselves have maintained that there are general aspects of the atonement, in addition to the special intent. As Curt Daniel notes,

Then there is the argument from the Trinity. It is argued that if Christ died for all men equally, then there would be conflict within the Trinity. The Father chose only some and the Spirit regenerates only some, so how could the Son die for all men in general? Actually, this argument needs refinement. There are general and particular aspects about the work of each member of the Trinity. The Father loves all men as creatures, but gives special love only to the elect. The Spirit calls all men, but efficaciously calls only the elect. Similarly, the Son died for all men, but died in a special manner for the elect. We must keep the balance with each of these. If, on the one hand, we believe only in a strictly Limited Atonement, then we can easily back into a strictly particular work of the Father and the Spirit. The result is Hyper-Calvinism, rejecting both Common Grace and the universal Free Offer of the Gospel. On the other hand, if the atonement is strictly universal, then there would be disparity. The tendency would be towards Arminianism—the result would be to reject election and the special calling of the Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Curt Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism* (Springfield, IL: Good Books, 2003), 371.

Even on Calvinistic grounds, one cannot use God's special intent to save the elect to nullify His universal love, common grace, or the free offer. The unity in the Godhead argument,<sup>31</sup> if used to negate a general aspect to Christ's work on the cross, results in hyper-Calvinism, according to Daniel.

### *Universalism Entailed*

Some argue that if Jesus died for the sins of all people, then all people will be saved. This is called *universalism*. This is a false conclusion for several reasons. First, the Scripture is clear that all will not be saved. Second, it confuses the extent of the atonement with the application of the atonement. No one is saved by the death of Christ on the cross until he believes in Christ. Ephesians 2:1–3 makes clear that even the elect are under the wrath of God and “have no hope” until they believe. Third, the argument wrongly understands the nature of the atonement as a commercial transaction—if Christ died for someone's sins, then those sins are ipso facto forgiven. This is not how the atonement works.

### *Christ's Intercession Limited to the Elect (John 17)*

John 17 contains Christ's high priestly prayer for His disciples. The argument is as follows: Jesus intercedes only for the elect; therefore, the atonement is limited to the elect only. Since Jesus did not intercede for the world, He did not die for the sins of the world. This is a common argument in the limited atonement arsenal and has been addressed and answered, even by a number of Calvinists.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Recall the discussion above on the Trinity and the atonement.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* (London: Printed by Robert White, 1675), 2:68–69; Daniel, *The History and Theology of Calvinism*, 371; Harold Dekker, “God's Love to Sinners: One or Two?,” *Reformed Journal* 13 (1963): 14–15; Nathaniel Holmes, “Christ's Offering Himself to All Sinners, and Answering All Their Objections,” in *The Works of Dr. Nathaniel Holmes* (London, 1651), 15; Edward Polhill, “The Divine Will Considered in Its Eternal Decrees,” in *The Works of Edward Polhill* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1988), 167–68, 170–71, 174; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980), 3:420–21; Joseph Truman, *A Discourse of Natural and Moral Impotency* (London: Printed for Robert Clavel, 1675), 185–86; Gryffith Williams, *The Delights of the Saints* (London: Printed for Nathaniel Butter, 1622), 37.

John 17 does not state that Jesus died only for those for whom He prays. Laying aside for the moment the possibility that, in context, this is most likely a reference to the disciples, and even taking it as extending to the believing elect at the time—even then, the conclusion is not warranted that the text means that Jesus did not die for the sins of all people, elect and non-elect (negative inference fallacy).

The argument falls prey to the logical fallacy of generalizing that election entails limited atonement. If Jesus prays only for the elect, then He must have died only for the elect. The mistake here is a collapsing of the intercession of Christ into His expiation for sins. This merely begs the question.

Harold Dekker, formerly professor and academic dean at Calvin Theological Seminary, offers a better interpretation of John 17. I summarize his argument:

- Does John 17:9 indicate that Jesus died for the elect only? The context beginning with verse 4 makes clear that those to whom Jesus referred in verse 9 are those who had come to believe in Him up to that point in time. Verse 20 supports this, since there Jesus says He prays also for those who will (future) believe in Him.
- When Jesus says that He does not pray for the world (v. 9), what does He mean? Jesus prayed a specific prayer for those who had believed and would believe in Him. There would have been no point in Jesus praying these specific things for the unconverted, because they could never be true for the unconverted until they were converted. The fact that He did not do so proves nothing about His disposition toward the world or the extent of His atonement for the world.
- This is made even clearer in John 17:21–23. Here Jesus does indeed pray for the world—namely, that the world might believe. Here the word “world” cannot be limited to the elect and means nothing less than the world of all unbelieving people.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Dekker, “God’s Love to Sinners,” 14–15. See also Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 725, who argues the same point. This interpretation also seems to accord with Carson’s. See Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 560–61.

David Ponter points out how, when it comes to John 17, the following are alleged, asserted, and assumed without any support from confirming evidence:

1. That this is a specific and effectual high priestly prayer on the part of Jesus.
2. That the “world” of verse 9 represents the world of the reprobate.
3. That those “given” in verse 9 represent the totality of the elect.
4. That the extent of the high priestly intercession delimits the scope of the satisfaction.
5. That the two parallel clauses in verses 21 and 23 are systemically overlooked or misread.<sup>34</sup>

Ponter focuses on number 5—John 17:21 and 23:

[T]hat they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe [Gk. *pisteuē*] that You sent Me. . . . I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know [Gk. *ginōskē*] that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. [NASB]

Ponter notes how Calvin took “world” in verses 21 and 23 as the world of the reprobate (non-elect) according to its usage throughout John 17. But when Calvin came to the verbs “to believe” and “to know,” he interpreted them as referring to something other than true saving faith. Where is the warrant for changing the normal meaning of “to believe” and “to know” in John’s Gospel such that they mean something other than saving belief and knowledge? Notice John 17:8: “For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them*, and have known [Gk. *egnōsan*] surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed [Gk. *episteusan*] that You sent Me.” Jesus uses the two verbs *believe* (Gk. *pisteuō*) and *know* (Gk. *ginōskō*) with the identical referent of the apostles

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<sup>34</sup> David Ponter, “Revisiting John 17 and Jesus’ Prayer for the World,” *Calvin and Calvinism: An Elenchus for Classic-Moderate Calvinism* (blog), February 10, 2015, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=15779>.

who had come to know and believe that Jesus had truly been sent from the Father. This same point is repeated in verses 21 and 23 but now applied to the “world.”

Ponter then considers John 17:25, “O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known [Gk. *egnōsan*] that You sent Me.” This same approach can be found in other places in John’s Gospel. Consider John 6:69, “Also we have come to *believe* and *know* that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (emphasis added). Likewise John 16:27, “For the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have *believed* that I came forth from God,” and John 16:30, “Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we *believe* that You came forth from God” (emphasis added).

Apparently, these expressions have something of a thematic or formulaic meaning for John. Calvin has assumed and asserted that “world” in verse 9 denotes the non-elect rather than the world of humanity in opposition to God and the church. Context and usage mitigate against this interpretation. Ponter concludes,

However, once the meaning of *kosmos* throughout the chapter is allowed to assume its normal meaning, and once the meanings of the verbs *believe* and *know* are allowed to be read consistently (as defined by context and usage rather than atextual interpolations), then according [to] the standard rules of hermeneutics, the strict particularist reading of this passage really has no footing in this chapter.<sup>35</sup>

Jesus’s prayer is for the world’s salvation, as evidenced by the use of the subjunctives (the mood of potentiality) in Greek: “That the world may believe,” and “that the world may know.” Jesus prays that future believers be unified for a major purpose: that the world may believe and know that Jesus has been sent from the Father. This exegesis of John 17 supports an unlimited atonement.

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<sup>35</sup> Ponter, “Revisiting John 17” (emphasis original).



Those who assert limited atonement insist that if Christ dies for a particular person, then He prays for that particular person. But this argument can be inverted. All would have to agree that if Christ prays for a particular person, He must have died for that person. John 17:21 and 23 clearly assert that Christ prays for the world; therefore, He must have died for the world.

### ***The Extent of the Atonement and Removal of Legal Barriers***

Modern Calvinists who affirm limited atonement are often confused by this idea of objective reconciliation—i.e., God’s removal of legal barriers through the atonement of Christ. For example, Tom Nettles, in his treatment of J. P. Boyce on the atonement, does not seem to grasp what Boyce—and Charles Hodge, Boyce’s mentor—meant when they spoke of Christ’s death having “removed all legal obstacles.” Nettles thinks of “the legal impediments” as equivalent to the forgiveness of sins; for how can God condemn anyone when He has removed legal barriers?<sup>36</sup> The death of Christ objectively satisfies the requirements of the Law such that nothing stands in the way of God’s righteous character so that He may now, on the grounds of Christ’s death, offer salvation to any and all who believe.

### ***The Extent of the Atonement and the Love of God***

Many in the history of the Reformed tradition have subordinated God’s love to His sovereignty.<sup>37</sup> At the heart of this approach lies a fundamental misreading of the intra-Trinitarian nature and relationship of perfect love and how that is expressed to the world through Jesus Christ. God’s nature is such that He loves all individuals and desires their eternal salvation. Consequently, God has provided atonement for the sins of all. Furthermore, given that love is intrinsic to God’s nature, to posit an arbitrary

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<sup>36</sup> See Thomas J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life*, 2nd ed. (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), 349. See also Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 331–32 (see “Introduction,” n. 16); and C. Hodge, *The Orthodox Doctrine regarding the Extent of the Atonement Vindicated* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, 1846), 69.

<sup>37</sup> “Sadly, in tidying up Calvin, such Calvinists ended up subordinating the free love of God to the sovereign will of God, something that Calvin did not do” (Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories: A Way Through the Maze* [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014], 81).

distinction between His saving love for the elect and His general, albeit non-saving love, for the non-elect is actually to impugn the character of God as revealed in Scripture.

Limited atonement cuts across the biblical revelation of the love of God. If God determined that Christ died only for the sins of the elect, then clearly He loves the elect more and in a drastically different way as compared to the non-elect. John Frame speaks of God's temporal love for the non-elect, which is to be distinguished from His saving love, which only terminates on the elect.<sup>38</sup> Passages, such as John 3:16, that teach God's love for all the world must be taken at face value. How can God be said to love someone in the gospel offer when He has not provided a means for their salvation via an atonement?

One should distinguish where and how it is that high and moderate Calvinists differ on the issue of God's love for the elect and non-elect and where they agree. Both agree to distinguish God's love for the elect from the non-elect in the sense that God only provides the necessary saving grace through the effectual call to redeem the elect. All Calvinists, because of their doctrine of unconditional election, must talk about God's love in ways that distinguish different kinds, or at least degrees, of God's love for the elect and non-elect. Some prefer to say that God has a "special" or "saving" love for the elect that He does not have for the non-elect.

Most in both camps agree that humanity has the natural capacity to believe but does not have the moral capacity to believe apart from the effectual calling, which comes only to the elect. But moderates assert that God's love for His world, as the Scripture teaches, extends to the point of Christ dying for the sins of all humanity, so that if anyone does believe, there is a sufficient atonement to save him. On this construct, no one perishes for lack of an atonement for his sin. On the high Calvinist construct, the non-elect could not be saved even if they wanted to because limited atonement by definition asserts that there is no atonement for their sins. This view runs counter to the biblical revelation of the omni-benevolence of God and Christ for the entire world.

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<sup>38</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of God* (Philadelphia: P&R, 2002), 417–20.

All non-Calvinists find this notion of God's "saving love" or "special love" as defined by Calvinists to be problematic. Of course, truly God's love expressed as His method of relationship to and benefits toward all believers certainly differs from that of unbelievers. But it is a different matter to suggest, as all Calvinists do, that God places a saving love on some individuals and not on others. From a non-Calvinist perspective, Scripture does not make such a distinction. Henry Sheldon's point about this notion of God's "special love" is worthy of consideration:

Predestinarians are wont to descant on the special love of God, as though a love which is entirely independent of relative worthiness of its objects, and passes by some to fasten exclusively upon others, constitutes a pleasing mystery. However, a love of this kind belongs to a pathological condition. It is quite possible to limited beings in whom feeling and reason are not necessarily in true coordination. But to impute it to God, whose feeling never outruns His all-perfect intelligence, is without any rational warrant. The differing measures of His love must be supposed to correspond to the differing realities of its objects. He is not liable to untruth in His feelings any more than He is liable to error in His intellectual perceptions.<sup>39</sup>

### ***The Extent of the Atonement and Its Sufficiency***<sup>40</sup>

Some Calvinists who affirm limited atonement maintain that Christ's atonement is sufficient for all people, even though it effected satisfaction for the sins only of the elect. The sufficiency argument of those who hold to limited atonement proceeds in this fashion: Christ died only for the sins of the elect. Nevertheless, the death of Christ is sufficient for all people in the sense of its infinite worth and value. Therefore, we should preach the gospel to all people since it is sufficient and since we do not know who are the elect. Anyone who believes the gospel will be saved.

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<sup>39</sup> Sheldon, *System of Christian Doctrine*, 433 (see chap. 5, n. 34).

<sup>40</sup> Material in this section also appears in Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 772–75.

Here is the problem: How can Christ's substitutionary death be said to be sufficient for the sins of the entire world, when, according to limited atonement, no atonement for sins exists for the non-elect? What strict Calvinists are actually saying, by implication, is that the atonement *would* or *could be* sufficient for all had God intended it to be sufficient for them. But God, according to them, did not intend the atonement to be made as a ransom price on behalf of the non-elect; thus, there is no satisfaction made for their sins. The sufficiency, on their view, can be understood only as a statement about the atonement's infinite intrinsic value—hypothetically, it could be satisfactory for all, but it is not “extrinsically” or “actually” satisfactory for all.

Theologians often use “sufficiency” terminology without clearly defining what they mean. There are actually two kinds of sufficiency with respect to the atonement: (1) *infinite/universal/extrinsic sufficiency*, and (2) *limited/intrinsic sufficiency*. When the former is used by limitarians, this terminology means, at least by entailment, that the death of Christ *could have been* sufficient or able to atone for all the sins of the world *if God had intended for it to do so*. However, since they think God did not intend for the death of Christ to satisfy for the sins of all but only the sins of the elect, it is not *actually* sufficient or *able to save* any others. When *infinite/universal/extrinsic sufficiency* is used by moderate Calvinists and non-Calvinists, the terminology means that the death of Christ is of such a nature that it is actually able to save all people. It is, in fact (not hypothetically), a satisfaction for the sins of all humanity. Therefore, if anyone perishes, it is not for lack of atonement for his sins. The fault lies totally within himself.

*Limited sufficiency* means that the atonement was satisfactory for the sins of the elect alone; thus, it is limited in its capacity to save only those for whom Christ died. *Intrinsic sufficiency* speaks to the atonement's internal or infinite, abstract ability to save all humanity (if God so intended), in such a way that it has no direct reference to the actual extent of the atonement. When those who assert limited atonement speak of the “sufficiency” of the atonement, they are always speaking of either a “limited sufficiency” or an “intrinsic sufficiency.”

The atonement is sufficient for the sins of all people, not only because of its value, but because it was actually made for the sins of all people and its benefits are *available* for the redemption of every person from his sin. An atonement cannot be said to be “sufficient” in any meaningful way for someone for whose sins it did not atone.<sup>41</sup>

If limited atonement is correct, Jesus did not substitute Himself on the cross for the sins of the non-elect. If this is the case, the following entails:

1. It is impossible that the non-elect could ever be saved since there is no atonement made for their sins. They are in the same unsavable state they would be in if Jesus had never come at all. Or, as others have argued, they are no more savable than fallen angels.
2. It is impossible that the atonement can ever be described as sufficiently able to save the non-elect in any way other than hypothetically: something cannot be sufficient for anyone for whom it is non-existent. To suggest otherwise is simply to engage in semantic word games, obfuscation, or equivocation.
3. Further complications emerge concerning the preaching of the gospel. How can preachers universally and indiscriminately offer the gospel in good faith to all people, which clearly includes many who are non-elect, when there is no gospel to offer them—that is, when there is no satisfaction for all their sins? The usual response from strict Calvinists is that we do not know who the elect are, so we offer the gospel to all. But this misses the point and the problem. The issue is not that we do not know who the elect are. That is a given. The issue is that we are offering something to all people, including those who turn out to be non-elect, that indeed does not exist for all to whom the offer is made. An offer made to all sinners entails contradiction as the preacher knows that the satisfaction for sins by Christ on the cross was not made for all to whom the gospel comes but pretends and speaks as if there is a legitimate offer to all to whom the gospel is preached.

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<sup>41</sup> Even an ultra-high Calvinist like Arthur Pink agreed with this point: “The Atonement, therefore, is in no sense sufficient for a man, unless the Lord Jesus died *for* that man” (Arthur Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John. Three Volumes in One: Volume Two—John 8 to 15:6* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 220; emphasis original).

4. The problem is even more acute with respect to the gospel offer when it is understood that it is God Himself making the offer through us. Second Corinthians 5:18–20 makes clear that *God* is offering salvation to all people through the church *on the grounds of the atonement of Christ*. If He Himself has limited that substitution to only the elect, how can He make such an offer genuinely to all people?
5. If Christ did not die for the sins of all people, what exactly are unbelievers guilty of rejecting? There is no atonement for their sins for them to reject. Unbelief of the gospel, by its very definition, involves rejection of God’s provision of grace through Christ’s death.
6. Scripture makes use of universal exhortations to believe the gospel. Limited atonement deprives these commands of their significance.<sup>42</sup>

On the limited atonement scheme, the atonement can only be sufficient for those for whom it is efficient.

To say that the atonement is sufficient—in the sense that if anyone believes the gospel, he will find a sufficient atonement for his sins—does not work. Therefore, all people are “savable,” insofar as if anyone believes, he will be saved. Well, of course. No one doubts that. That proposition is true as far as it goes because it only speaks to the causal relationship between faith and salvation: Anyone who truly believes will certainly be saved. But the confusion becomes evident when asked why this is so. The usual response: because there is an atonement of infinite value able to be applied

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<sup>42</sup> Regarding this point, consider James Pendleton’s reasoning: “If, then, it is the duty of all men to believe, and if faith implies reliance on the atonement, and if the atonement was made for a part of the race only, it follows that it is the duty of those for whom no atonement was made to rely on that which has no existence. This is an absurdity. The more the point is considered, the more evident it will appear that the duty of all men to believe the gospel is inseparable from the ‘objective fullness’ of the provisions of the atonement for the salvation of all men. . . . Now, if Christ did not die for all, and if it is the duty of all to believe in him, it is the duty of some—those for whom he did not die—to believe an untruth. This also reduces the matter to an absurdity for it cannot be the duty of anyone to believe what is not true. We must either give up the position that it is the duty of all men to believe the gospel, or admit that the atonement of Christ has reference to all men” (Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 243–45 [see chap. 1, n. 4]).

to the one who believes. Of course, there is. But ask the question this way: Suppose one of the non-elect should believe, could they be saved? Not according to the limited atonement position because no satisfaction for sins exists for the non-elect.

Imagine that Christ had not died at all on the cross. Now, in such a scenario, imagine this statement: “If anyone believes in Christ, he shall be saved.” Such a statement is meaningless and is, in fact, false. In this scenario, there is no means provided for anyone to be saved regardless of whether they believe or not. This is precisely where the non-elect stand in this world in relation to the cross of Christ and their sin in the limited atonement scheme.<sup>43</sup>

The logic here is simple. If there is no atonement for some people, then those people are not savable. If no atonement exists for some, how is it possible that the gospel can be *offered* to those people for whom no atonement exists? If anyone is not savable, he cannot accept an offer of salvation. One cannot offer salvation in any consistent way to someone for whom no atonement exists. Either Christ has substituted for the sins of all people or He has not. Scripture teaches that He died for the sins of all. Only universal atonement guarantees the genuineness of the offer of salvation made to all people through the preaching of the gospel.

### ***Preaching, Evangelism, Missions, and the Extent of the Atonement***

With respect to preaching and evangelism, limited atonement entails some negative practical implications for ministry that we do not have the space to cover in depth at this point. These may be listed under three headings: (1) a diminishing of God’s universal saving will, (2) the well-meant gospel offer, and (3) the bold proclamation of the gospel. I have discussed each of these in more detail in *The Extent of the Atonement*.<sup>44</sup> At this point only a few comments can be offered.

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<sup>43</sup> For more on this point, see the excellent essay by David Ponter, “Limited Atonement and the Falsification of the Sincere Offer of the Gospel,” *Calvin and Calvinism: An Elenchus for Classic-Moderate Calvinism* (blog), March 27, 2012, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=11670>.

<sup>44</sup> Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 785–91.

God's universal saving will is His expressed desire that all people come to salvation. This can be seen clearly in 1 Tim 2:4–6 and 2 Pet 3:9. Proponents of limited atonement struggle to reconcile these texts with their position—i.e., that God desires the salvation of all people but that He designed the atonement to pay for the sins of only *some* people.

The well-meant or sincere nature of the gospel offer has to do with the grounds for offering the gospel to all people in the world. Scripture clearly teaches that the gospel should be offered to everyone. Only universal atonement can ground the offer of the gospel in a universal manner (see preceding section on 2 Cor 5:14–21). The basis of the “offerability” of the gospel to (1) those who *never* hear it is just as important as the basis for the offer of the gospel to (2) those who do hear it. *Both* must be grounded in the universal satisfaction of Christ, which is why Christ can charge the church to take the gospel to the whole world, even to those who never hear it. Why? Because He suffered on behalf of the whole human race (thus rendering salvation *offerable* to all), not only on behalf of those who hear the gospel call (or those actually offered eternal life through the gospel call). Theoretically, all are savable (and thus the gospel is universally *offerable*) by virtue of Christ's death for all, but only those who hear the gospel are *actually offered* eternal life in Christ. Again, the *basis* or *ground* for both the theoretical offerability of life in Christ (to those who never hear) and the actual offer of life in Christ (to those who do hear) is the same: Christ died for the sins of all.

The “bold proclamation” has to do with preaching the gospel and boldly telling any and all that “because God loves you Christ died for your sins.” Those who assert limited atonement cannot preach the message that “Christ died for your sins” to any mixed crowd of believers and unbelievers or to any group of unbelievers if, in fact, Christ died for the sins only of the elect among the people hearing the gospel. The usual approach is to say something like “Christ died for sinners,” assuming that “sinners” is a cipher for “elect sinners.”<sup>45</sup>

Erskine Mason, a nineteenth-century Calvinist pastor, helpfully summarized the importance of a universal atonement for preaching:

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<sup>45</sup> For more on this issue, see Allen, 785–90.



I confess, my brethren, I do not understand the gospel, if this is not one of its cardinal doctrines; if the indiscriminate offer of Jesus Christ, and of pardon and eternal life through him, is not made to the race, and as truly and honestly and sincerely made to one individual as another of the race. . . . If the entire population of the globe were before me, and there should be one in the mighty assembly for whom there was no provision, I could not preach the gospel; for how could I say in sincerity and honesty to all and to each, come and take of the waters of life freely?<sup>46</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Scripture says that the content of the gospel includes the fact that “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3). Limited atonement denies and distorts a crucial aspect of the gospel: that Christ died for the sins of the world. Limited atonement truncates the gospel because it saws off the arms of the cross too close to the stake.

Christ died for the sins of all because of His and the Father’s love for all, to provide a genuine offer of salvation to all; and His death not only makes salvation possible for all but actually secures the salvation of all who believe through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. There is a provision of forgiveness for all to whom the gospel comes. There is a provision of forgiveness for all who come to the gospel.

### **Application of the Atonement**

When is the atonement applied to a person? The biblical answer is that atonement is applied at the point of faith in Christ. The provision of the atonement for all is unconditional. But there is a condition annexed by God for the application of the atonement and for our *receiving* of salvation,

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<sup>46</sup> Erskine Mason, “Extent of the Atonement,” in *A Pastor’s Legacy: Being Sermons on Practical Subjects* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1853), 281–82. On the same point, see also Gardiner Spring, *The Attraction of the Cross; Designed to Illustrate the Leading Truths, Obligations and Hopes of Christianity*, 9th ed. (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1854), 93–98.

which is the benefit of atonement: faith in Christ, as is affirmed in scores of NT texts (e.g., Acts 16:31; Rom 4:5; Eph 2:8–9).

The atonement in and of itself saves no one. Pause and let that sink in for a moment. There is nothing in the atonement itself that makes it effectual for anyone. To be effectual, the atonement must be applied by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. This is a theological truth that is confirmed by the likes of such great Calvinist theologians as Charles Hodge, Robert Dabney, W. G. T. Shedd, A. H. Strong, and Millard Erickson, not to mention many others. All orthodox Christians must affirm the distinction between atonement accomplished and atonement applied.

The writings of John Flavel, the great seventeenth-century Puritan, are illuminating: “The same hand that prepared it [redemption] must also apply it, or else we perish, notwithstanding all that the Father has done in contriving, and appointing, and all that the Son has done in executing, and accomplishing the design thus far.”<sup>47</sup> Flavel continues, “Such is the importance of the personal application of Christ to us by the Spirit, that whatsoever the Father has done in the contrivance, or the Son has done in the accomplishment of our redemption, is all unavailable and ineffectual to our salvation without this.”<sup>48</sup> Finally, Flavel adds,

And Christ’s humiliation and sufferings are a most complete and sufficient meritorious cause of our salvation, to which nothing can be added to make it more apt, and able to procure our salvation, than it already is: yet neither the one nor the other can actually save any soul, without the Spirit’s application of Christ to it. The Father has elected, and the Son has redeemed; but until the Spirit (who is the last cause) has wrought his part also, we cannot be saved.<sup>49</sup>

Likewise, the great Lutheran systematic theologian Franz Pieper stated,

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<sup>47</sup> John Flavel, *The Method of Grace: In the Holy Spirit’s Applying to the Souls of Men, the Eternal Redemption Contrived by the Father and Accomplished by the Son* (New York: American Tract Society, 1845), 16.

<sup>48</sup> Flavel, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Flavel, 19.

But the sanctification effected by the redeeming work of Christ did not in any way achieve our reconciliation with God. The reconciliation of the world with God was not accomplished, either in whole or in part, by the Savior's guaranty that His disciples would lead a life "united with God," but solely and entirely by the Savior's own fulfillment of the divine Law. The Savior Himself paid the entire debt, "mathematically" and "juridically" computed, and in His resurrection received God's receipt for it; and this receipt was made out to all mankind. Christ, who was given into death for our sins, was raised again for our justification (Rom. 4:25). This receipt, "paid in full," is contained in the Gospel, and the Gospel, by the powerful working of the Holy Ghost (John 16:14), calls forth faith on the part of man ("faith cometh by hearing," Rom. 10:17). So a man is justified before God *sola fide*, thus excluding works . . . . Faith is now counted by God for righteousness, not inasmuch as it guarantees a life "united with God" (which it, and it alone, certainly does), but inasmuch as it accepts the paid and receipted bill, inasmuch as it believes that God raised the Savior from the dead (Rom. 10:9), and justifies not the "transformed man," but "the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5).<sup>50</sup>

The atonement must be considered from the perspective of God's intention for it, the extent of its scope, and the way in which it is applied.

The atonement is linked to its application, but we must be careful not to conflate the extent with the application. As Shedd correctly states,

The *expiation* of sin is distinguishable from the *pardon* of it. The former, conceivably, might take place and the latter not. When Christ died on Calvary, the whole mass, so to speak, of human sin was expiated merely by that death; but the whole mass was not pardoned merely by that death. The claims of law and justice for the sins of the whole world were satisfied by the "offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10); but the sins of every individual man were not forgiven and "blotted out" by

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<sup>50</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:365 (see chap. 3, n. 88).

this transaction. Still another transaction was requisite in order to this, namely, the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the sinner working faith in this expiatory offering and the declarative act of God saying “your sin is forgiven you.” The Son of God, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, “sat down on the right hand of God” (10:12); but if the redeeming work of the Trinity had stopped at this point, not a soul of mankind would have been pardoned and justified, yet the expiatory value of the “one sacrifice” would have been just the same.<sup>51</sup>

Nowhere in Scripture are we told that atonement is equal to salvation. The benefits of the atonement must be applied to the individual to be efficacious, and such application is clearly conditioned in the NT upon faith in Christ. The cross itself, unapplied, saves no one.<sup>52</sup> Salvation is both an objective and subjective reality. Salvation is effected not only through the death of Christ on the cross but also through the application of the benefits of His death by the Holy Spirit.<sup>53</sup> We participate in the life of the triune God “*through the work of Christ as the ground of its possibility, and through the agency of the Holy Spirit as its actualization.*”<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, 3:418; emphasis original. Shedd’s comments about the Holy Spirit working faith in the heart of the sinner reflect his Calvinistic understanding of the nature of total depravity and election, such that God chooses to give or grant faith only to His elect. All non-Calvinists would, of course, reject this construal of the process, along with rejecting the notion that regeneration precedes faith. See, for example, David L. Allen, “Does Regeneration Precede Faith?,” *JBTM* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 34–52.

<sup>52</sup> Even Calvin rightly affirmed this. See Calvin, *Institutes* 3.1.1 (see “Introduction,” n. 15).

<sup>53</sup> Bloesch, *Jesus Christ*, 163 (see chap. 5, n. 28).

<sup>54</sup> Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 339; emphasis original (see chap. 1, n. 22).

## CHAPTER 7

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### *The Nature of the Atonement*

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The nature of the atonement has been the subject of much theological discussion throughout church history.<sup>1</sup> Scripture speaks of the atonement under a number of controlling categories and metaphors that demonstrate the richness and depth of the work of Christ on the cross. The foundation of all these concepts is the biblical description of atonement as an actual vicarious satisfaction for sins via substitution.

In modern theology, the word *atonement* has come to replace the older term *satisfaction*. When we speak of atonement, we are referring to the nature of the atonement as a satisfaction for sin. “Satisfaction” is a more comprehensive expression. In the NKJV translation of the NT, the word “atonement” occurs only in Rom 5:11, rendering the Greek word *katallagē* (“reconciliation”). In English translations of the OT, “atonement” is often used to render key Hebrew terms such as *kipper* and *kippurim* where “covering,” “expiation,” and “propitiation” for sin are in view.

Consequently, “atonement” refers to the work of Christ on the cross, and to the nature of that work as an offering for sin that is propitiatory, expiatory, and the ground for forgiveness and reconciliation of people to God. By atonement, the guilt of sin is addressed. Atonement is a full and

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<sup>1</sup> Debate over the nature of the atonement has intensified in the twenty-first century. Steve Chalke and Alan Mann, in *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), reject penal substitution. In 2005, the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement led to the publication of Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker, eds., *The Atonement Debate* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008). James Beilby and Paul Eddy edited *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006). In this work, Greg Boyd defends the Christus Victor view; Tom Schreiner asserts the penal substitution view; Bruce Reichenbach defends the healing in the atonement view; and Joel Green propounds the kaleidoscopic view—that no one metaphor is sufficient to describe the atonement. See also Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement* (see chap. 5, n. 3).

final provision for the sin problem because by means of the atonement, the demands of the divine law have been fulfilled. Law demands punishment for sin. Christ's death is a sacrificial, substitutionary death on behalf of sinful humanity and completely satisfies the demands of the law.

The sacrificial and substitutionary nature of the atonement can be seen in such passages as Matt 20:28; 25:28; Rom 3:24–25; Eph 1:7; Col 1:20; Heb 2:17; 1 Pet 3:18; and 1 John 2:2. Only through the death of Christ on the cross are sins dealt with and salvation accomplished. Because Christ bore the sins of humanity on the cross, deliverance from the guilt of sin is made possible.

We might summarize the nature of the atonement as revealed in Scripture in the following way: Christ substituted Himself for the sins of all people, living or dead; He died in their place bearing their sin. This substitution was sacrificial in nature and constituted a satisfaction for all sin so that God's broken law has been vindicated. This substitutionary death resulted in an objective reconciliation, removing all legal barriers between God and man. In this sense, the redemption price for sin has been paid.

Scripture describes atonement as a multifaceted event. It has implications for God, man, sin, death, Satan, and all creation.<sup>2</sup> It is the foundation and chief cornerstone of God's great metanarrative of salvation as revealed in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation.

Atonement is both initiated by God and satisfies the law of God. Defined with reference to the OT law, the work of Christ on the cross is an atonement that meets the demands of God's justice as expressed in His law (Gal 3:12–14; 5:1; Col 2:13–14). Salvation could never be achieved on the basis of any attempt to keep the law. On the cross, God's righteousness, wrath, justice, sovereignty, mercy, love, and grace are all on display. In our discussion of the nature of the atonement, we will attempt to show how these concepts are interrelated.

## **The Bearing of the Love of God on the Atonement**

Salvation originates with God, who takes the initiative by providing atonement for sins. The single motivation for God's provision of the atonement that is most often mentioned in Scripture is His love for all sinners. "For

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 4 on The Necessity of the Atonement.

God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died” (2 Cor 5:14). God’s love is evidenced by the cross: “In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9–10).

Likewise, Jesus specifically mentioned to His disciples that His love is the motivation for His atonement: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; As I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10). “This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:12–13).

Scripture affirms several things about the love of God. First, God is by His nature, love (1 John 4:8). Torrance states,

God does not love us because of the atoning propitiation enacted in the sacrificial death of Christ. Rather does that propitiation flow freely from the consistent self-movement of the Love that God himself is. It is through the sheer overflow of his eternal love that God has provided for mankind atoning propitiation in the blood of Christ, in order thereby to draw near to us and to draw us near to himself in such a way as to do away with all barriers of sin, hostility and fear between us and himself.<sup>3</sup>

Second, within the Trinity, the reciprocal relationship of love is expressed in John 15:9–10 and 17:23. Third, God’s love initiates all love—“He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

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<sup>3</sup> T. F. Torrance, *Christian Doctrine of God: One Being, Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 245.

Fourth, God's love is freely bestowed prior to any conditions, but this love is not exclusive of conditions, as John 3:16 demonstrates. God universally seeks a relationship of reciprocal love, but He also enters into a particular relationship only with those who respond appropriately to His love. There is both a conditionality and unconditionality to God's love, corresponding to objective and subjective aspects of His love. God's *subjective love* is that which inheres in His character regardless of human response. God's *objective love* is His love that is affected by the response of people. God's objective love "describes his (interactive) love relationships with creaturely objects and thus refers to that love which initiates relationship with people and evaluatively corresponds to, and is affected by, the dispositions and/or actions of its objects."<sup>4</sup> In the subjective sense, God's love is described in Scripture as eternal, unconditionally constant, and grounded in His eternal character of love. The objective aspects of God's love are relational and predicated on human response to God's prevenient,<sup>5</sup> unmerited, love.

Fifth, there is no example in Scripture of causally determined love. Scripture regularly depicts God's love and human love as voluntary.

Sixth, God's love is evaluative. "God's love for humans is explicitly linked to evaluative pleasure and/or displeasure semantically and thematically."<sup>6</sup> Likewise, God's displeasure in Scripture is never stated to be arbitrary, but always motivated and prompted by evil.

Seventh, Scripture indicates God's love is both universal and particular. God's love for the world is foreconditional<sup>7</sup> and universally relational. God loves all people and desires all to come to a saving relationship with Him through Christ (1 Tim 2:4–6). God loves every individual foreconditionally for the purpose of loving them particularly in a reciprocal love relationship.

<sup>4</sup> Peckham, *The Love of God*, 212 (see chap. 1, n. 5).

<sup>5</sup> "We need to recover that word 'prevenient' because no other word or phrase captures so well the essential fact about grace: it *prevenes* (goes before), or *precedes*, recognition of sin, *precedes* confession of sin, *precedes* repentance for sin, and *precedes* forsaking of sin" (Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 168 [see "Introduction," n. 41]).

<sup>6</sup> Peckham, *The Love of God*, 119.

<sup>7</sup> A term coined by John Peckham, meaning, "God's love is freely bestowed prior to any conditions but not exclusive of conditions. Accordingly, some elements of God's love are unconditional, while God's love is in other ways conditional" (Peckham, 191).



Why is God's love particular? Reformed theology argues that this is the case because of God's selective choice of some for salvation—i.e., of the elect upon whom He sets His saving or special electing love. Peckham agrees that Scripture differentiates between God's universal and particular love but believes that God has given humanity "significant freedom" to choose to love God in return or to reject Him. Some are loved by God more intimately than others, receiving the blessings of His saving love, not because of an arbitrary sovereign election, but because of human rejection of God's love.<sup>8</sup>

What does this evaluation of the love of God have to say about the atonement? Does Scripture connect the love of God with the atonement? Indeed it does. In fact, given what Scripture says about the atonement and the love of God, the notion of a limited atonement is precluded and for obvious reasons. How could God be said to love, with a desire to save, in any meaningful sense of the term, those for whom He did not provide atonement for their sins? How could God be said to desire the salvation of all people if He did not provide atonement for all people? Since no one can possibly be saved apart from the atonement of Christ, it is simply contradictory to speak of God's universal love and His universal saving will on the limited atonement platform.

John 3:16 clearly indicates that God's intentions to save are as broad as the world. John clearly connects God's act of atonement for sins with God's love (1 John 4:9–10). Canonically, the logic of Romans 1–11 demonstrates this as well. In Romans 1–3, Paul demonstrates that the scope of human sinfulness is universal. In Rom 11:32, the scope of God's mercy is universal. That Paul may be referring to the people groups of Jews and Gentiles does not change the fact that God's purpose is to show mercy to all within both people groups. H. D. McDonald expressed it this way:

The love of God is not in the New Testament a truth declared, so to speak, antecedent to the work of Christ. It is rather the uniform teaching that it is in relation to Christ's coming and deed that his love is declared. It is the act of atonement itself as God's judgment of our sin on Christ that is the chief reason for the announcement *God is love*. The death of Christ, by which he bore

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<sup>8</sup> See Peckham, 257–63.

sin's condemnation as an essential of the divine forgiveness, is at the same time a demonstration of the immensity and the holiness of God's love. The fact that God has himself met in the death of his Son the requirement of his holy judgment on sin is the final manifestation of his love. And it is a love that lies in a region other than mere words. It is a love that has its action in the atonement of Christ's death. God could not do justice to his love and his holiness in relation to sin in a way less awful than this: that the Son of God has taken for us the whole responsibility of it.<sup>9</sup>

God loves His people, the church. That is certainly true. But we must also state that God also loves *all* people and that Christ died for the sins of all people, lest we truncate the gospel.

### Atonement as Objective and Subjective

Scripture makes clear that the atonement must be considered subjectively and objectively with respect to God. God is the subject in that He provides, because of His love, atonement through Christ on the cross. But God the Father is also in a sense the object of the atonement in that His wrath and justice are satisfied by the work of Christ on the cross. Neither the objective nor the subjective aspects of the atonement should be subordinated to the other.

The terms *objective* and *subjective* are also used in broadly general fashion to distinguish various theories of the atonement.

These labels, too, are often used as much to disparage as describe. . . . Generally, the former term ["objective"] refers to theories that stress that God has accomplished something external to the recipient of the benefits of the atonement, something that is real even if particular persons are unaware of it. Objective theories focus on God's initiative, and they typically center their concern in the past event of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. . . . Subjective

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<sup>9</sup> McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 30–31 (see chap. 1, n. 11); emphasis original.

theories focus on the human response, and thus typically center their concern in what happens in the present.<sup>10</sup>

Berkouwer offers a penetrating critique of subjective views of the atonement and reconciliation:

The error of the noetic, subjective doctrine of reconciliation is that it denatures the love of God to an affectionless, unconcerned sentiment which is incapable of being insulted or injured, a love which needs only to be unveiled, without suffering and without sacrifice and without an act in history. This “unveiling” takes the place of the wrath of God, which must be eliminated as a human distortion of the concept of God. The entire teaching of the Scripture shrivels to naught; there is no appreciation of why the suffering of Christ was a “must,” why such a High Priest became us (Heb. 7:26), who once at the end of the ages has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (Heb. 9:26).<sup>11</sup>

Berkouwer stresses that the battle over the dilemma concerns, essentially, the love of God. Critics of the penal substitutionary model of atonement assert its ascription to God of traits that obscure His love. However, the church has always stressed the unity and harmony of God’s attributes, including the unity between His holiness and love, in His provision of atonement. In the cross of Christ, God’s justice and love are *simultaneously* revealed.<sup>12</sup> As Berkouwer correctly concludes, the question of whether God or man is the object of reconciliation is a false dilemma.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Atonement in Relation to God, Christ, Satan, Humanity, and Sin**

In considering its nature, the atonement is made specifically for human sin and relates to all humanity. The sin of Adam and Eve ruptured their

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<sup>10</sup> Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 19 (see “Introduction,” n. 37).

<sup>11</sup> Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, 274 (see “Introduction,” n. 13).

<sup>12</sup> Berkouwer, 275, 277.

<sup>13</sup> Berkouwer, 287.

relationship with God. God can only be approached by means of a sacrificial offering for human sin. This is pictured in the OT by God's establishment of the various offerings as a requirement for the people of Israel: sin offerings, guilt offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings. Human sin is ubiquitous and is a universal problem (Isa 53:6; Rom 3:23; 5:12). The NT directly recognizes the atonement as a sacrifice for our sins (Rom 4:25; Heb 10:12; 1 Pet 3:18). The verses cited here, and many more like them, indicate that Christ's death occurred because of human sin; that He bore the penalty of our sin; and that He died with the intent of delivering us from our sins.<sup>14</sup>

The exact meaning of statements like these is difficult to determine. They may mean: (1) that our sins were responsible for His death, (2) that He bore the responsibilities of our sins or submitted to God's judgment upon our sins, or (3) that He died in order to deliver us from our sins; or they may mean a combination of any or all of these three meanings.

The atonement is the grounds for our salvation through the means of Christ's sin-bearing on the cross (Heb 9:28; 1 Pet 2:24) as a work of propitiation and expiation for sin (Rom 3:25; Heb 2:17; 1 John 2:2), whereby He takes away sin (John 1:29) and puts away sin (Heb 9:26).

When the atonement is applied to those who believe in Christ, the result is described as forgiveness or remission of sins (Matt 26:28; Luke 24:47; Acts 2:38; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14), deliverance or redemption from sin (Titus 2:14), purification or purging of sin (Heb 1:3), and cleansing from sin (I John 1:7). The atonement makes it possible for God to forgive the sins of those who meet His condition of salvation: repentance of sin and faith in Christ. The finished work of the cross makes certain that all who meet God's condition of salvation will indeed be saved.

The atonement has relation to Satan. The cross reverses the curse of Genesis and serves as the means by which Satan is ultimately defeated. The first reference to this defeat is found in Gen 3:15. Hebrews 2:14 expresses this truth as well: ". . . that through death He might destroy him

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<sup>14</sup> Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement*, 65 (see chap. 1, n. 19).

who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” The atonement brings victory over Satan and all evil powers (John 12:31–33; Col 2:14–15; Heb 2:14–15).

The atonement also has reference to death. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), and on the basis of the atonement (Heb 9:12), believers are delivered from the “fear of death” (Heb 2:15) and are said to have “passed from death into life” (John 5:24; cp. 3:15–16; 10:27–28).

The atonement of Christ is inextricably linked with His resurrection (1 Cor 15:3–4). Crucifixion cannot be separated from and given priority over resurrection.<sup>15</sup> Both the cross and the resurrection are the central themes of apostolic preaching. If Christ has not risen from the dead, we are still in our sins, according to 1 Corinthians 15. Both the cross and the resurrection are events necessary for the salvation of humanity (Mark 8:31). In the resurrection we have God’s great “Not Guilty!” overturning humanity’s verdict “Crucify Him!” As McDonald states,

It is in the resurrection that the saving actuality of the cross is realizable. The resurrection is the affirmation of the atonement. It is the divine guarantee that our sins, with their guilt and penalty, have been dealt with. . . . By means of the cross and empty tomb the salvation of God has become historical and eternal. Christ’s atonement is historically absolute in the cross and eternally actual in the resurrection. . . . Without the cross the resurrection might have been seen as a miracle but with no relation to men’s lives, and without the resurrection the cross must have been seen as a mistake with no relation to their sin. Without the resurrection the cross cannot be understood as atoning, and without the cross the resurrection cannot be experienced as redeeming.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Vidu, *Atonement, Law, and Justice*, 263 (see chap. 5, n. 11).

<sup>16</sup> McDonald, *The Atonement of the Death of Christ*, 38–40. See also Walter Künneth’s *Theology of the Resurrection* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965). As James Denney states, “There can be no salvation from sin unless there is a living Saviour: this explains the emphasis laid by the apostle on the resurrection. But the Living One can only be a Saviour because he has died: this explains the emphasis laid on the Cross” (Denney, *The Death of Christ*, 123 [see chap. 1, n. 3]). See also the discussion in Patterson, “The Work of Christ,” 473–75 (see “Introduction,” n. 21).

### *Atonement as Sacrifice*

Both the OT and NT portray atonement pervasively in sacrificial terms. This is expressed explicitly in such passages as Eph 5:2 where Paul describes Christ's death as a "sacrifice" to God. It is expressed implicitly in the fact that there are three times as many references to the "blood" of Christ as to the "death" of Christ. Culpepper notes that Jesus employs at least four sacrificial terms at the institution of the Lord's Supper—"blood," "covenant," "poured out," and "body"—and that He interpreted His mission in terms of the fulfilment of Isaiah 53.<sup>17</sup>

The sacrificial nature of the atonement is especially clear in Hebrews where Christ's death is said to be a sacrifice for sins (Heb 7:27; 9:26; 10:12). The author of Hebrews declares the death of Christ to be the fulfilment of all that was prefigured and foreshadowed typologically by the OT sacrificial system.

The twentieth century witnessed a growing tendency to reject the sacrificial nature of the atonement.<sup>18</sup> Others do not outright reject it, but seek to redefine it so as to essentially explain it away.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, the concept of atonement as sacrifice and the assertion that it was indeed a sacrifice is ubiquitous in both the OT and NT.

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<sup>17</sup> Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement*, 68.

<sup>18</sup> For bibliography, see Royce G. Gruenler, "Atonement in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 91.

<sup>19</sup> So Christian A. Eberhart, *The Sacrifice of Jesus: Understanding Atonement Biblically* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011). Eberhart identifies four reasons for the widespread rejection of atonement as sacrifice: (1) It is connected to death and suffering. (2) It appears to be inherently violent. (3) Some see it as constituting God as a divine child abuser. (4) The culture of individualism makes vicarious sacrifice hard to comprehend (Eberhart, 5–7). Eberhart's thesis is that the meaning of sacrifice in the OT is fourfold, "to be construed as *approach, exchange, communication, and purification*. These rituals lack any particular emphasis on death or violence. . . . New Testament soteriology does not focus exclusively on the death of Jesus but has a *broader incarnational dimension that includes His entire mission and life*" (Eberhart, 11; italics original). Thus, "sacrificial metaphors in christological contexts [in Scripture] do not exclusively express violence or vicarious death, but connote holiness and acceptance" (Eberhart, 103).

### *Atonement as Substitution*

Many theologians consider substitution to be the controlling theological category that defines the atonement and explains essentially how it works. Older works on the atonement sometimes use the adjective “vicarious,” meaning “substitutionary.” The theme of the atonement as substitutionary in nature is clearly present in both the Greek and Latin church fathers.<sup>20</sup> Many modern writers criticize penal substitution as inadequately addressing the changed relationship that occurs at salvation.<sup>21</sup> But earlier theologians were well aware of this and located the change that occurred as grounded in and initiated by the cross (*positional sanctification*) but then worked out in the believer’s life (*progressive sanctification*).

Another false dichotomy is revealed in the question: “Was the atonement representative or substitutionary?” The biblical answer is both. You can have representation without substitution, but you cannot have substitution without representation. There is no doubt that Jesus acted as the representative of humanity in His incarnation and crucifixion. As Culpepper points out, the NT concept of representative atonement is based on the OT concept of corporate personality. “Both the Son of Man and the Suffering Servant in both Old Testament prophecy and the New Testament fulfilment are representative figures.”<sup>22</sup> Second Corinthians 5:14–15 illustrates representation: “One died for all, therefore all died.”

More than fifty years ago, Leon Morris addressed this issue quite well. To say that the cross was representative but not substitutionary was in vogue at the time. Morris believed that representation language in lieu of substitution was problematic first because it “suffers from lack of accurate definition.” Placed in atonement contexts, representation and substitution mean virtually the same, as can be demonstrated from a dictionary. Where

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<sup>20</sup> See J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper Collins, 1978), 380–89.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Michael M. Winter, *The Atonement, Problems in Theology* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995); Darby K. Ray, *Deceiving the Devil: Atonement, Abuse, and Ransom* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998); and Cees J. den Heyer, *Jesus and the Doctrine of the Atonement: Biblical Notes on a Controversial Topic*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1998). For a survey of the state of atonement studies, see Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet*, 23–46.

<sup>22</sup> Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement*, 70–71.

the two can be distinguished, there is little reason to prefer representation over substitution. The key distinguishing factor appears to be the element of “personal delegation of responsibility.” Humanity has not delegated Christ as our representative; rather, God appointed Him to make atonement for our sins. Morris concludes that as long as this distinction is kept in mind, *and as long as substitution is not denied*, the concept may be useful.<sup>23</sup>

Leonard Hodgson believes that both concepts are found in the NT: “We do not have to choose between so-called substitutionary and representative doctrines as though they were mutually exclusive alternatives. . . . [T]here is truth in saying that Christ suffered in our stead (*ἀντί ἡμῶν* [*anti hēmōn*]) and truth also in saying that He suffered on our behalf (*ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν* [*hyper hēmōn*]).<sup>24</sup>

But some atonement passages simply cannot be limited to a “representation” category and are more accurately described as substitutionary (e.g., 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13; 1 Pet 2:24). Jesus not only did something “representatively” for people, He did something for them as their substitute, as is clearly brought out in passages like 1 Pet 3:18, “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.” Christ’s death on the cross was a substitutionary death in which He represented us. We have already seen how this is stated in Isaiah 53. The only way sin can be expiated is if it is borne on our behalf by a substitute.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, 407–09 (see chap. 3, n. 4).

<sup>24</sup> Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Atonement* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951), 142. On substitution/representation, see also Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 43–46 (see chap. 5, n. 5). Johnson appeals to Thomas F. Torrance in combining representation and substitution. Robert Anderson proposed the notion that Christ died two kinds of death—one for the saved and one for the unsaved (Robert Anderson, *The Gospel and Its Ministry* [London: James Nisbet & Co., 1876; 17th ed., London: Pickering and Inglis, 1969], 72). He argued that Christ died *hyper*—“for the benefit of” the ungodly—and not *anti*—“in the stead of” the ungodly. Anderson apparently based this conclusion on his observation that the Greek *hyper* is always used in presenting the gospel to the unsaved. Thus, Anderson said the sinner can be told that Christ died for his sins, but not that Christ died as his substitute (Anderson, 72). This is a misunderstanding of the Greek prepositions and a confusion of what substitution is.

<sup>25</sup> “According to the doctrine of the atonement, the work of Christ takes its meaning from the removal of the objective barrier standing between God and humankind as the result of human . . . sin. It therefore presupposes that God’s offended holiness must be expiated or the breach of the . . . law requited by a human act of restitution. The work of



Substitutionary atonement is exegetically based in key atonement texts that employ the Greek prepositions *anti* (e.g., Mark 10:45) and *hyper* (“on behalf of” or “for”; e.g., 1 Cor 15:3). The following atonement texts employ *hyper*:

- Jesus’s blood is “shed for many.” (Mark 14:24)
- “Christ died for the ungodly.” (Rom 5:6)
- “Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8)
- God “delivered . . . up” His Son “for us all.” (Rom 8:32)
- “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.” (1 Cor 15:3)
- “One died for all.” (2 Cor 5:14)
- God “made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.” (2 Cor 5:21)
- Christ “gave Himself for our sins.” (Gal 1:4)
- Christ “gave Himself for me.” (Gal 2:20)
- Christ “having become a curse for us.” (Gal 3:13)
- Christ “gave himself a ransom for all.” (1 Tim 2:6)
- Jesus tasted “death for everyone.” (Heb 2:9)
- “Christ . . . suffered . . . the just for the unjust.” (1 Pet 3:18)

In Luke 22:37, Jesus quotes from Isaiah 53 and indicates that His death is substitutionary in nature and that He is, in fact, the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.<sup>26</sup> Substitutionary atonement is clearly affirmed in Scripture. “The absolute oneness between the Father and the Son in the work of atonement must not for a moment be lost sight of. When Christ substitutes for sinful man in His death that is God Himself bearing the consequences of our sin, God saving man at cost to Himself, not at cost to someone else.”<sup>27</sup> Baptist theologian J. M. Pendleton states,

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Christ is understood as a substitutionary or vicarious act, in which he does before God and on behalf of others that which they are unable to do for themselves” (Colin E. Gunton, “The Atonement: Systematic Theology,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch, 5 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999], 1:156). Note the distinction between “vicarious substitution” and “penal substitution” in Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 499.

<sup>26</sup> On Jesus’s quotation of Isaiah 53 in Luke 22:37, see Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A. M. Hall (Philadelphia: WJK, 1963), 68–69; Hengel, *The Atonement*, 57–60 (see “Introduction,” n. 2); and Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 147 (see chap. 3, n. 65).

<sup>27</sup> Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, 410.

Christ died for our benefit because he died in our stead. We are benefited by *his* death because it was substituted for *our* death. There could be no saving benefit without this substitution: and it is to be feared that the words “for our benefit” delude many to their eternal ruin. They vainly suppose that they will be benefited by the death of Christ, whereas they divest it of the very peculiarity which enables it to confer benefit. The Redeemer’s death possesses saving power for men, because he died for men, in the room of men; but it possesses no such power for fallen angels, because he did not die for fallen angels. It cannot be insisted on too earnestly that the only reason why we are savingly benefited by the death of Christ is that he died in our place. He suffered in our stead and “put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” Heb. ix. 26. His obedience and death sustained the dignity of the divine throne, vindicated the rectitude of the divine administration, honored the preceptive and penal claims of the divine law, and opened a channel for the consistent exercise of mercy to guilty sinners.<sup>28</sup>

The critique of penal substitution, though reaching fever pitch in recent decades, has actually been around for quite some time. The Socinians opposed it in the seventeenth century, and it has been critiqued on and off at various points since that time. The twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of critique, so that Hughes could note in his 1949 work the “strong movement of revolt against all penal theories.”<sup>29</sup>

Some detractors of penal substitution eschew the “violence” they see in the doctrine and simply cannot fathom how a nonviolent God could operate in such a way. They essentially charge penal substitution with legitimizing violence in the name of justice.<sup>30</sup> Johnson notes that “the conviction that God is nonviolent in all his interactions, and especially the cross, is a widely shared, deeply held, and revolutionary thesis for the doctrine.”<sup>31</sup> However, Pugh is quite correct: “[I]t could be said that there

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<sup>28</sup> Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 227–28 (see chap. 1, n. 4).

<sup>29</sup> Hughes, *The Atonement*, xiii–xiv (see chap. 4, n. 21).

<sup>30</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 382 (see “Introduction,” n. 32).

<sup>31</sup> Johnson, “Atonement: The Shape and State of the Doctrine,” 15 (see “Introduction,” n. 7).

is no such thing as a non-violent atonement theory. Every theory of the atonement, even non-violent ones, involves God in redemptive violence.”<sup>32</sup> The blasphemous critique of penal substitution as “cosmic child abuse”<sup>33</sup> fails to acknowledge the trinitarian framework of the cross and undermines the sovereignty of God over the cross (Acts 2:23) as well as the reality of redemptive suffering as expressed in Isa 52:13–53:12.<sup>34</sup>

Bruce McCormack offers a penetrating critique of the false charge against penal substitution as “divine child abuse”<sup>35</sup> when he notes that the logic of penal substitution is not that the Father does something to His eternal Son, but rather that the cross is an event between the Father and the Son, the *Logos*, as *human*: “What happens in the outpouring of the wrath of God by the Father upon Jesus Christ is that the human experience of the ‘penalty of death’ that humans have merited through their sinfulness is taken into the very life of God himself.”<sup>36</sup> Moreover, since it is the triune God involved in the atonement, the Father is not doing something to someone other than Himself.

The triune God pours his wrath out upon himself in and through the human nature that he has made his own in his second mode of his being . . . [This] is the meaning of penal substitution when seen against the background of a well-ordered Christology and a well-ordered doctrine of the Trinity. . . . But the crucial point is that a well-ordered penal substitution theory (one that gets its ontological presuppositions right) does not portray this event in terms of a violent action of God (conceived of as one individual) against the

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<sup>32</sup> Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 59 (see chap. 6, n. 37).

<sup>33</sup> Chalke and Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, 182–83.

<sup>34</sup> Treat, *The Crucified King*, 176 (see “Introduction;” n. 1). See also the critique of the “divine child abuse” slander in Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 228–33 (see chap. 2, n. 5); and, more recently, Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 71–77.

<sup>35</sup> Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, “For God So Loved the World?” in *Christianity, Patriarchy, and Abuse: A Feminist Critique*, ed. Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989).

<sup>36</sup> Bruce L. McCormack, “The Ontological Presuppositions of Barth’s Doctrine of the Atonement,” in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 364.

Son (conceived of as a second distinct individual). Therefore, the event in question is inimitable in the absolute degree. It justifies nothing on the plane of human-to-human relations, and the moral charge against penal substitution cannot finally be sustained.<sup>37</sup>

Johnson fears that when penal substitution is made “the theory,” it leads to “a dangerous lack of proportion and perspective.”<sup>38</sup> This statement is surprising to me in light of the shrill statements made by those who deny or derogate penal substitution. The lack of proportion and perspective lies with those who would derogate or deny penal substitution, not the advocates of it.

Among those who support penal substitution, many are reluctant to give it primacy of place in Scripture. Michael Bird thinks penal substitution is not the primary and thus most important theory of the atonement because preaching in Acts focuses more on resurrection than the cross, and because of the place of penal substitution in church history.<sup>39</sup> Others, however—rightly in my view—consider penal substitution to be the foundational approach to the atonement in Scripture.<sup>40</sup> Robert Peterson offers nine substantive reasons why penal substitution should be considered foundational to the other concepts of atonement: (1) redemptive history (Isa 52:13–53:12); (2) Mark 10:45 (the only place in the Gospels where Jesus interprets the significance of His death and which affirms penal substitution); (3) Heb 2:17; 9:23; and throughout Hebrews, in which redemption is more than substitution but includes it; (4) the inclusion of legal substitution in other pictures of Christ’s work; (5) penal substitution as the grounds for reconciliation in 2 Cor 5:21; (6) the subordination of the Christus Victor theme to that of substitution in Colossians 14–15 and Rev

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<sup>37</sup> McCormack, 364–65. But see the concerns and cautions raised about McCormack’s trinitarian “inseparability” by Vidu, “The Place of the Cross,” 28–32 (see chap. 4, n. 19).

<sup>38</sup> Johnson, “Atonement: The Shape and State of the Doctrine,” 16.

<sup>39</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 414.

<sup>40</sup> Penal substitution as a way of understanding the atonement has been around since the patristic era. See Joseph F. Mitros, “Patristic Views of Christ’s Salvific Work,” *Thought* 42 (1967): 415–47; Henri A. G. Blocher, “Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *JETS* 47 (2004): 629–45; and Michael J. Vlach, “Penal Substitution in Church History,” *MSJ* 20 (2009): 199–214.

5:5–9; (7) sacrificial language in Scripture that indicates substitution; (8) the prominence of legal substitution in Scripture; and (9) the “Godward direction” of penal substitution.<sup>41</sup>

Jeremy Treat likewise believes the place of priority belongs to penal substitution, citing two major reasons:

First, in terms of theology, penal substitution has priority because of its explanatory power. . . . Second, penal substitution has priority in the sense that it is more directly related to the God-human relationship, which is the special focus of creation, fall, and redemption. In other words, penal substitution *directly* addresses the root problem between God and humanity (wrath/guilt), whereas *Christus Victor* addresses the *derivative* problem of human bondage to Satan.”<sup>42</sup>

The cross is a victory (*Christus Victor*) by means of penal substitution.

The objections to substitutionary atonement have been well answered.<sup>43</sup> I. Howard Marshall’s point is well taken: The way to answer criticism of penal substitution “is not by denying the biblical perception of the significance of the death of Jesus, but by understanding it correctly.”<sup>44</sup> He is likewise correct to point out that the denial of penal substitution should be seen as a denial of what Scripture says rather than a convincing reinterpretation of what Scripture says.<sup>45</sup> Garrett notes that the theme

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<sup>41</sup> Robert A. Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son: The Work of Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 557–60.

<sup>42</sup> Treat, *The Crucified King*, 223–24; emphasis original.

<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 744–52 (see “Introduction,” n. 21); Geisler, *Sin, Salvation*, 245 (see chap. 4, n. 17); Daniel J. Hill and Joseph Jedwab, “Atonement and the Concept of Punishment,” in *Locating Atonement: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 139–53. Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement* (see chap. 5, n. 3); Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son*, 396–412; Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 489–506 (see “Introduction,” n. 41); Treat, *The Crucified King*. For perhaps the most complete response to all objections concerning penal substitution, see Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 205–328 (see chap. 2, n. 5). The great Greek scholar, A. T. Robertson, said, “Those who refuse to admit that Jesus held this notion of a substitutionary death . . . [take] an easy way to get rid of passages that contradict one’s theological opinions” (A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. [Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1930] 1:163).

<sup>44</sup> Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement*, 53.

<sup>45</sup> Marshall, 53.

of substitution involves drawing together four biblical metaphors used in reference to Christ's death: ransom, sacrifice, redemption, and justification.<sup>46</sup> Substitution is simply indispensable for atonement as revealed in Scripture.

Stephen Holmes addresses the contemporary criticisms to penal substitution and notes that the "cultural plausibility" of the doctrine is weak due to views on retributive justice, the "prevailing instinctive political liberalism among cultural elites," and the fact that so many in Western culture simply do not view themselves as sinners in need of salvation.<sup>47</sup> I agree with Holmes when he suggests: "Penal substitution remains of value because it reveals something about the inescapability of guilt and so about our need for atonement."<sup>48</sup> Holmes fosters an approach of seeing multiple metaphors, including penal substitution, in Scripture. He argues against the viewpoint that penal substitution can be found in the church fathers and that its essential genesis was in Calvin.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, Holmes remonstrates with those like Joel Green, Mark Baker, Steve Chalke, and others who strongly deny penal substitution. He wrongly concludes that the NT does not demand penal substitution since "there is no explicit statement of Jesus bearing the penalty of our sins,"<sup>50</sup> yet adds that penal substitution must remain as a viable metaphor, among many others, as an expression of atonement lest we privilege it over other metaphors and distort the biblical witness.<sup>51</sup> Thiselton points out that "the terms *substitution*,

<sup>46</sup> Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:17 (see "Introduction," n. 21).

<sup>47</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, "Penal Substitution," in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 309–10.

<sup>48</sup> Holmes, "Penal Substitution," 313. It is not clear why Holmes would say, regarding penal substitution, that "even if we regard it as an impossible doctrine to preach today, it is a doctrine that should remain of theological interest, because it has things to tell us about the nature of the atonement which we cannot hear so clearly anywhere else" (Holmes, 314). If it teaches us things about the nature of the atonement, how can it be regarded by anyone as "an impossible doctrine to preach today"?

<sup>49</sup> Stephen R. Holmes, *The Wondrous Cross: Atonement and Penal Substitution in the Bible and History*, Christian Doctrine in Historical Perspective (London: Paternoster, 2007), 57. Ben Pugh likewise errs, thinking penal substitution was birthed during the Reformation (Ben Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 63 [see chap. 6, n. 35]). "Penal substitution, then, is really a justification-eye-view of the atonement. The real roots of it are justification by faith. . . . Penal substitution is, in effect, a justification for justification" (Pugh, 76).

<sup>50</sup> Holmes, *The Wondrous Cross*, 43.

<sup>51</sup> Holmes, 85–86.

*identification, representation, and participation* are no mere abstractions reflecting ‘problems’ drawn from the epistles, but draw living currency from the whole of the New Testament.”<sup>52</sup>

Leon Morris has stated the importance of understanding and affirming penal substitution in stark terms:

To put it bluntly and plainly, if Christ is not my Substitute, I still occupy the place of a condemned sinner. If my sins and my guilt are not transferred to Him, if He did not take them upon Himself, then surely they remain with me. If He did not deal with my sins, I must face their consequences. If my penalty was not borne by Him, it still hangs over me. There is no other possibility. To say that substitution is immoral is to say that redemption is impossible. We must beware of taking up such a disastrous position.<sup>53</sup>

As Lewis Smedes puts it: “While the substitutionary death of Christ is not everything in redemption, nothing else is enough without it.”<sup>54</sup> Overall, when it comes to penal substitution today, there are three approaches: (1) those who denigrate it; (2) those who cautiously support it as a model of atonement to be incorporated with all other NT models;<sup>55</sup> and (3) those who defend it as the foundational and most important expression of atonement theology.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 341; emphasis original (see chap. 1, n. 22).

<sup>53</sup> Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, 410.

<sup>54</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, *The Incarnation: Trends in Modern Anglican Thought* (Kampen, Netherlands: J. H. Kok, 1953), 160.

<sup>55</sup> E.g., Holmes, *The Wondrous Cross*; Holmes, “Can Punishment Bring Peace? Penal Substitution Revisited,” *SJT* 58 (2005): 104–23.

<sup>56</sup> E.g., Stott, *The Cross of Christ*. See also Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions*, 201–204 especially; Treat, *The Crucified King*. Baptists, and especially Southern Baptists, have for the most part strongly supported penal substitution. See the resolution “On the Necessity of Penal Substitutionary Atonement” in the appendix. One of the earliest seventeenth-century Baptist theologians, Thomas Grantham, affirmed the penal substitutionary nature of the atonement and universal atonement (Thomas Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus* [London: Printed for Francis Smith, 1678], 2.62).

### *Atonement as Propitiation and Expiation*

We have already seen that the NT authors employ the Greek term *hilasmos*, “propitiation,” in some of the key atonement texts. The term means “to turn away wrath by means of sacrifice.”<sup>57</sup> The noun *hilasmos* (“propitiation”) is used only twice in the NT (1 John 2:2; 4:10). The related noun *hilasterion* also occurs twice and is translated either as “propitiation” or “mercy seat” in Rom 3:25 and “mercy seat” in Heb 9:5. We have seen that in the LXX, the related verb *hilaskomai*, “to propitiate,” was sometimes used to translate the Hebrew *kaphar*, “to cover” in the context of atonement and worship. In the NT, the verbal form occurs only twice (Luke

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<sup>57</sup> For detailed lexical discussion of the meaning of “propitiation,” see *BDAG*, 473–74; *TDNT*, 3:300–23; *TDNTa*, 362–66; *EDNT*, 2:185–86; and *NIDNTTE*, 2:531–41. See also Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (see chap. 1, n. 6); on pp. 149–74, Morris discusses the OT concept of God’s wrath and demonstrates that “propitiation” is established not only lexically but also by the context when the Hebrew and Greek terms are used. In the LXX, *hilaskomai* is sometimes associated with God’s wrath (Exod 32:12–14; Dan 9:16–19), and the word normally refers to propitiation of wrath in Greek literature, as noted by Ben Witherington, 493 (see chap. 3, n. 139). C. K. Barrett states, “It would be wrong to neglect the fact that expiation has, as it were, the effect of propitiation” (*The Epistle to the Romans*, BNTC [New York: Harper, 1957], 78). The verb *hilaskomai* includes both meanings of expiation and propitiation, as Leon Morris has conclusively demonstrated (Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 155). “If one reduces the language of Scripture from ‘propitiation’ to ‘expiation’ in all instances, he still must answer the question, ‘Why should sins be expiated?’ What would happen if no expiation were provided? Can one deny that, according to the teaching of Scripture, men will die in their sins?” (P. K. Jewett, “Propitiation,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney, 5 vols. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975], 4:904–05). For an excellent discussion of the terms (including bibliography), see Judith M. Gundry-Volf, “Expiation, Propitiation, Mercy Seat,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 279–84. See also George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 429–31. Dunn is squeamish about understanding propitiation as appeasing God’s anger against sin, as are many theologians, but especially so in recent years (James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 212–33). O’Collins attempts to mute Pauline mention of God’s “wrath” in an effort to deny penal substitution. While he rightly says “anger” designates God’s judgment on sin, he insists, wrongly, that the NT “never invokes God’s anger in connection with the sufferings and death of Christ” (Gerald O’Collins, “Redemption: Some Crucial Issues,” 2 [see chap. 1, n. 10]). The statement that Christ bore in our place the wrath of God may not appear literally in so many words in Scripture, but such would seem to be semantically stated in Rom 5:9 (“Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him”) especially so in light of Rom 3:21–26. See also Gordon Fee, “Paul and the Metaphors for Salvation,” 43–68 (see “Introduction,” n. 22).



18:13 and Heb 2:17). The latter is especially important in the context of atonement.

In what sense is the atonement a propitiation? Answering this question correctly is important given all the misunderstanding surrounding the concept. “Jesus does not propitiate the Father so as to change his attitude to sinners and make it possible for him to forgive sin. Rather, Father and Son together take upon themselves all the suffering and judgement caused by and due to sin, and bear them for us.”<sup>58</sup> In satisfying the wrath of God, we should not think of the atonement in such a way as to portray God as angry with Christ. Calvin rightly affirmed that God punished Jesus instead of us but denied that the Father was ever angry with the Son.<sup>59</sup> We must keep a proper trinitarian construct in mind when talking about the relationship between the Father and Son at the cross. As Hodgson states, God “wills that sin shall be punished, but He does not will that sin shall be punished without also willing that the punishment shall fall on Himself.”<sup>60</sup>

Scripture links propitiation with the love of God for humanity in 1 John 4:9–10. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our sins” (v. 10). As James Denney explains, “So far from finding any kind of contrast between love and propitiation, the apostle can convey no idea of love to anyone except by pointing to the propitiation—love is what is manifested there; and he can give no account of the propitiation but by saying, ‘Behold what manner of love’ [1 John 3:1].”<sup>61</sup> Or, as T. F. Torrance points out, “It is precisely in this propitiating movement of reconciliation and justification through his Son that God the Father opens his innermost heart and mind to us in the self-revelation of his love.”<sup>62</sup> Fleming Rutledge makes the point well:

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<sup>58</sup> Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement*, 58. Perhaps Marshall could have worded this a little more carefully to avoid sounding like the error of patripassianism, which he no doubt rejects. Properly speaking, the Son alone suffers the judgment due for sinners, by the will of the Father.

<sup>59</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:517; 2:16:11 (see “Introduction,” n. 13).

<sup>60</sup> Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, 77. “The wrath of God falls upon God himself, by God’s own choice, out of God’s own love” (Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 143).

<sup>61</sup> Denney, *The Death of Christ*, 276 (see chap. 1, n. 3).

<sup>62</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 111.

God is not divided against himself. When we see Jesus, we see the Father (John 14:7). The Father did not look at Jesus on the cross and suddenly have a change of heart. The purpose of the atonement was not to bring about a change in God's attitude toward his rebellious creatures. God's attitude toward us has always and ever been the same. Judgment against sin is preceded, accompanied, and followed by God's mercy. There was never a time when God was against us. Even in his wrath he is for us. Yet at the same time he is not for us *without* wrath, because his will is to destroy all that is hostile to perfecting his world. The paradox of the cross demonstrates the victorious love of God for us at the same time that it shows forth his judgment upon sin.<sup>63</sup>

How should we describe the difference between propitiation and expiation? *Expiation* signifies the cancellation of sin, whereas *propitiation* denotes the turning away of the wrath of God along with the cancellation of sin. Misconceptions about the doctrine of propitiation often occur when pagan ideas are read into the uses of the word in the OT and NT.<sup>64</sup> Unlike the pagan contexts, God Himself, not man, takes the initiative to offer the sacrifice by His grace; and the sacrifice itself is none other than God in the person of His Son, Jesus. It is the consistent view of Scripture that humanity's sin has incurred the wrath of God and that this wrath is only averted by the substitutionary atonement that Christ has provided on the cross. Evangelical theology insists on taking *hilaskomai* in the sense of "make propitiation" because that is the meaning of the word and that is the heart of the doctrine of the atonement.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 282.

<sup>64</sup> Cp. Stott who stated, "If we are to develop a truly biblical doctrine of propitiation, it will be necessary to distinguish it from pagan ideas at three crucial points, relating to why a propitiation is necessary, who made it and what it was" (*The Cross of Christ*, 171–74). See the excellent excursus on this subject in Daniel L. Akin, *1,2,3 John*, NAC 38 (Nashville: B&H, 2001), 253–65. Not all evangelical scholars are confident that "propitiation" is the intended meaning of the *hilaskomai* word group. See, for example, Gundry-Volf, "Expiation, Propitiation, Mercy Seat," 279–84.

<sup>65</sup> E.g., Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 575 (see "Introduction," n. 21). C. K. Barrett states, "It would be wrong to neglect the fact that expiation has, as it were, the effect of propitiation" (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 78).

Leon Morris's magisterial study on the meaning of *hilaskomai* provides clear and irrefutable evidence that the term includes the concept of the expiation of sin but also conveys the concept of the averting of God's wrath from sinners.<sup>66</sup> Thiselton rightly notes, "Expiation and propitiation do not offer an either-or. If we do not totally *exclude* what propitiation (qualified by other models) points to, this *also presupposes* the reality of *expiation*. Nevertheless, on its own *expiation* risks losing something, not least the *personal* dimension of the action."<sup>67</sup> "Propitiation" is a fundamental theological concept in a biblical doctrine of the atonement.

### ***Atonement as Reconciliation***<sup>68</sup>

The concept of reconciliation is the most personal of all biblical metaphors for what Christ accomplished on the cross. Scripture describes humanity as "enemies" of God because of sin (Rom 5:10). But through the cross, former enemies are now "reconciled" resulting in peace. Reconciliation is essentially peacemaking. God takes the initiative to break down barriers and make friends of former enemies.

There are four key texts on reconciliation in the NT: Rom 5:1–11; 2 Cor 5:14–21; Eph 2:11–19; Col 1:19–23.<sup>69</sup> Each of these texts makes clear that God brings about reconciliation through Christ's death on the

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<sup>66</sup> Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 144–213 (see chap. 1, n. 6).

<sup>67</sup> Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 346.

<sup>68</sup> It is surprising that this aspect of the atonement often receives very little treatment. It receives precious little attention in the recent *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*. Of the eighteen primary chapters and eighty-four essays in the book's 812 pages of content, reconciliation receives only a short six page essay, which does not even discuss the theological aspect of reconciliation in the atonement. I. Howard Marshall laments the same problem with the famous *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, a six-volume work of well over 6,000 pages (Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement*, 99).

<sup>69</sup> For studies on reconciliation in these texts, see Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981); Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 132–50; I. Howard Marshall, "The Meaning of 'Reconciliation,'" in *Jesus the Saviour: Studies in New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 258–74; and Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son*, 276–312. For lexical and theological information on *kattalagē* ("reconciliation"), see *BDAG*, 521; *TDNT*, 1:251–59; *TDNTa*, 40–42; *EDNT* 1:62, 307; *NIDNTE*, 1:242–49, 1:145–76.

cross. For example, in Eph 2:11–19 Paul explains the means of reconciliation is “by the blood of Christ” and “through the cross.”

At least six key principles are important to note concerning reconciliation from these texts:

1. God is the one who initiates reconciliation. God is the offended party and man is the offender. Yet it is not man who seeks reconciliation with God; rather God initiates reconciliation and accomplishes it by the blood of Christ. God’s motive for reconciliation is His love for humanity (Rom 5:10).
2. God is not only the subject of reconciliation; He is the goal as well. Note that in 2 Cor 5:18–20, God initiates reconciliation through Christ, and God is the object of the reconciling activity.
3. According to 2 Cor 5:18–21, reconciliation must be conceived in an objective sense and a subjective sense. Objectively, God has brought about a change in His relationship with sinful humanity through the cross of Christ. He has removed all barriers blocking His granting of salvation to sinners. There is an objective sense in which Christ reconciled the world to God, according to 2 Cor 5:18–21, and this reconciliation is an accomplished act whether or not a single person is ever personally reconciled to God. But for this reconciliation to be effected, it must be subjectively appropriated by the sinner through faith in Christ.<sup>70</sup>
4. Paul explains reconciliation as operating on three levels: personal (2 Cor 5:18–21), corporate (Jews and Gentiles, Eph 2:11–19), and cosmic (Col 1:19–20).
5. Reconciliation brings “peace,” objective well-being leading to harmonious relations between God and those reconciled, as well as between people.
6. Reconciliation is something that must be “received” (Rom 5:11). On the basis of an already accomplished act of reconciliation, the

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<sup>70</sup> See L. Morris, *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 236–37, 246–49; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 311–12; Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 197.

offer of the gospel can go out to all people who “receive” this reconciliation. This is the subjective side of reconciliation.

### ***Atonement as Redemption (Ransom)***

Scripture is replete with redemption language in connection with atonement and salvation. Redemption has to do with freedom and liberation. In the context of OT and NT times, the word essentially connoted the effecting of release by means of the payment of a price. In NT times, it originally applied to prisoners who had been taken captive in warfare or to slaves who were given their freedom when someone paid a “redemption” price called a “ransom.”<sup>71</sup> We have already listed and briefly analyzed the various places where the Hebrew and Greek words for “redemption” are used in Scripture.

As Cousar notes, the NT concept of redemption carries forward two major OT themes: liberation by a mighty power and a price paid to effect that liberation.<sup>72</sup> The atonement is viewed as an act of redemption where Christ paid the price necessary for the release of sin’s captives. Jesus indicated that this was the purpose for His going to the cross (Mark 10:45). Paul speaks of Christ’s redeeming us in Rom 3:24 and Eph 1:7. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law according to Gal 3:13. The author of Hebrews speaks of Christ’s obtaining “eternal redemption” for us on the cross (Heb 9:12). Peter speaks of the cost of our redemption: “[Y]ou were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:18–19).

Scripture speaks of redemption not only as a past act but also as a future promise. Jesus, speaking of a future day when He would return “with power and great glory,” told His disciples how to respond: “[L]ook up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:27–28). Paul describes this future day as one for which believers eagerly wait because they will experience the “redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23). In

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<sup>71</sup> For an accessible summary of the concept in the OT and NT, see Morris, *The Atonement*, 106–31.

<sup>72</sup> Cousar, *A Theology of the Cross*, 61 (see “Preface,” n. 1).

Eph 4:30, Christians are exhorted not to grieve the Holy Spirit, who has sealed them “for the day of redemption.”

Leon Morris summarizes redemption in the NT as picturing and emphasizing three things: (1) People are slaves to sin. (2) Christ paid the price of freedom. (3) The redeemed are set free.<sup>73</sup> This new-found freedom is more than just liberation from sin and darkness; it is a freedom that binds us to a life of service to the One who set us free. Salvation is not just freedom *from* sin but freedom *to* serve and freedom *for* our allegiance to the One who has set us free.

### *Atonement as Justification*

Righteousness is at the heart of God’s character and His plan of salvation (Rom 1:16). In the revelation of God in Christ at the cross, God’s righteousness is vindicated, displayed, satisfied, and offered as a gift to sinners who believe in Christ. James Leo Garrett outlines the three meanings of “righteousness” in reference to God within the context of God’s covenant with Israel: (1) the mandatory, (2) the punitive or retributive, and (3) the redemptive.

As to the mandatory, Jesus by His sinless life and perfect obedience to the Father’s will fulfilled the righteous demand of the law (Matt. 3:15; Heb. 7:26–27a; 10:5–10). As to the punitive, Jesus in and by His death bore or endured the punishment that the righteous Father rightfully expected guilty human beings to bear or endure (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:24–26; Gal. 3:13). As to the redemptive, Jesus by His death and resurrection exhibited and effectuated the gracious saving or liberating nature and purpose of the righteous Father vis-à-vis human sin and death and the suprahuman powers of evil (Rom. 8:1–4; Heb. 2:14–15; 1 John 2:1–2).<sup>74</sup>

Romans is the key book in the NT that presents the theological concept of the righteousness of God and its relationship to atonement. Romans

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<sup>73</sup> Morris, *The Atonement*, 128–30.

<sup>74</sup> Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:18.

3:21–26 is the key passage in this vein. See the discussion on this text in chapter 3, “Atonement in the New Testament.”

In conclusion, the words of the Puritan Stephen Charnock capsule the variety of atonement terms used in the NT to express the nature of what God has done for us through Christ on the cross:

The Scripture hath various terms for our recovery by Christ, which all amount to one thing, but imply the variety of our misery by sin, and the full proportion of the remedy to all our capacities in that misery. Our fall put us under various relations; our Saviour hath cut those knots, and tied new ones of a contrary nature. It is called reconciliation as it respects us as enemies, salvation as it respects us in a state of damnation, propitiation as we are guilty, redemption as captives, and bound over to punishment. Reconciliation, justification, and adoption differ thus: in reconciliation, God is considered as the supreme Lord and the injured party, and man is considered as an enemy that hath wronged him; in justification, God is considered as a judge, and man as guilty; in adoption, God is considered as a father, and man as an alien. Reconciliation makes us friends, justification makes us righteous, adoption makes us heirs.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Charnock, “A Discourse of God’s Being the Author of Reconciliation,” 3:338–40 (see chap. 3, n. 126).





## CHAPTER 8

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### *Special Issues Concerning the Atonement*

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There are several “special issues” that are not always given treatment in works on the atonement, such as the frequently asked questions in relation to the extent of the atonement: “Is the atonement actual or potential?” and “Is the blood of Christ ‘wasted’ on those who are not finally saved and end up in hell?” I am often asked questions about these issues, so perhaps this section will be helpful to many.

#### **Issue #1: Is the Atonement Actual or Potential?**

The *limited atonement* position entails that all those for whom Jesus died must have the atonement applied to them according to the dictates of unconditional election. Hence, the atonement is not “potential” but “actual” in the sense that it actually atones for all those for whom it was made. Those who hold this position contend that *unlimited atonement* makes the atonement to be “potential” but not “actual” in that many for whom Jesus died never receive the benefits of the atonement. Limited atonement advocates attempt to impale their opponents on the horns of a dilemma: Either the atonement is actual or it is only potential. But such an argument engages in equivocation and a false dilemma fallacy.

The equivocation is the substitution of “atonement” for actual “salvation” when the atonement is applied. The atonement is an actual completed fact. In that sense, there is nothing “potential” about it. However, “salvation” in the sense of atonement applied is *potential* for all for whom atonement has been accomplished *upon condition of faith*.

The limitarian wants to consider the atonement itself as a cause effected by God alone (i.e., *monergistic*) that brings about an effect (salvation for the elect) without any intervening condition. But this understanding of the atonement (i.e., as a conditionless causality expressed as a monergistic efficacious act) leaves out something important in the equation—the reality of intervening conditions (*bi-conditionals*). For example, take the statement “Jesus actually saves all who believe.” This is how the Scripture puts things. Never in Scripture are we told that the atonement itself saves anyone. Scripture knows of no salvation apart from belief, either antecedent to faith exercised in historical context (justification at the cross or in eternity) or apart from the mechanism of belief. Given these facts, the obvious truth follows: Jesus is the potential Savior of all people. Salvation is not actualized until the mechanism of faith occurs. Prior to that point, salvation is, and in fact has to be, potential. According to Eph 2:3, even the unbelieving elect (thinking of election from a Calvinistic perspective) are under the wrath of God (“we . . . were by nature children of wrath”). The atonement itself does not save anyone until faith is exercised. The atonement in itself does not secure its own application.

Limitarians collapse the potentiality into actuality—a major error. Their logic proceeds in this fashion:

1. Jesus can only be the potential Savior of the ones for whose sins He died.
2. Jesus did not die for the non-elect (the point of contention).
3. Therefore, there is no potential salvation for the non-elect.

Limited atonement assumes a *conditionless* causality, thus begging the question at hand (whether the atonement is limited or unlimited). It is a false dilemma to assert that *either* Jesus is an actual Savior *or* He is only a potential Savior. Those who reject limited atonement are accused of understanding Jesus as only a *potential* Savior. No, Jesus *actually* saves all who *believe* based on an all-sufficient atonement accomplished for the sins of all people. This is the clear teaching of Scripture.

One of the most common arguments for limited atonement is the argument that it is either the case that Christ died *merely* to make men savable,

or to effectually save some (as opposed to all). The standard form of the argument goes like this:

It is either A or B.  
 Not A.  
 Therefore B.

This form of syllogism can be a sound line of argument if, and only if, there are only two alternatives, that is, if there is no third alternative (i.e., *no tertius quid*). Stated in conversational English, the argument works like this: *Either* Christ died for all, merely and only to make it possible for God to save all (A), *or* He died with an effectual intention to save some only (B). The argument assumes that both A and B cannot be true. First, the proponent of this dilemma will cite Scripture that speaks of Christ's intentionally and effectually saving some (not all—i.e., “Not A”). This then establishes B (“Therefore B”). Next, the proponent will claim that A (that Christ died for all) cannot be true. But this creates a false either/or fallacy. For moderate Calvinists (who affirm an unlimited atonement), and for Arminians and other non-Calvinists (who affirm an unlimited atonement), it is not a case of either/or but of both/and.

Remove from the first proposition the idea of “merely” or “only” so that it is *either* “Christ died to make people savable” *or* “Christ died to effectually save some.” Moderate Calvinists affirm that Christ died to make all people savable and with the intention to save only the elect. Arminians and non-Calvinists affirm that Christ died to make all people savable, and with the special intention to save only those who believe (who are also the elect). It is false to say that Arminians do not believe in effectual salvation. They just do not believe that God intends to save *only* the elect in the way the Calvinist defines election. Arminians believe that God intends to effectually save all who believe in Christ (who are, of course, the elect).

## **Issue #2: Do the Blood of OT Sacrifices and the Blood of Jesus Represent Life or Death?**

This question is raised due to God's statement in Lev 17:11, “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make

atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.” Leon Morris summarizes the debate in his *Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*. His conclusion, based on the use of “blood” in atonement contexts in both the OT and NT, is that the shedding of blood in a sacrificial context indicates a focus not on the release of life but on the fact of death or life given up in death.<sup>1</sup> Rutledge concurs:

It is surely right to say that the essence of Christ’s sacrifice is the giving of his life, but the insistence of these scholars in detaching the life from the death means that we cannot speak of representation, substitution, propitiation, vicarious suffering, or even exchange happening on the cross because the whole idea of God coming under God’s own judgment is eliminated.<sup>2</sup>

### **Issue #3: How Is Christ’s Penal Substitutionary Death on the Cross Related to the Law and the Sins of Humanity for Which He died?**

One question theologians have considered is: Did Jesus suffer the exact *quantitative* equivalent of the law’s punishment for sin or did He suffer a *qualitative* equivalency relative to the sins of the world?<sup>3</sup> Put another way,

<sup>1</sup> Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 112–28 (see chap. 1, n. 6). See also Patterson, “The Work of Christ,” 584 (see chap. 2, n. 16). J. Denney took B. F. Westcott to the woodshed for his “strange caprice” in dividing the life of Christ from His death: “I venture to say that a more groundless fancy never haunted and troubled the interpretation of any part of Scripture than that which is introduced by this distinction into the Epistle to the Hebrews and the First Epistle of John. . . . But there is no meaning in saying that by His death His life—as something other than His death—is ‘liberated’ and ‘made available’ for men; on the contrary, what makes His risen life significant and a saving power for sinners is neither more nor less than this, that His death is in it; it is the life of one who by dying has dealt with the fatal necessities of man’s situation, and in doing so has given a supreme demonstration of His love” (Denney, *The Death of Christ*, 271–72; citation of Westcott, 271 n. 1. See Westcott, *The Epistles of St. John*, p. 34–35; *Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 293–95. [see chap. 1, n. 3]).

<sup>2</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 238 (see “Introduction,” n. 41).

<sup>3</sup> In the post-Reformation era and beyond, theologians debated the issue using the Latin terms *idem* (“the exact same”) and *tantundem* (“the same amount, to the same degree or extent”). The question is whether Christ suffered the *idem* (i.e., an exact equivalent suffering for sins) or the *tantundem* (i.e., the qualitative equivalent suffering for sin). The debates

did Jesus suffer for each individual sin of each individual sinner in a quantitative fashion such that if there had been one more sinner added to the list of humanity's sinners, Christ would have had to suffer proportionately more for those sins as well? To answer this question, we must be careful to define what "satisfaction" for sin means with respect to the death of Christ and, in so doing, to distinguish between a commercial/pecuniary satisfaction versus a penal satisfaction.

Let us review the nature of commercial debt payments. There are two kinds. First, there is payment that is the exact equivalent of that which is owed. If \$100 is owed, \$100 is paid. The creditor may be uninvolved in the transaction. All that matters is the payment of the debt. The debt may be paid by the debtor himself or by another (surety or guarantor) on behalf of the debtor. The result is the release from debt of the debtor by the creditor. A second kind is payment rendered that is equivalent to what is owed but not the identical thing owed. In this case, the creditor must be willing to accept the equivalent payment and remit the debt.

Building on these notions, some within Reformed theology have described the death of Christ as an exact equivalent payment for sins (henceforth called *equivalentism*). Historically this has been expressed in two forms. The first approach posits that all the sins of the elect, and only the sins of the elect, were imputed to Christ. Due to the divine nature of Christ, this payment was externally sufficient exclusively for the elect, but it was hypothetically sufficient to have been a payment for the entire world of sinners had God intended it so to be. Had more sin been imputed to Christ, Christ would have suffered more. The basis of this approach is John Owen's claim that Christ suffered the exact equivalent (*idem*) of the law's punishment against any given single sinner; as opposed to Christ suffering a just equivalent (*tantundem*) of the law's curse against any given single sinner.<sup>4</sup> Owen argued for a pecuniary/commercial satisfaction for sins whereby Jesus made a payment to the Father on the cross that

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were protracted and prolix, but the issue is important. See, for example the debates between Richard Baxter and John Owen as discussed in Clifford, *Atonement and Justification* (see chap. 6, n. 24); Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper-Corn: Richard Baxter's Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Owen, *The Death of Death*, 10:265–66 (see chap. 6, n. 25).

“purchased” faith and all other graces from God according to the terms of the Covenant of Redemption.<sup>5</sup> This is an essential component of his argument for limited atonement. Most modern advocates of limited atonement follow Owen’s approach.<sup>6</sup>

The second approach was a development of the first by strict equivalentists and/or hyper-Calvinists, who quantified the sins of all elect sinners collectively. They claimed that the corresponding suffering by Christ was properly proportionate, such that had more sin been quantified, the suffering of Christ would have increased proportionately. On the cross, Christ suffered the *idem* due to a plurality of sinners (the elect), and only for the sins of the elect. Most Reformed theologians past and present reject both of these concepts of equivalentism, even though many of them affirm a strictly limited atonement. Christ suffered the *tantundem* not the *idem*.

There are good reasons to reject this kind of strict equivalentism (*idem*). It would seem obvious that Christ did not, and in fact, could not endure exactly the same penalty that the law exacts upon sinners: (1) The law demands punishment of each sinner; Christ was not a sinner. (2) The law demands punishment for all sinners; Christ was one man who was punished in the place of all sinners. (3) The law demands eternal punishment; Christ suffered on the cross for six hours.<sup>7</sup> Jesus did not discharge

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<sup>5</sup> See Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 216–18; 688–90 (see “Introduction,” n. 16).

<sup>6</sup> For problems associated with these notions of faith as a purchase and the Covenant of Redemption, see Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 213–18.

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, John Gibbon, “The Nature of Justification Opened,” in *Puritan Sermons 1659–1689: Being the Morning Exercises at Cripplegate, St. Giles in the Fields, and in Southwark by Seventy-Five Ministers of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 5:321–23. As David Ponter rightly notes, John Owen’s attempt to claim that mere physical death of the body, apart from any consideration of eternal suffering, obtains the essential satisfaction to God’s law (Owen’s distinction, following Aristotle, between “essential” vs. “accidental” comes into play here), is an evasion and ultimately abortive. If physical death and consignment to hell are conceived as eternal or even temporary in duration, and yet not essential as a satisfaction to God’s justice and holiness, then it would seem difficult if not impossible to justify God’s consignment of such people to eternal suffering in hell. The consequence of this would be that eternal punishment is not an essential demand of the law against sin, but that merely physical death is. Scripture asserts, however, eternal punishment is part of the essential requirement for the satisfaction of the law against sin, because only eternal punishment has the equivalency of an “infinite” value corresponding with the infinite value of the demerit of sin. Christ, being an infinite person, thereby properly equals the value of infinite demerit as an affront to an infinite and holy God. Owen, reacting to the Socinian claim that Christ suffered a lesser satisfaction

a debt in a commercial fashion by payment in kind. Rather, He made a satisfaction for sins according to the just demands of the law. On the cross, Christ suffered for the sins of the world. His suffering was deemed a just equivalent (*tantundem*), and His finite suffering was deemed satisfactory for any and all sinners on the basis of the infinite value and worth of His person (as Anselm set forth long ago). Only an infinite and sinless being in the nature of humanity can satisfy God's justice. This is what Christ, the God-Man, accomplished on the cross.<sup>8</sup>

By the nineteenth century, the classical distinctions between *idem* and *tantundem* had, for the most part, been dropped and were replaced with the broader categories of pecuniary versus penal satisfaction. Charles Hodge,

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than the law would demand from sinners, overreacted by positing that Christ suffered the very *idem* of the law's demands against sinners, namely mere death itself. In this Owen is moving away from mainstream Reformed theology and paving the way for later hyper-Calvinist ideas that Christ suffered so much for so much sin and that began to see Christ's satisfaction for sin on the cross as having an exact mathematical (and/or pecuniary) correspondence, as seen, for example, in Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted in the Perfection and Encouragements of the Saints, Notwithstanding Sins and Trials. Being the Complete Works of Tobias Crisp D. D. Sometime Minister of the Gospel at Brinksworth in Whitshire Containing Fifty-Two Sermons on Several Select Texts of Scriptures*, 4 vols. (London: R. Noble, 1791); some Welsh hyper-Calvinist Baptists (see Owen Thomas, *The Atonement Controversy: In Welsh Theological Literature and Debate, 1707–1841*) [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 2002]); later, the American Baptist John L. Dagg (*Manual of Theology* [Harrisonburg, VA: Gano, 1990]); and more recently, Nettles (*By His Grace and for His Glory* (see chap. 6, n. 34). See David Ponter, "John Owen (1616–1683) on Christ Suffering the *Idem*, Not the *Tantundem* of the Law's Punishment," *Calvin and Calvinism: An Elenchus for Classic-Moderate Calvinism* (blog), June 17, 2009, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=3143>; and Ponter, "Thomas Jacombe (1623–1687) on Christ Suffering the *Idem* and the *Tantundem*: A Mediating Position," *Calvin and Calvinism: An Elenchus for Classic-Moderate Calvinism* (blog), June 25, 2014, accessed August 14, 2018, <http://calvinandcalvinism.com/?p=14350#more-14350>).

<sup>8</sup> The great Matthew Henry expressed it this way: "Our Lord Jesus was appointed and did undertake to make satisfaction for our sins and so to save us from the penal consequences of them. [1.] He was appointed to do it, by the will of his Father; for the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. God chose him to be the Saviour of poor sinners and would have him to save them in this way, by bearing their sins, and the punishment of them; not the *idem*—the same that we would have suffered, but the *tantundem*—that which was more than equivalent of the maintaining of the honour of the holiness and justice of God in the government of the world" (Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 4:239. See also Matthew Henry, "A Sermon on the Forgiveness of Sin as a Debt," in *The Complete Works of Rev. Matthew Henry (His Unfinished Commentary Excepted)* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 328–29.

Robert Dabney, and W. G. T. Shedd all critiqued the pecuniary approach of Owen and his double payment argument in defense of limited atonement.<sup>9</sup>

There are several additional problems that result from an understanding of Christ's death on the cross to be an exact equivalency for the law's punishment of sin. By definition, limited atonement entails a limited imputation of sin to Christ (such that He only satisfies for the sins of the elect). This results in two problems. First, there is a natural impossibility for all the non-elect to be saved. Second, there can be no genuine offer of salvation to all people. Christ's satisfaction for sins on the cross cannot be sufficient, adaptable, or available to the non-elect. They remain in the same state as if Christ had not died for the sins of anyone at all. There is no legal (the non-elect are not savable in terms of the law) or logical way the gospel can be offered consistently or coherently under such circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

One might add a third problem. Owen's defense of the suffering of Christ as *idem* led him to conclude that the cross ipso facto discharges the sinner from the law's penalty. God accepts the payment, indeed, must accept it. Thus, for Owen,<sup>11</sup> and all who follow in His train, all for whom Christ died, will invariably be saved. But this would seem to remove grace from the act of forgiveness and substitute an act of justice grounded in a commercialistic understanding of the atonement.<sup>12</sup> In a commercial trans-

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<sup>9</sup> "The *idem-tantundem* distinction automatically answers Owen's objection that if any suffer eternally for whom Christ died, then 'double payment' is being demanded. But assuming the commercialist analogy, there is no duplication of payment. Those who reject the gospel do not suffer again what Christ has suffered for them. He 'paid' the *tantundem*, or equivalent penalty; they will 'pay' the *idem*, or exact price" (Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*, 130; emphasis original). Owen recognized that without the *idem* view, it is impossible to prove from the nature of the atonement that it is limited to the elect. See Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 204–23.

<sup>10</sup> Some Calvinists who assert limited atonement do not see and/or acknowledge the logical contradiction between espousing a limited substitution for sin and the free offer of the gospel. Others are aware of the problem and attempt to resolve the contradiction, but with no success. See, for example, John Piper, *Does God Desire All to Be Saved?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). For more on this issue, see Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 722–79.

<sup>11</sup> Owen declaimed that the elect were "owed" salvation because of Christ's work on the cross. See Allen, *Extent*, 213–14.

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Fuller argues that the commercial theory is "inconsistent with the free forgiveness of sin, and sinners being directed to apply for mercy as supplicants, rather than as claimants" (Fuller, "The Gospel Worthy of All Acceptation," 2:402 (see chap. 7, n. 19). Ralph Wardlaw writes, "[T]he payment of debt, by strictly and literally cancelling all claim,



action, a creditor does not “pardon” the debtor when the debt is fully paid, regardless of who pays the debt, because commercial debt does not entail moral guilt. Furthermore, the creditor cannot refuse to cancel the debt once it is paid in a commercial transaction. There is no grace, forgiveness, or pardon involved in such a transaction. Charles Hodge critiqued Owen’s dependence upon commercialism and the double payment argument: “There is no grace in accepting a pecuniary satisfaction. It cannot be refused. It *ipso facto* liberates. The moment the debt is paid the debtor is free; and that without any condition. Nothing of this is true in the case of judicial satisfaction.”<sup>13</sup>

A fourth problem also follows. The view that the satisfaction of Christ was a strict and proper payment to the *idem* of the law laid the foundation for the more basic doctrinal distortion that the imputation of sin involved literally transferring to Christ the sinner’s obligation, with Christ acting as the sinner’s surety (guarantor). Since this point has already been addressed in a previous chapter, no more need be said here.

We conclude that the nature of Christ’s satisfaction for sin in relation to the law is that He paid a qualitative equivalent penalty for sin (*tantundem*) and not the exact quantitative penalty (*idem*) for sin.

#### **Issue #4: Is the Blood of Christ “Wasted” on Those Who Are Eternally Lost?**

Some who argue for limited atonement assert that if some people reject Christ and experience eternal punishment, then somehow the blood of Christ has been “wasted” or “shed in vain” for them. From a Calvinistic perspective, the argument presupposes that if God does something in the death of Christ for the non-elect that does not redound unto their salvation, then His blood is wasted.<sup>14</sup> It furthermore presupposes that if God wills that Christ die for the sins of all people and that all those for whom He died are not ultimately saved from their sins, then God is doing something in

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leaves no room for the exercise of grace” (*Systematic Theology*, ed. James R. Campbell, 3 vols. [Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1856–1857], 2:369).

<sup>13</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:557 (see chap. 6, n. 20).

<sup>14</sup> See Owen, “The Death of Death,” 149, 238, 248, 413. Owen spoke of Christ’s blood being spilled “in vain.”

vain or is wasting His efforts to bring about an end that ultimately remains unfulfilled.

There are several problems with the “wasted blood” argument, as pointed out by Richard Baxter and others. First, one must distinguish between defect or failure in the atonement itself versus failure due to the fault of unbelievers to receive the benefit of the atonement.<sup>15</sup> The atonement itself is perfect and complete. It is sufficient to save anyone who meets God’s condition of salvation: repentance of sin and faith in Christ. God’s purpose in the atonement was to demonstrate His love for all people, not just some people.

Who are we to tell God that Christ died in vain when God tells us that Christ died for all, even for those who ultimately reject Him? As Richard Baxter says, we should “be afraid of blaspheming God” by suggesting that Christ died in vain.<sup>16</sup> Baxter went on to make the point that God created Adam in all perfection, yet Adam, and thus all humanity, fell. Did God create Adam in vain? God’s purpose in the atonement is completely fulfilled in His just punishment on unbelievers for rejecting God’s grace given in Christ by His death on the cross for their sins. Baxter continues to list many benefits of the atonement to unbelievers, including the fact that all people are capable of salvation based on the atonement.<sup>17</sup> This point has also been argued by many Calvinists.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Baxter, *Universal Redemption*, 453–54 (see chap.3, n. 116).

<sup>16</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, 2:66–67 (see chap. 6, n. 32).

<sup>17</sup> Baxter, 2:66–67.

<sup>18</sup> William Whittaker, *Eighteen Sermons Preached Upon Several Texts of Scripture* (London: Printed for Tho. Parkhurst, 1674), 64; John Davenant, *Animadversions* (London: Printed for John Partridge, 1641), 36–37, 256–257; Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst, 1692), 488, 507; William Twisse, named Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly in 1643, stated, “In like sort as touching the possibility of salvation, not one Divine of ours, that I know, denies the possibility of any man’s salvation while he lives in this World” (William Twisse, *The Riches of God’s Love unto the Vessels of Mercy, Consistent with His Absolute Hatred or Reprobation of the Vessels of Wrath* [Oxford: Printed by L. L. and H. H. Printers to the University, 1653], 1:49; see also 1:181; 2:5); Jonathan Edwards, “Pressing into the Kingdom of God,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, rev. Edward Hickman, 2 vols. (1834; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1974), 1:656. See also Charles Hodge, *Princeton Sermons* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1879), 17. These are only a few of the Reformed sources that affirm the savability of all men and a universal atonement. These sources and many others can be consulted at Tony Byrne, “Saveable,” *Theological Meditations* (blog), accessed August 14, 2018,

Richard Baxter has strong words for anyone who would see the death of Christ as being “in vain” or that Christ is an “imperfect Redeemer” if He died for the sins of people who die in unbelief and are eternally lost:

Those that dare say, that Christ is an imperfect Redeemer if he does not procure Faith itself for every Man that he Dies for, (which is their Master Argument) may as well say, that God is an imperfect Creator, because he makes not Worms to be Men; or that he is an imperfect Conservator because he preserved not man from Mortality, Damnation and Antecedent Calamities; especially from Sin: Or that he is imperfectly Merciful, because he permits Men to sin; and Condemns them: Or that Christ is an Imperfect Redeemer of the Elect, because he suffers them after his Redemption to Sin, Suffer and Die: Or, that the Holy Ghost is an imperfect Sanctifier and Caller, because many wicked Men are Sanctified and Believe imperfectly (so as will not suffice to Salvation) and because they resist and quench the Spirit, and fall from that Faith and Sanctification which they had. Or that the Spirit is an imperfect Comforter; because so many Saints Live and Die in such uncomfortable sadness: Or that Scripture is an imperfect means, because the Effect is so imperfect. In a word, they may as well say, that where God does not overcome men’s wicked dispositions, he is an imperfect God to them in regard of his Mercies: All which besem not the Tongue of a Christian.<sup>19</sup>

Baxter lists at least twenty benefits that all people receive by virtue of Christ’s death for all, and none of these are “in vain” on God’s part but effectually underline His goodness and wisdom in all things.<sup>20</sup>

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<http://theologicalmeditations.blogspot.com/p/saveable.html>. See also Allen, *The Extent of the Atonement*, 334–35, 380.

<sup>19</sup> Baxter, *Universal Redemption*, 65–66 (spelling updated).

<sup>20</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, 1.2.53–54.

### **Issue #5: Did Christ Die for “All without Distinction” or “All without Exception”?**<sup>21</sup>

Calvinists who want to limit the atonement only to the elect have major difficulty with the many NT passages that say Christ died for “all” people or for “the world.” In order to maintain limited atonement and explain away the universal language of “all” in texts like 1 Tim 2:4–6, they are forced into an exegetical straitjacket and say something along these lines: “The word ‘all’ in these verses doesn’t mean ‘all people without exception’ but rather ‘all people without distinction.’” Is this a valid argument? No.

Attempting to force the meaning of “all without distinction” on the universal texts is to explode them with “grammatical gunpowder,” as Spurgeon said in his critique of John Gill.<sup>22</sup> The “all without distinction” concept gets converted to mean “some of all without distinction.” Thus, “all” becomes “some of all sorts,” an exegetically and hermeneutically unwarranted and, in fact, illegitimate move. With respect to the NT atonement texts that use universal language, the bifurcation of “all without distinction” and “all without exception” is ultimately a distinction without a difference. If I speak of all people without racial, gender, or other distinctions, am I not speaking of all people without exception? Whatever the distinction is and whatever is the scope of the “all” must be supplied by the context. The two phrases simply cannot be compartmentalized linguistically. The distinction is artificial.

All Calvinists who want to maintain limited atonement essentially convert the “all” in texts like 1 Tim 2:6 to mean “some.” In the Greek text, the word “all” (*pantōn*, 1 Tim 2:6) obviously refers to people, and in conjunction with verse 5 (where Jesus is “the one Mediator between God and men”), the “all” of verse 6 clearly corresponds to “men” (“humanity,” CSB) of verse 5. What the Calvinist interpreter does is to make

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<sup>21</sup> For an excellent discussion of this issue, see I. H. Marshall, “Universal Grace and Atonement in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. C. Pinnock (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 1985), 51–69.

<sup>22</sup> Charles H. Spurgeon, “Salvation by Knowing the Truth,” Sermon No. 1516 in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, 57 vols. (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1881), 26:50, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.spurgeongems.org/chsbm26.pdf>.

“all” refer to “all without distinction” (i.e., “all kinds of people”) and then to make this refer to “some of all kinds of people.” But note that with this maneuver, the modifier “all” no longer stands for “all people” but modifies “kinds” of people. Contextually, is Paul urging Christians to pray for all “kinds of people” or for individual people in such a way that no concrete, particular person is to be excluded from prayer? The latter is obviously the case, and this is how Calvin (properly, I might add) interpreted the text. John Owen, however, interpreted 1 Tim 2:6 to refer to “some of all kinds” of people. He was forced to do so to maintain his prior commitment to limited atonement.

The bottom line here is that “all people” becomes, for proponents of limited atonement, “some people of all kinds.” *All* becomes *some*. In 1 Tim 2:4–6, Paul’s intent is to say that Jesus is the Savior of all people without distinction, which simply also means all people without exception.<sup>23</sup>

### **Issue #6: How Does the Atonement Operate? What is Meant When We Speak of Sin Being Imputed to Christ?**

This question has to do with the imputation of human sin to Christ in a substitutionary framework. A corollary is: How should we understand the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the believing sinner? In other words, how exactly does the death of Christ on the cross bring about our salvation when God applies the benefits of the atonement to us?

The doctrine of imputation is frequently misunderstood. The key issue in imputation is how our sins were “transferred” to Christ when He died as our substitute. What exactly is “transferred”? Many have answered this question while operating from a commercialistic or quantitative understanding of imputation. But as W. O. Carver states, “We ought at once to dismiss all merely quantitative and commercial conceptions of exchange of merit. There is no longer any question that the doctrines of imputation, both of Adam’s sin and of Christ’s righteousness, were overwrought and

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<sup>23</sup> See the excellent discussion in Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 425–33 (see chap. 3, n. 128); I. H. Marshall, “For All, for All My Saviour Died,” in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark H. Pinnock*, ed. S. Porter and A. Cross (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2003), 322–46.

applied by the early theologians with a fatal exclusiveness, without warrant in the Word of God.”<sup>24</sup>

The blood of Christ is metaphorically or analogically compared to pecuniary (commercial) transactions in Scripture via the use of debt language such as “ransom,” “redemption,” or “purchase.” Such language is not meant to describe the actual mechanism of how atonement works. Christ’s blood is not a literal commercial commodity. Sin is a debt, but it is more than a debt—it is a crime against God’s law with moral implications. This is why there is danger in viewing Christ’s penal satisfaction (or substitution) as a literal payment, as if it functions like pecuniary or commercial transactions. While we may compare His death to commercial debt payments analogically, we should not view it as a literal debt payment in the sense that our sin is somehow literally transferred to Christ as our substitute on the cross. Andrew Fuller, the great English Baptist Calvinist, expresses this well:

It is not true that redemption has for its basis the idea of pecuniary justice, and not that of moral justice. That sin is called a *debt*, and the death of Christ a *price*, a *ransom*, &c., is true; but it is no unusual thing for moral obligations and deliverances, to be expressed in language borrowed from pecuniary transactions. The obligations of a son to a father, are commonly expressed by such terms as owing and paying: he *owes* a debt of obedience, and in yielding it he *pays* a debt of gratitude. The same may be said of an obligation to punishment. A murderer *owes* his life to the justice of his country; and when he suffers, he is said to *pay* the awful debt. So also if a great character, by suffering death, could deliver his country, such deliverance would be spoken of as obtained by the *price* of blood. No one mistakes these things by understanding them of pecuniary transactions. In such connexions [*sic*], every one perceives that the terms are used not literally, but metaphorically; and it is thus that they are to be understood with reference to

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<sup>24</sup> William O Carver, “Atonement,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, 5 vols., rev. ed., ed. James Orr (Chicago: Howard Severance Co., 1915), 1:324, accessed August 14, 2018, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/encyclopedias/isbe/atonement.html>.

the death of Christ. As sin is not a pecuniary, but a moral debt, so the atonement for it is not a pecuniary, but a moral ransom.

There is, doubtless, a sufficient analogy between pecuniary and moral proceedings to justify the use of such language, both in Scripture and in common life; and it is easy to perceive the advantages which arise from it; as, besides conveying much important truth, it renders it peculiarly impressive to the mind. But it is not always safe to reason from the former to the latter; much less is it just to affirm that the latter has for its basis every principle which pertains to the former.<sup>25</sup>

Not a few modern Calvinists conceive of imputation as if it were a quantitative imputation of so many sins that are then *transferred* to Christ. This assumption lies at the heart of the Double Payment and Trilemma arguments used to support limited atonement, as we have seen. We must avoid thinking of the imputation of our sins to Christ in a way that necessitates Christ Himself becoming a sinner or His being guilty of sin. A voluntary obligation to endure the punishment of another via substitution does not entail guilt being “transferred” to the innocent substitute any more than a consequent exemption from obligation in the offender results in his innocence or grants him righteous character in a literal fashion. Both *guilt* and *innocence*, though transferable in their *effects or benefits to another*, are themselves untransferable. When my sins are imputed to Christ, they remain my personal sins. When Christ’s righteousness is imputed to me, I do not become personally righteous. Rather, Christ is *treated as if He were a sinner* and I am *treated as if I were righteous*. I am released from the penalty of my sin because my sins were imputed to Him on the cross and His righteousness has been imputed to me. The “transfer” is not literal; it is metaphorical, but nonetheless real.<sup>26</sup> The “transfer” is representative

<sup>25</sup> Fuller, “The Gospel Its Own Witness,” 2:80–81; emphasis original (see chap. 7, n. 21).

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Fuller understood imputation correctly: “It is thus I understand the term, when applied to justification. ‘Abraham believed God, and it was *counted* unto him for righteousness.—To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is *counted* unto him for righteousness,’ Rom. iv.3, 5. . . . It was reckoned to him *as if it were* his, and the effects or benefits were actually transferred to him; but this was all. Abraham did not become meritorious, or cease to be unworthy. . . . It is thus also that I

but not personal. Christ was “made sin,” though at the cross, as before, He remained personally sinless. We were made righteous by justification, though then, as before, we possessed no divine righteousness of God personally or literally.<sup>27</sup> As Leon Morris states, “Sin is not to be regarded as a detachable entity which may be removed from the sinner, parceled up, and given to someone else. Sin is a personal affair. My guilt is my own.”<sup>28</sup>

A good theory of the atonement should dispense with the necessity of reference to Christ gaining an excess of merit as in Anselm’s theory. Thinking in terms of literal transference of sin from sinners to Christ is not the way imputation works.<sup>29</sup> “Imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner must be approached with caution. It can easily cut the nerve of all effort to enter into an experimental righteousness. Atonement becomes a commercial transaction in which bankrupt sinners have lodged to their credit the superabundant wealth of Christ’s merit, or the recompense paid to Him by the Father.”<sup>30</sup>

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understand *the imputation of sin to Christ*. He was *made sin* for us, in the same sense as we are *made the righteousness of God in him*. He was accounted in the Divine administration AS IF HE WERE, OR HAD BEEN, the sinner; that those who believe on him might be accounted AS IF THEY WERE, OR HAD BEEN, righteous” (Andrew Fuller, “Letter II. Imputation,” in *Six Letters to Dr. Ryland Respecting the Controversy with the Rev. A. Booth*, in *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, ed. Joseph Belcher, 3 vols. (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1988), 2:703–04; emphasis original).

<sup>27</sup> Revere Franklin Weidner, *Soteriology: Or, The Doctrine of the Work of Christ* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1914), 93. Likewise, Daniel D. Whedon writes, “And as the fact of the agent’s act is nontransferable from one agent to another, so the merit, demerit, reward, or penalty, is ethically nontransferable. Punishment and guilt, therefore, are no more transferable than personal identity. When an innocent being is said to suffer the punishment of a guilty being the language is conceptual, and not barely literal and true. The innocent being is still innocent, and he endures what to the guilty agent would by punishment, but to him it is only consequent through substitutional suffering” (Daniel D. Whedon, *Freedom of the Will: A Wesleyan Response to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John D. Wagner [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009], 27).

<sup>28</sup> Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, 415 (see chap. 3, n. 4).

<sup>29</sup> Sheldon, *System of Christian Doctrine*, 409 (see chap. 5, n. 34).

<sup>30</sup> Alexander McCrea, *The Work of Jesus in Christian Thought* (London: Epworth Press, 1939), 209–12. As Richard Lints states, “If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance or a gas which can be passed around the courtroom” (Lint, “Soteriology,” 282 [see “Introduction,” n. 24]). Lints’s statement needs to be nuanced. God does indeed “impute” His righteousness to us; it is just that it is not imputed in any sense of something “transferred,” which is Lints’s point.



Andrew Fuller understood and correctly stated the biblical concept of imputation of our sins to Christ:

[I]mputation ought not to be confounded with *transfer*. In its proper [literal] sense, we have seen there is no transfer pertaining to it. In its figurative sense, as applied to justification, it is righteousness itself that is imputed; but its effects only are transferred. So also in respect of sin; sin itself is the object of imputation; but neither this nor guilt is strictly speaking transferred, for neither of them is a transferable object. As all that is transferred in the imputation of righteousness is its beneficial effects, so all that is transferred in the imputation of sin is its penal effects. To say that Christ was *reckoned* or *counted* in the Divine administration as *if he were* the sinner, and came under an *obligation* to endure the curse for us, is one thing; but to say that he *deserved* the curse is another. To speak of his being guilty by imputation is the same thing, in my ear, as to say he was criminal or wicked by imputation; which, if taken improperly, for his being reckoned *as if he were so*, is just; but if properly, for his *being so*, is inadmissible. Guilt is the inseparable attendant of transgression. If Christ by imputation became *deserving* of punishment, we by non-imputation cease to deserve it; and, if our demerits be literally transferred to him, his merits must of course be the same to us; and then, instead of approaching God as guilty and unworthy, we might take consequence to ourselves before him, as not only guiltless, but meritorious beings.<sup>31</sup>

Fuller is attempting to avoid three mistakes: (1) that Christ became a sinner when our sins were imputed to Him; (2) that Christ died for only so much sin in a quantifiable sense; (3) that Christ's righteousness is transferred to the believer so that he literally becomes no longer a sinner. In summary, to speak of sins being imputed to Christ is a figurative way of expressing that our sins are reckoned to Christ our substitute, and though our sins are not literally imputed to Him, He is treated as though they were His.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Fuller, "Letter II. Imputation," 2:705; emphasis original.

<sup>32</sup> Gerhard O. Forde points out how the Socinians argued that Anselm had privileged divine justice above love and freedom. Why should God pay God? Socinians questioned

Limited atonement advocates are inextricably entangled in problems over how imputation works in their system. Limited imputation of sin to Christ as a substitute only for the elect is the whole essence of limited atonement. Limitarians have no category for the atonement as an objective reconciliation of God to all people. Their view amounts to an understanding of imputation as transference—the sins of some people are laid on Christ, but not the sins of other people. The payment of Christ for the sins of the elect (though not necessarily the degree of His sufferings) is according to the amount of their debt and theirs alone. Regardless of its infinite *intrinsic* value, Christ's atonement is not of *extrinsically* sufficient value for anyone other than those who are actually saved by it. A few limitarians follow the logic and go so far as to say if more were elected, Christ would have had to suffer more to pay for their sins.

Limited atonement advocates are attempting to hold two conflicting concepts. First, most deny any form of quantitative equivalency—that Christ suffered so much for so much sin. Second, only a limited number of sins are imputed to Christ—the sins of the elect. In this scenario, the imputation of sin to Christ is (1) for a specific number of people (the elect) and (2) their specific number of sins. This entails a commercialistic understanding of the atonement. Commercialism results when imputation is connected to quantifiable suffering. Most Calvinists who affirm limited atonement want to maintain limited imputation without quantifiable suffering, but by entailment their approach inevitably leads to Christ suffering for so much sin and so many sinners—the elect. Some Calvinists, a

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just how the suffering of one could be equivalent to that of the human race. They struggled over the issue of how exactly it is that sin can be transferred and one substitute for another. According to Forde, Orthodox Protestantism went beyond Anselm and surrendered the distinction between satisfaction and punishment. Forde queries as to how the suffering of one can be transferred to another. He criticizes penal substitution for its “commercialism” as expressed in the limited atonement scheme. Forde is correct to point out the commercialism of limited atonement, but is not clear as to whether he views penal substitution itself as problematic. Whereas some Calvinists went too far in their press for limited atonement, Forde suggests, rightly, that the Socinians went too far in the opposite direction by saying no transference was possible. (Forde, “Seventh Locus,” 25 [see chap. 1, n. 22]). The key is understanding imputation as transference in a metaphorical sense rather than a literal sense.

minority (such as John Leadley Dagg and Tom Nettles), see the contradiction and argue that limited imputation implies quantitative equivalency.<sup>33</sup>

On the limited atonement platform, a commercialist atonement cannot be consistently rejected because limited atonement necessitates a quantifiable form of imputation of sin—and that is commercialism. Commercialism is not less than a conception of the death of Christ in literal debt categories with quantifiable suffering.<sup>34</sup> The biblical approach to imputation is that Christ suffered proportionally for all *categories* of human sin (see under “Issue #3” above), which by definition includes every human sin.<sup>35</sup>

### **Issue #7: If Christ Died for the Sins of All People, How Can God Justly Condemn Anyone to Hell?**

This question concerns the Double Payment argument used by those who affirm limited atonement against unlimited atonement. I have addressed the argument under the preceding section “Extent of the Atonement.”

The flip side to this question is: “Did Jesus die for those who were already in hell at the time He died?” The best way to answer this question is to ask another question: “Did Jesus die for those who were already in heaven at the time He died?” The answer is obviously yes to both questions. The actual location of all those who died prior to the death of Christ on the cross has no bearing on whether or not He died for their sins. Since

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<sup>33</sup> John Leadley Dagg, the nineteenth-century Baptist theologian, held to quantitative equivalency. Tom Nettles holds to it today. See Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory*, 305–16.

<sup>34</sup> In the debates between John Owen and Richard Baxter over the extent of the atonement, Owen wanted to reject quantifiable suffering—the *idem*, a Latin word meaning “exact suffering for exact sins.” Baxter argued that the nature of imputation was *tantundem*—“suffering for the like thing,” so that Christ died not for every individual sin of lying in a quantifiable fashion, but for “lying”—liars categorically. “Lying” as a category of sin was imputed to him so that He was treated as though He were guilty of lying. If Christ suffered for individual sins in a quantitative fashion, the *idem* is logically the only alternative. Limited atonement necessitates a quantified imputation of sin. Advocates may want to affirm imputation in the sense of *tantundem*, but they cannot consistently do so.

<sup>35</sup> For a recent attempt to explain the mechanism of how imputation operates from a Reformed perspective, see Oliver D. Crisp, *The Word Enfleshed: Exploring the Person and Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2016), 119–44.

Scripture is clear that Christ died for the sins of all people—living, dead, and who will ever live—then He died for the sins of those who are already in hell at the time of His death.

### **Issue #8: Since the Atonement Satisfies the Justice of God, How Is Salvation an Act of Mercy?**

Mercy can be given only when justice prevails. God cannot use divine freedom in a way contradictory with His character and nature. God cannot lie. The character of God is such that He cannot let sin go unpunished. Salvation is an act of both justice and of mercy.

### **Issue #9: What Is the Relationship of Atonement to Forgiveness?**

Some make the theological argument that forgiveness does not require atonement. A key reason is the supposition that such would be contrary to the nature of God. The Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 is often referenced as supporting this argument.<sup>36</sup>

Although Scripture never directly speaks of God as having to be propitiated before extending forgiveness, it does speak of God's designating that there must be a substitutionary sacrifice, which functions both to propitiate God's wrath and to expiate human sin for sins to be forgiven. When one buys a bank, he buys all the debts owed to that bank. If the new bank owner decides to cancel these debts, the debtor does not have to pay them, but the debt has still been paid by the one who purchased the bank, whether the debts are forgiven or not. Hence, forgiveness and paying the debt are not contradictory.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See the brief discussion in Cynthia L. Rigby, "Forgiveness," in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 493–97; and the more substantive discussion in Hugh Dermot McDonald, *Forgiveness and Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984). This approach "is often used to tie Jesus down to the purely human zone and to dedogmatize all theories of the atonement and vicarious suffering" (Thielicke, *The Evangelical Faith*, 388 [see chap. 3, n. 122]).

<sup>37</sup> Geisler, *Sin, Salvation*, 250 (see chap. 4, n. 17). See also Oliver D. Crisp, "The Logic of Penal Substitution Revisited," in *The Atonement Debate*, ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 221–22.

We must also understand that forgiveness in and of itself is not the essence of Christianity. Theologically, “forgiveness must be understood in its relationship to justice if the Christian gospel is to be allowed its full scope.”<sup>38</sup> Since it is impossible, humanly speaking, to administrate justice that is proportionate to the offense, the justice of God’s act of atonement in Christ on the cross grounds the forgiveness and makes it all the more an act of grace.

Justification is grounded in the atoning work of Christ on the cross. The result of justification is the forgiveness of our sins. William Lane Craig notes,

It is noteworthy that biblically, the object of divine forgiveness is just as often said to be sins as sinners. Not only are people forgiven for their sins, but their sins are forgiven. This fact makes it evidence that divine forgiveness is not (merely) a change of attitude on God’s part toward sinners. Divine forgiveness has as its effect, not (merely) God’s laying aside feelings of resentment or bitterness or anger (or what have you, according to one’s favorite analysis of forgiveness), but rather the removal of the liability to punishment that attends sin. As a result of divine forgiveness, a person who formerly deserved punishment now no longer does. Because of the forgiveness that is to be found in Christ, one is no longer held accountable for one’s sins. “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8.1). It is evident, then, that divine forgiveness is much more akin to legal pardon than to forgiveness as typically understood.<sup>39</sup>

### **Issue #10: Is There “Healing” in the Atonement?<sup>40</sup>**

Some have advocated the position that there is not only provision for the forgiveness of sins in the atonement, but also the complete healing in

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<sup>38</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 115.

<sup>39</sup> Craig, *The Atonement*, 24–25 (see “Introduction,” n. 46).

<sup>40</sup> For a helpful study of this issue, consult William E. Biederwolf, *Whipping-Post Theology: Or Did Jesus Atone for Disease?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1934); see also Paige

this life of all sickness and bodily disease. For example, Aimee Semple McPherson expresses this sentiment:

“Was He whipped that my sins might be washed away?”

“No, child; the blood of the cross was sufficient for that.”

“Then why did they pluck the beard from His face and beat Him with cruel staves? Was that for the cleansing of sin?”

“No, child; the blood was sufficient for that.”

“Then why, O Spirit of God, tell me, why did they torture my Savior so? Was God merely permitting the vindictive, fiendish wrath of an angry mob to be wreaked upon the head of His blessed Son? Else if His stripes did not cleanse me from sin, then *why* did they whip Him so?”

“Why, Child? Do you not know the meaning of that lash, the cruel blows of the smiters’ scourge? It was thus He bore your suffering, and by His stripes you are healed. Not a meaningless blow, not a meaningless pain, did that previous body bear. At the whipping post, He purchased your healing.”<sup>41</sup>

The key verse used to support this notion is Isa 53:4: “Surely He has borne our griefs / And carried our sorrows.”

Biederwolf ably lays out and critiques this errant notion. The devil is the author of all disease, according to some in the faith healing movement. This is a confusion of the penalty of sin with the sin itself which causes the penalty.<sup>42</sup> If the healing of disease is in the atonement, then why is not death “healed” in the atonement so that Christians would never die? Why does the atonement not do for the body what it does for the soul?<sup>43</sup>

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Patterson, “The Work of Christ,” 439–79 (see “Introduction,” n. 21).

<sup>41</sup> Aimee Semple McPherson, *Divine Healing Sermons* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1923, 2014), 60–61; emphasis original.

<sup>42</sup> Biederwolf, *Whipping-Post Theology*, 23.

<sup>43</sup> Biederwolf, 67.

If healing is in the atonement, then certain “inescapable conclusions” follow, according to Biederwolf:

1. All Christians suffering from sickness and disease are not in a right relationship with God.
2. God must of necessity disapprove of the use of medicine.
3. If sickness is atoned for, then the body becomes immortal as well as the soul.
4. If Christ bore our sicknesses as well as our sin, then He must have been sick and diseased with all human sicknesses.<sup>44</sup>

The concept of healing in the atonement fails to interpret Isa 53:4 correctly. The Hebrew *choli* (“sickness, grief”) can be used in a figurative sense for soul-sickness or mental distress (e.g., Jer 6:7). The Hebrew word *mak’ov* (“pain, sorrow”) is almost always used for soul-sickness and mental distress. The focus of Isaiah 53 is that Christ took our sins, not our diseases. If Christ took on our physical disease, Isa 53:4 is the only verse in the Bible that states such.

Sickness and disease bear a different relationship to people than does their sin. There is no guilt associated with sickness or disease. Having the flu or cancer is not sinful. In a real sense all suffering, sickness, and disease is a result of sin. Adam’s fall brought physical death. In the atonement, Jesus bore the penalty of humanity’s sin, but He did not bear any penalty for our sicknesses since there was none to bear.

We should make another point as well. Not all sickness is due to actual sin. Jesus made that clear. However, some sickness is directly due to sin. Had Adam not sinned, there would be no sickness, suffering, or death. We conclude that the notion of physical healing being somehow located in the atonement is nowhere taught in Scripture.

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<sup>44</sup> Biederwolf, 60–84. We should note that Biederwolf’s final conclusion is based on a faulty commercialistic understanding of the atonement.

## **Issue #11: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Atonement and its Application**

If we assume the phrase “by the eternal Spirit” refers to the Holy Spirit in Heb 9:14, then this is an important text that speaks to the Trinitarian nature of the atonement: Christ offered himself to God as a sacrifice through (by means of, with the aid of, enabled by) the Holy Spirit.<sup>45</sup>

The Gospel writers emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in connection with the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ (Matt 3:16; 12:28; Mark 1:12; Luke 1:17; 2:27; 4:1, 14, 18). Works on the Holy Spirit often, however, tend to minimize or ignore the role of the Holy Spirit in the actual death of Christ on the cross, likely because outside of Heb 9:14, there is no explicit text linking the two.

Yet it stands to reason that the Holy Spirit, who played such a vital role in the incarnation, baptism, ministry, and resurrection of Jesus, should also play a vital role in his crucifixion. As John Owen states: “In all that ensued, all that followed hereon, unto his giving up the ghost, he offered himself to God in and by those actings of the grace of the Holy Spirit in him, which accompanied him to the last.”<sup>46</sup> Likewise, Owen stated: “All these things being wrought in the human nature by the Holy Ghost, who, in the time of his offering, acted all his graces unto the utmost, he is said thereon to ‘offer himself unto God through the eternal Spirit’”<sup>47</sup>

Abraham Kuyper has rightly argued that the work of the Holy Spirit in the Person of Christ is not exhausted in the incarnation, earthly ministry or resurrection and exaltation, but appears conspicuously in Christ’s death on the cross.<sup>48</sup> Kuyper notes:

To the question how His human nature could pass through eternal death and not perish, having no Mediator to support it, we answer:

<sup>45</sup> See David L. Allen, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Atonement and its Application,” Paper delivered at the 2018 Evangelical Theological Society, Denver, CO. <http://drdavidallen.com/bible/my-evangelical-theological-society-2018-paper-the-role-of-the-holy-spirit-in-the-atonement-and-its-application/>.

<sup>46</sup> J. Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, ed. W. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), 177.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, 180.

<sup>48</sup> A. Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1900), 93.



The human nature of Christ would have been overwhelmed by it, the in-shining of the Holy Spirit would have ceased if His divine nature, i.e., the infinite might of His Godhead, had not been underneath it. Hence the Apostle declares: “Who through the Eternal Spirit offered Himself,” . . . . The term “Eternal Spirit” was chosen to indicate that the divine-human Person of Christ entered into such indissoluble fellowship with the Holy Spirit as even eternal death could not break.<sup>49</sup>

The key point in Kuyper’s work on the Holy Spirit is his assertion, infused in all of his Christology, that Jesus did all he did relying on the Holy Spirit rather than his own deity. This is no less true for the work of Christ in atonement. The Son offers himself as a sacrifice to the Father through the Spirit. The Holy Spirit empowered, enabled, and upheld the Son in his atoning work on the cross.

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<sup>49</sup> A. Kuyper, 103–04.



## CHAPTER 9

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### *Historical Theories of the Atonement*<sup>1</sup>

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Several things should be kept in mind as we list, summarize, and briefly assess the atonement theories propounded throughout church history. First, it is perhaps better to refer to these theories, or at least some of them, as models of how atonement operates. Second, although Scripture is the usual starting point for most of the models in question, several other factors are in play, including historical circumstances and perspective, theological perspectives, and cultural contextualization—intellectual, social, and personal milieu. Third, most of these models of the atonement are not monolithic or mutually exclusive, and there is sometimes considerable similarity and cross-pollination. Fourth, some of these models have appeared, been eclipsed, and have reappeared throughout church history. Fifth, in their discussions of the atonement, the church fathers anticipated in germinal form most of the models of the atonement, which would be more fully developed later. For example, a precursor of the Moral Influence theory can be found in Irenaeus;<sup>2</sup> the seeds of Anselm’s Satisfaction

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<sup>1</sup> For accessible summary surveys of the various atonement theories, consult: Patterson, “The Work of Christ,” 572–80 (see chap. 2, n. 16); Geisler, *Sin, Salvation*, 202–15 (see chap. 4, n. 17); Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation*, 147–99 (see “Introduction,” n. 15); Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 388–410 (see chap. 7, n. 37). For a more in-depth analysis of the history of atonement theories, see Robert S. Franks, *The Work of Christ: A Historical Study of Christian Doctrine* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1962); and Robert S. Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments* (New York: Abingdon, 1960). Paul’s title sounds as if the work focuses on the sacraments, but pages 35–293 cover the history of atonement theories quite well. See also Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 163–88 (see chap. 7, n. 18).

<sup>2</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, trans. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in vol. 1 of *ANF*, 5.1, pp. 526–27.

theory can be found in Origen,<sup>3</sup> and the germs of the Governmental theory can be found in Gregory of Nazianzus.<sup>4</sup> Gunton notes that the “foundations of the classical doctrine of the atonement were laid by the patristic writers (. . . Church Fathers), for example, by . . . Athanasius (c. 297–373), who in *De incarnatione* employed forensic, sacrificial, and military imagery in his account of the saving significance of Jesus (. . . Soteriology).”<sup>5</sup> In 1931, Rivière demonstrated that both the Latin and Greek church fathers utilized the concepts of sacrifice and penal substitution.<sup>6</sup> Garry Williams also has demonstrated that penal substitution was taught by the early church fathers,

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<sup>3</sup> Origen, “Homily 24: Numbers 28–30” in *Homilies on Numbers*, ed. Christopher A. Hall, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, Ancient Christian Texts (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 147–50.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, “Expiation and Atonement (Christian),” 5:643.

<sup>5</sup> Gunton, “Atonement: Systematic Theology,” 1:156 (see chap. 7, n. 25).

<sup>6</sup> It became commonplace in the twentieth century to assert that penal substitution is basically a Reformation doctrine with little or no examples prior to the sixteenth-century Reformers. However, this perspective simply cannot be sustained in the light of the evidence and has been debunked in recent years. Examples are plentiful. Athanasius clearly affirmed the substitutionary nature of the atonement. See Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* [*De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*], in *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Archibald Robertson, vol. 4 of *NPNF<sup>2</sup>*, 40–41, 47–48; Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* [*Orationes contra Arianos IV*], in *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, edited by Archibald Robertson, vol. 4 of *NPNF<sup>2</sup>*, 2.19.47, p. 374; 2.21.66, p. 384. Eusebius spoke of the atonement in terms of sacrifice, expiation, and vicarious punishment. See Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. W. J. Ferrar (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 1:55, 187; 2:120. Augustine spoke of the atonement as penal debt. See Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*, trans. Richard Stothert, in *St. Augustine: The Writings Against the Manichæans and Against the Donatists*, ed. Archibald Robertson, vol. 4 of *NPNF<sup>1</sup>*, 14.4, p. 208. In the fifth century, Gelasius of Cyzicus stated, “There were many holy men, many prophets, many righteous men, but not one of them had the power to ransom himself from the authority of death; but he, the Saviour of all, came and received the punishments which were due to us (*tas hemin chreostoumenas timorias*) into his sinless flesh, which was of us, in place of us, and on our behalf. . . . This is the apostolic and approved faith of the church, which, transmitted from the beginning from the Lord himself through the apostles from one generation to another, the church sets on high and has held fast until even now, and will do forever” (cited in Garry J. Williams, “A Critical Exposition of Hugo Grotius’s Doctrine of the Atonement in *De satisfaction Christi*” [PhD diss., University of Oxford, 1999], 91). Gelasius’s statement affirms two things: The atonement is penal and substitutionary in nature, and it is universal in extent. See, for example, Jean Rivière, *Le Dogme de la Rédemption: Étude Théologique*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Librairie Victor LeCoffre, J. Gabalda, 1931), 94–95; and Blocher, “*Agnus Victor*,” 67–91 (see chap. 3, n. 122). See also Peter Ensor, “Penal Substitutionary Atonement in the Later Ante-Nicene Period,” *EQ* 87, no. 4 (2015): 331–46.

and that Grotius incorporated penal substitution in his Governmental theory of the atonement.<sup>7</sup>

### Recapitulation Theory

The earliest theory of the atonement, the *Recapitulation Theory*, was first propounded by Irenaeus. Building on the concept of Jesus as the “Second Adam” and new head of humanity, Irenaeus suggested that Christ recapitulated in His life and work what Adam failed to accomplish. Christ recapitulated the scene of the Fall on behalf of the whole human race and turned the defeat of Adam into victory, restoring all that man lost.<sup>8</sup>

### Ransom Theory

Some of the early Greek church fathers like Irenaeus, Origen, and Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>9</sup> laid out in their writings an approach to the atonement that has come to be called the *Ransom Theory*. Humanity, by virtue of sin, had fallen under the dominion and bondage of Satan, who possesses power

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<sup>7</sup> Williams, “A Critical Exposition of Hugo Grotius’s Doctrine,” 59–61, 68–91, 102, 144–48, 244. Williams, contrary to Grensted, finds penal substitutionary atonement “had reached its full form by the end of the Patristic era” (90). He notes that by the end of the sixth century, “none of the key elements of the Penal doctrine was missing, and even the Reformers of the Sixteenth did not add anything new to it” (Williams, 90). “It would, therefore, be anachronistic to conclude that the Fathers were less committed to the Penal doctrine than the Reformers—it suffices to say that they only rarely needed to emphasize the Penal doctrine for polemical purposes” (Williams, 90).

<sup>8</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.1.2, p. 527. Rashdall would later posit Gnostic influence on Irenaeus: “Irenaeus simply substituted the Devil for the Demiurge” (Hastings Rashdall, *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* [London: Macmillan, 1919], 245). For an accessible discussion, see Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 26–41 (see chap. 6, n. 35).

<sup>9</sup> For more on Gregory of Nyssa, consult John McGuckin, “St. Gregory of Nyssa on the Dynamics of Salvation,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 155–73. Though Gregory is well known for his Ransom themes, they are not primary in his writings. “The breaking down of Gregory’s soteriology into discrete theories, following his rhetorical images as if they were propositional, has been a mistaken pathway of much twentieth century patristic interpretation in regard to the Nyssen’s soteriology. It has largely misunderstood both the extensive dependence of patristic thought on apostolic (exegetical) patterns (especially Paul) and has regularly confused fundamental literary structures (*pathos* with *ethos* and *logos*) in the intellectual patterns of ancient discourse” (McGuckin, 172; emphasis original).

over humanity. Man must be bought back by a ransom paid to the Devil to which the Devil would consent. The atonement was a ransom paid by God to Satan in order to secure the redemption of humanity. Some patristic theologians used 1 Cor 2:8 to support a notion that God deceived the Devil.<sup>10</sup> Origen carried it further by saying that the Devil deceived himself. Not all patristic writers held that the Devil possessed rights over humanity. Irenaeus rejected this notion.<sup>11</sup> Origen built on Irenaeus and stated that Satan set the price for humanity's redemption as the blood of Christ.<sup>12</sup> Gregory of Nyssa's ransom theory was attacked by Gregory of Nazianzus, who denied the ransom was paid to the Devil or to God.<sup>13</sup>

This same concept can be found in the Latin church fathers as well, such as Augustine and Gregory the Great, followed by medieval theologians like Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter Lombard. Gregory compared Christ's humanity to the bait placed upon the hook of His divinity.<sup>14</sup> Peter Lombard described atonement as a mouse trap, baited by the blood of Christ, which tricked Satan.<sup>15</sup>

The Ransom theory contains several serious problems. First, there is no scriptural evidence for it. Second, it presses the debt metaphor in Scripture to the extreme limit. Not only did many in the patristic era take this commercial concept of "ransom" too literally with respect to the Devil, but also many in the post-Reformation era, like John Owen in the Reformed tradition, misused it with respect to God. Third, the theory "rested upon

<sup>10</sup> So Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, vol. 5 of *NPNF*<sup>2</sup>, 24.

<sup>11</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.1.1.

<sup>12</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1–5*, trans. Thomas P. Scheck, *The Fathers of the Church* 103 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 2.13.29.

<sup>13</sup> For an accessible discussion, see Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 3–25.

<sup>14</sup> Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job [Moralia]*, trans. J. Bliss, *Library of Fathers*, vol. 3, pt. 2 (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1850), 33.7, p. 569.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, "Expiation and Atonement (Christian)," 5:643. On the importance of the atonement in the church fathers, see Brian Daley, "'He Himself Is Our Peace' (Eph. 2:14): Early Christian Views of Redemption in Christ," in *The Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 149–76. See also Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (see chap. 7, n. 18). Peter Lombard, *The Sentences [Liber Sententiarum]*, *Book 3: On the Incarnation of the Word*, trans. Giulio Silano, *Mediaeval Sources in Translation* 45 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), 3.19.1, p. 79.

unsound views of the unity, sovereignty, and moral character of God.”<sup>16</sup> Oliver Crisp notes that the Ransom theory is less like a doctrine or model and “more like a motif or metaphor, for it does not provide a clear mechanism of atonement.”<sup>17</sup>

## Christus Victor

The broader context in which the Ransom theory fits in the patristic era is the predominant view of the atonement that has come to be called *Christus Victor*. The essence of the view is Christ’s victory over Satan through the cross and the resurrection. Irenæus, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Basil, the two Gregories, Cyril of Alexandria, John of Damascus, Hilary, Rufinus, Jerome, Augustine, and Leo the Great all advocated some form of it. However, most patristic theologians also held to some form of a satisfaction/substitutionary atonement, as previously noted. Even Luther described the atonement in this language as well, though his views were not confined to the Christus Victor model.

This model of the atonement received significant articulation and revival when, in 1930, Gustaf Aulén published his book, *Christus Victor*, which was translated into English a year later.<sup>18</sup> Aulén claimed the model of Christ as victor over Satan was the “classical” view of the atonement that was displaced by the “Latin” view of “satisfaction.” For Aulén, Luther had recovered the classical view only to see it again overtaken by the “Latin” view under Protestant Orthodoxy. Due to the significance of the revival of this view in the twentieth century, we shall later consider it more in depth.

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<sup>16</sup> McCrea, *The Work of Jesus*, 205 (see chap. 8, n. 30).

<sup>17</sup> Crisp, “Methodological Issues in Approaching the Atonement,” 319 (see “Introduction,” n. 29). Pugh points out how the Ransom theory is reappropriated in the Word of Faith movement, feminist theology, and the emergent church movement (Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 1, 13–18; 34–35).

<sup>18</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Herbert (London: SPCK, 1931; repr., 1961). Christus Victor was championed in more recent times by Youssouf Dembélé, “Salvation as Victory: A Reconsideration of the Concept of Salvation in the Light of Jesus Christ’s Life and Work Viewed as a Triumph Over the Personal Powers of Evil” (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2001).

## Mystical Theory

Some early church fathers also incorporated elements of Platonism and later Neoplatonism into their approach to the atonement, which would later come to be called the *Mystical Theory* of the atonement. This theory conceives of the atonement in a subjective manner in which humanity is affected by the death of Christ by being mystically brought into union and/or participation in the life of Christ. There is no objective aspect of the work of Christ on the cross by which God is propitiated and sin is expiated. In essence, the saving power of the atonement is not what Christ did *for* people on the cross but what He does *in* people.

### Bridge to the Middle Ages: Athanasius and Augustine

Athanasius, in *On the Incarnation*, asked the question concerning the necessity of the incarnation for humanity's salvation. If the issue were simply human guilt, forgiveness might be given for adequate repentance. But, Athanasius reasoned, forgiveness alone could not deal with the radical corruption of human nature caused by sin (7.2–4). Only the incarnation could accomplish this (8.7). In the incarnation, Christ became partaker of human nature, sharing in human suffering. He died the death we deserved due to our sin, and so opened the way for us to share in the divine life (8.8):<sup>19</sup> “Taking a body like our own, because we all were liable to the corruption of death, he surrendered his body to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father. . . . Whence, as I said before, the Word, since it was not possible for him to die, took to himself a body such as could die, that he might offer it as his own in the stead of all.”<sup>20</sup> When he quoted Isaiah 53, Athanasius used the imagery of substitution and exchange.<sup>21</sup>

For Athanasius, the incarnation links humanity with the God-Man Jesus, thus opening a way of salvation. The resurrection of Christ demonstrates His power over death. Humanity is promised salvation and eternal

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<sup>19</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 4:39–40, 43.

<sup>20</sup> Athanasius, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Athanasius, *Against the Arians*, 3.31.



life for all who believe in Christ.<sup>22</sup> Take note also of Athanasius's affirmation of unlimited atonement in his use of the phrase "in the stead of all." Athanasius is not only saying something about the "how" of atonement (substitution), but also about the "who"—"all."<sup>23</sup>

Brown notes that this focus on the resurrection in Athanasius, and other Greek church fathers, is distinguished somewhat from the Latin fathers, who viewed the supreme need of humanity as deliverance from guilt, not corruption. Augustine agreed with Athanasius in his concept of sin as inherited corruption but differed in the emphasis that he placed upon the guilt of sin. Death is a result of sin, but the greater problem is humanity's separation from God, which is the judicial consequence of Adam's sin. In and through the fall of Adam, humanity has become guilty before God and has incurred His wrath.<sup>24</sup>

Though Augustine wrote no monograph on the atonement, his atonement doctrine includes several strands: mediation, sacrifice, substitution, deliverance from Satan, and moral influence.<sup>25</sup> These ideas differ little from those of the church fathers preceding him.<sup>26</sup> In one sense, Augustine can be seen as the halfway house between the Greek fathers of the church and Anselm in the Middle Ages.<sup>27</sup>

## Satisfaction Theory

A crucial breakthrough in atonement doctrine came with Anselm in the medieval period.<sup>28</sup> Though he did not originate it, Anselm was the first to

<sup>22</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 4:52–53. See the excellent summary in Brown, "Expiation and Atonement (Christian)," 5:642.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Myers, "The Patristic Atonement Model," in *Locating Atonement: Explorations in Constructive Dogmatics*, ed. Oliver D. Crisp and Fred Sanders (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 85–86.

<sup>24</sup> Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 643–44. For more on Athanasius's view of the atonement, see Thomas Weinandy, "Athanasius's Incarnational Soteriology," in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 135–54.

<sup>25</sup> On Augustine's approach to the atonement, see the brief survey by David Vincent Meconi, "Augustine," in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 381–87.

<sup>26</sup> Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:49 (see "Introduction," n. 21).

<sup>27</sup> As suggested by McCrea, *The Work of Jesus in Christian Thought*, 201.

<sup>28</sup> For a summary of Anselm's view of atonement, see John McIntyre, *St. Anselm and His Critics: A Re-Interpretation of the Cur Deus Homo* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1954);

develop the *Satisfaction Theory*<sup>29</sup> theologically in his famous *Cur Deus Homo* (*Why the God-Man?*) in 1098. According to the Satisfaction theory, the cross is a sacrifice for the expiation of sin and guilt, offered to God in fulfillment of the demands of His law, based on His love, so that God is reconciled to sinful humanity. “Therefore is it necessary for him to perfect in human nature what he has begun. But this, as we have already said, cannot be accomplished save by a complete expiation of sin, which no sinner can effect for himself.”<sup>30</sup>

Anselm posed the question of the actual necessity of the cross. For Anselm, the answer lies in God Himself. Humanity owes God the debt of total response and obedience. Sin withholds this and thus dishonors God. Sin is a universal breach of justice. Anselm understood sin as ultimately personal. God cannot simply forgive sin because in this case mercy would cancel justice. To protect God’s honor, the cross is necessary. Satisfaction must be rendered by Christ on the cross to the divine honor.<sup>31</sup> Anselm is quite clear that God is not concerned merely with His own honor. For Anselm, “the whole conception revolves around our need to honor God, not God’s need to be honored.”<sup>32</sup>

Humanity should make atonement, but cannot; God could do it but must not. For Anselm, the only solution is Christ, the God-man. “[N]one but God can make this satisfaction. . . . But none but a man ought to do this. . . . it is necessary for the God-man to make it.”<sup>33</sup> Sin is an infinite offense against God and thus requires an equally infinite satisfaction, which

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David Bentley Hart, “A Gift Exceeding Every Debt: An Eastern Orthodox Appreciation of Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo*,” *Pro Ecclesia* 7 (1998): 333–49; O’Collins, “Redemption: Some Crucial Issues,” 9 (see chap. 1, n. 10); Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 45–62; Katherine Sonderegger, “Anselmian Atonement,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 175–93; and Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 146–66 (see “Introduction,” n. 41).

<sup>29</sup> Anselm’s satisfaction theory was anticipated by many of the church fathers, as demonstrated by Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 388. Concepts like satisfaction and sin as debt had already been developed in Athanasius (*On the Incarnation*, 20.2).

<sup>30</sup> Anselm, *Why God Became Man* [*Cur Deus Homo*], 2.4 (see chap. 1, n. 12).

<sup>31</sup> “[S]o he who violates another’s honor does not enough by merely rendering honor again, but must, according to the extent of the injury done, make restoration in some way satisfactory to the person whom he has dishonored” (Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, 1.11).

<sup>32</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 156.

<sup>33</sup> Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, 2.6.

Jesus offered to God on the cross. The necessity proceeds from the need of one who is sinless to render the satisfaction to God. Anselm broke with the concept of Christ paying a debt to Satan and maintained that the debt was paid to God via a substitutionary sacrifice. God's justice demands that sin's debt be paid, and God's love for humanity motivated Him to pay the debt Himself. Christ, in His atonement, gives more than is required. His infinite sacrifice deserves a reward, but He Himself needs no reward. He can thus give the merits of His sacrifice to sinful humanity. It should be noted, however, that the NT does not speak of merit in connection with the atonement. Those who receive the benefits of His merits will be saved from their sin.

It has been standard fare to assert that the sociological background for Anselm's concept of the atonement as satisfaction of God's honor lay in the feudal honor system of his age where the notion of feudal chivalry demanded satisfaction for wounded honor. According to McCrea, Anselm's dangerously anthropomorphic view of God determined his definition of sin. Sin is insult, an affront to God's honor and dignity.<sup>34</sup> But this is something of a one-sided critique that does not take into account Anselm's overall approach.<sup>35</sup> For Anselm, as well as the church fathers, there is "a common understanding of the human predicament as **both guilt requiring remission and captivity requiring deliverance.**"<sup>36</sup> Rutledge summarizes Anselm:

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<sup>34</sup> McCrea, *The Work of Jesus in Christian Thought*, 208 (see chap. 8, n. 28). For additional evaluation and critique of Anselm's theory, see Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments*, 76–79.

<sup>35</sup> In fact, Rutledge has noted how Anselm's fame and influence is "matched by the degree of scorn heaped upon him. . . . His 'theory' of 'satisfaction' has been reviled as juridical, feudal, rigid, absolutist, vengeful, sadistic, immoral, and violent" (Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 146). Rutledge's treatment of Anselm is an excellent summary antidote to these spurious criticisms (Rutledge, 146–66). Rutledge, following David Bentley Hart ("A Gift Exceeding Every Debt," 330–49), rescues Anselm from his harsh critics (Rutledge, 158–59). In the same vein, Sonderegger's "Anselmian Atonement" extricates Anselm from some of the harsh criticism, especially his so-called cultural dependence on "feudal honor" (Sonderegger, 175–93). See also Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 53–54, especially n. 64. See also the recent treatment of Anselm in Craig, *The Atonement*, 32–35 (see "Introduction," n. 46).

<sup>36</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 161 (emphasis original). Rutledge here affirms that this point made by Hart is "fundamental" to her argument.

[T]he self-oblation of the Son on the cross proceeded out of God's eternal, triune inner being. In our preaching, teaching, and learning we must emphatically reject any interpretation that divides the will of the Father from that of the Son, or suggests that anything is going on that does not proceed out of love. As we shall see again and again, God's justice and God's mercy both issue forth from his single will of eternal love.<sup>37</sup>

Pugh is probably correct when he asserts that Anselm's "*Cur Deus Homo* should be viewed as more post-patristic than proto-Reformed."<sup>38</sup>

## Penal Substitution in Atonement Theories

### *Middle Ages*

Enter Abelard. Abelard is famously, though falsely, known for the origination of the "Moral Influence" theory of the atonement. Abelard felt that Anselm had not focused enough on the love of God as a motivating factor for the atonement. Abelard interpreted the concept of the "righteousness of God" in Rom 3:21–26 as love.

However, recent scholarship shows that Abelard was not an exemplarist in that he did not explain the atonement exclusively as one that provides an example<sup>39</sup> but expressed a penal substitution notion, as well, in his comments on Rom 4:25.<sup>40</sup> This is confirmed by Caroline Walker Bynum:

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<sup>37</sup> Rutledge, 163. "If we are to appreciate . . . Anselm's language of satisfaction, we need to be clear that *the change effected by Christ's self-oblation does not occur within God*. This is of primary importance. If we do not emphasize this, we end up with a dangerously capricious God who is indeed open to the critiques brought by those who think of the wrath of God as an emotion that must be appeased. In all our discussion of reconciliation, this underlying point is fundamental. It is not God that is changed. It is the relationship of human beings and the creation to God that is changed" (Rutledge, 163; emphasis original).

<sup>38</sup> Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 60.

<sup>39</sup> Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 16 (see chap. 5, n. 5). See also Adam J. Johnson, "Peter Abelard," in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 357–60.

<sup>40</sup> See Craig, *The Atonement*, 36–37. "Peter Abelard, though his understanding of the atonement was definitively subjective, also included objective aspects, even propitiation" (Treat, *The Crucified King*, 180 ([see "Introduction," n. 1]). Treat refers to Peter Abelard, "Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans (An Excerpt from the Second Book)," in *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, ed. and trans. Eugene R. Fairweather; LCC

Anselmian and Abelardian understandings of Christ's work of redemption were far closer to each other than generally portrayed. She explains that "there are subjective and objective elements in the theories of both Anselm and Abelard. . . . Hence, it is quite wrong to see two redemptive theories warring for precedence in the twelfth century. . . . There are not two theories (Abelardian and Anselmian) in the Middle Ages but one."<sup>41</sup>

Peter Lombard (d. AD 1160), whose *Sentences* was the theological textbook of the later medieval period, retained the idea of *Christus Victor*. According to Bynum, he agreed with Anselm regarding satisfaction; but he, unlike Anselm, viewed it as penal substitution.<sup>42</sup> The greatest theologian of the middle ages, Thomas Aquinas, likewise affirmed a penal satisfaction component in the atonement.<sup>43</sup> Aquinas spoke of the atonement as a satisfaction, an example, and a victory over Satan. However, he did not integrate these themes into a theory of the atonement.<sup>44</sup>

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10; (Philadelphia: WJK, 1956), 279. Treat continues, "There is no doubt, however, that Abelard's understanding of propitiation was deficient. Abelard was also open to the atonement as redemption from the devil, if indeed the devil's authority was subservient to God's (Treat, 281)" (Treat, 180, n. 28). [Robert Letham notes: "Peter Abelard (1079–1142) has been identified as its founder. This is false on two counts. First, a purely exemplary cast had been suggested for atonement long before Abelard. Clement of Alexandria (c. 155–c. 220) had taught that Christ was an illuminator whose task involved the impartation of knowledge (*Protrepticos* 11, 114, 4, *GCS* 12, 80–81; *Paedagogus* 1, 5, *MPG* 8, 261–280; *Stromatum* 2, 22, *MPG* 8, 1079f.). Second, the claim for Abelard rests on one passage in his writings, in his *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, in particular his comments on Romans 3:19–26. In fact, the case rests on just one sentence, which states that redemption is 'love in us'. Earlier in the selfsame context, however, Abelard has unequivocally spoken of redemption by the blood of Christ, which he sees as his death. He rejects a ransom paid to Satan for it is properly paid to God. Hence, the atonement is in reality a Godward phenomenon and not a subjective moral change in us. Recent scholarship has recognized this to be so." Letham, *The Work of Christ*, 166–67 (see "Introduction," n. 45).] See also Blocher, "Atonement," 73 (see chap. 3, n. 1). Robert Paul, speaking about the exemplarist aspect of Abelard, says that "the great characteristic of the Abelardian theory is that it is extremely simple to state but extremely difficult to live" (Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments*, 83).

<sup>41</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Power in the Blood: Sacrifice, Satisfaction, and Substitution in Late Medieval Soteriology," in *The Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 179–81.

<sup>42</sup> Bynum, 178–80.

<sup>43</sup> Blocher, "Atonement," 73.

<sup>44</sup> Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments*, 85–86.

## *Reformation*

With the Reformation came another development in the doctrine of the atonement. Protestants and Catholics divided over the nature and effects of the atonement. As Brown describes: “To the Catholic theologian the Atonement forms the basis of the whole system of ecclesiastical machinery upon which man’s salvation is supposed to depend. To the Protestant it is his warrant for rejecting this machinery as superfluous.”<sup>45</sup> The Anselmic portrayal of Christ’s redeeming work as satisfaction of God’s offended honor was recast by the Reformers in forensic terms. The atonement would come to be viewed as both satisfaction and penal substitution.<sup>46</sup>

### *Martin Luther*

Martin Luther’s theology of atonement<sup>47</sup> builds on Anselm’s satisfaction theory and includes Christus Victor as well. This is perhaps best seen in his commentary on Gal 3:13.<sup>48</sup> Paul Althaus summarized Luther’s view: “The satisfaction which God’s righteousness demands constitutes the primary and decisive significance of Christ’s work and particularly of his death. Everything else depends on this satisfaction, including the destruction of the might and authority of the demonic powers spoiled of all right and

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<sup>45</sup> Brown, “Expiation and Atonement (Christian),” 5:645.

<sup>46</sup> “The Reformers and post-Reformation theologians worked a penal variation on Anselm, contending that Jesus’s death satisfied not God’s honor but his justice” (Vanhooser, “Atonement,” 177 [see “Introduction,” n. 1]). Likewise, B. B. Warfield said, “It was not, however, until the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith threw its light back upon the ‘satisfaction’ which provided its basis, that that doctrine came fully to its rights. No one before Luther had spoken with the clarity, depth, or breadth which characterize his references to Christ as our deliverer, first from the guilt of sin, and then, because from the guilt of sin, also from all that is evil, since all that is evil springs from sin” (Benjamin B. Warfield, “Atonement,” in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. Samuel Macauley Jackson [New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908–1914], 1:350, in reference to Harnack and others on the subject).

<sup>47</sup> See Robert A. Kolb, “Martin Luther,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 613–21. For a summary survey of Luther’s view of the atonement, see Steven D. Paulson and Nicholas Hopman, “Atonement,” in *Dictionary of Luther and the Lutheran Traditions*, ed. Timothy Wengert (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 48–51. See also Alister McGrath, *Luther’s Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 148–75, and Jack D. Kilcrease, *The Doctrine of Atonement: From Luther to Forde* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 218), 26–50.

<sup>48</sup> Martin Luther, “Lectures on Galatians (1535),” *LW* 26:276–81.

power.”<sup>49</sup> Luther affirms satisfaction but asserts that there is more to the atonement than that:

Even if one wants to retain the word satisfaction and say thereby that Christ has made satisfaction for our sins, nevertheless it is too weak and says too little about the grace of Christ and does not sufficiently honor Christ’s suffering. One must give them higher honor because he did not only make satisfaction for sin but also redeemed us from death, the devil, and the power of hell, and guarantees us an eternal kingdom of grace as well as the daily forgiveness of subsequent sins, and so becomes for us . . . an eternal redemption and sanctification.<sup>50</sup>

Luther spoke of sins being laid upon Christ by divine love.<sup>51</sup> He also clearly affirmed substitutionary atonement:

When the merciful Father saw that we were being oppressed through the Law, that we were being held under a curse, and that we should not be liberated from it by anything, He sent his Son into the world, heaped all the sins of all men upon him and said to him: “Be Peter the denier; Paul the persecutor, blasphemer and assaulter; David the adulterer; the sinner who ate the apple in Paradise; the thief on the cross. In short, the person of all men, the one who has committed the sins of all men. And see to it that you pay and make satisfaction for them.”<sup>52</sup>

Luther also affirmed that the death of Christ was an unlimited atonement where Christ substituted for the sins of all the world—i.e., that all the sins

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<sup>49</sup> Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 220.

<sup>50</sup> Martin Luther (WA, 21:264, 27), trans. and quoted by Gerhard O. Forde in Forde, “Seventh Locus,” 49; see 62, n. 10 (see chap. 1, n. 22).

<sup>51</sup> Luther, “Lectures on Galatians (1535),” LW 26:279.

<sup>52</sup> Luther, LW 26:280. Philip S. Watson (*Let God Be God: An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000]) claims that Luther did not teach penal substitution, but Garry Williams has demonstrated this claim to be false (Williams, “A Critical Exposition,” 98–102).

of the world were imputed to Him in such a way that the death of Christ was a universal satisfaction for all sinners:

All the prophets well foresaw in the Spirit, that Christ, by imputation, would become the greatest sinner upon the face of the earth, and a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world; would be no more considered an innocent person and without sin, or the Son of God in glory, but a notorious sinner, and so be for a while forsaken (Psalm 8), and have lying upon his neck the sins of all mankind;

Therefore the law, which Moses gave to be executed upon all malefactors and murderers in general, took hold on Christ, finding him with and among sinners and murderers, though in his own person innocent.

This manner of picturing Christ to us, the sophists, robbers of God, obscure and falsify; for they will not that Christ was made a curse for us, to the end he might deliver us from the curse of the law, nor that he has anything to do with sin and poor sinners; though for their sakes alone was he made man and died, but they set before us merely Christ's examples, which they say we ought to imitate and follow; and thus they not only steal from Christ his proper name and title, but also make him a severe and angry judge, a fearful and horrible tyrant, full of wrath against poor sinners, and bent on condemning them.<sup>53</sup>

### *John Calvin*

John Calvin's theology of the atonement is well known. Early Reformed theology gave considerable attention to the equivalency of punishment for fallen humanity's offense against the law of God, expressed in the form of a penal substitutionary atonement.<sup>54</sup> Calvin and other Reformed

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<sup>53</sup> Martin Luther, "Of Jesus Christ #202," in *The Table Talk of Martin Luther: Luther's Comments on Life, the Church and the Bible* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003), 174.

<sup>54</sup> Gabriel Fackre, "Atonement," in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Louisville: WJK, 1992), 13–16.



theologians went beyond Anselm and the satisfaction theory into actual punishment categories, thus strengthening the penal substitutionary nature of the atonement.<sup>55</sup> Calvin's descriptions of Christ's vicarious work blend priestly imagery (e.g., Heb 9:14, 25–26) with legal metaphors (e.g., Gal 3:13).<sup>56</sup>

For Calvin, the essence of deity is retributive justice. It is not simply a question of God's honor, as Anselm had stated, which can only be satisfied by obedience to God's commands; it is a question of God's holiness. God does indeed desire to forgive sins, but this grace can be exercised only if justice is satisfied, and justice requires a punishment commensurate to the sin. This is what constitutes the cross as a penal substitution. God has provided Christ as humanity's substitute to take the place of guilty sinners. On the grounds of this penal substitutionary atonement, God can now offer forgiveness consistent with His justice to all who have faith in Christ.<sup>57</sup>

The Reformation understanding of the atonement as penal substitution coupled with the rediscovery of justification by grace through faith alone would chart the course for Protestant theology, especially among evangelicals, from that day until the present time. At the turn of the twentieth century, B. B. Warfield, then president of Princeton Theological Seminary, could state, "Lutherans and Reformed are entirely at one in their conception of the nature of our Lord's saving work as a substitutive sin-bearer and an atoning sacrifice."<sup>58</sup> Robert Paul asserts that "it was the theory of penal substitution which from the middle of the sixteenth century to the middle

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<sup>55</sup> Brown, "Expiation and Atonement (Christian)," 1:645.

<sup>56</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:501–03; 2.15.6 (see "Introduction," n. 13). Two important works on the subject of Calvin and the atonement are: Paul van Buren, *Calvin in Our Place: The Substitutionary Character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); and Robert Peterson, *Calvin and the Atonement* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1999). For a recent treatment of Calvin and the atonement, see Paul Daffy Jones, "The Fury of Love: Calvin on the Atonement," in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 213–35.

<sup>57</sup> Brown, "Expiation and Atonement (Christian)," 645–46. Johnson affirms penal substitution with the proper caveats, namely, that it should not hold priority of place among other theories (*Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 113–15). Other recent defenders of penal substitution think it does hold pride of place as the central biblical model of the atonement. See, for example, Peterson, *Salvation Accomplished by the Son*, 362–412 (see chap. 7, n. 41).

<sup>58</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, "Introduction," in *The Atonement and Modern Thought* by Junius Remensnyder (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1905), ix–x.

years of the nineteenth century became the quasi-orthodox doctrine for the greater part of Protestantism.”<sup>59</sup>

In essence, penal substitution understands the atonement as an act where Christ made satisfaction for sins. On the one hand, this satisfaction was made to the justice of God, which had been violated by human sin, by means of Christ’s bearing the penalty for human guilt. On the other hand, Christ made satisfaction to the demands of the law of God, which requires perfect obedience; and He did so as the second Adam, thus succeeding where the first Adam failed.<sup>60</sup> But the history of atonement theology with respect to attitudes toward penal substitution is widely divergent—for the next 400-plus years, it has been strong affirmation or strong denial!

### *Socinianism*

The rise of Socinianism brought a strong challenge to penal substitution. Faustus Socinus (AD 1539–1604) criticized the idea of transferred penalty, which underlay Calvin’s penal substitutionary model, along with many post-Reformation developments of the doctrine.<sup>61</sup> Socinians argued that Anselm had privileged God’s justice above His love. The notion of God paying God was considered nonsensical. How can the suffering of one individual be equivalent to that of the human race? Especially problematic for the Socinians was the question of how sin can be transferred so that Christ can be a substitute for others. Socinians advocated the cross as a demonstration of God’s love and an incentive to lead people to salvation through Christ (a concept that would later become known as the Moral Influence theory of the atonement).

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<sup>59</sup> Paul, *The Atonement and the Sacraments*, 109.

<sup>60</sup> Warfield, “Atonement,” 350.

<sup>61</sup> Faustus Socinus, *De Iesu Christo Servatore, Hoc est, cur et qua ratione Iesus Christus noster servator sit* [Concerning Jesus Christ the Savior] (Kraków, Poland: Alexander Rodecius, 1594). Socinus’s Christology was flawed and included the denial of the divine nature and unique Sonship of Christ. For a short survey of Socinus on the atonement, see Alan W. Gomes, “Socinus,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 753–57.

### Hugo Grotius

To counter the Socinians' attack on the objectivity of the atonement, the Dutch jurist Hugh Grotius (AD 1583–1645) advocated what has come to be called the Governmental theory<sup>62</sup> of the atonement in his famous *Satisfaction of Christ*.<sup>63</sup> Grotius emphasized the role of God as a benevolent universal ruler whose love for sinners, exhibited by the cross, enabled Him to forgive sinners in accordance with His justice as the moral governor of the universe and for the well-being of His subjects. However, there is more to Grotius's theory. The Governmental theory as articulated by Grotius, and by many advocates after him, retained an objective penal aspect of the atonement, though this is often missed by its critics.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> The best analysis of the Governmental theory is Garry Williams, "A Critical Exposition" (see this chap., n. 6). The Governmental theory was popular among many Calvinists, Wesleyan Methodists, American Congregationalists, and other Arminians in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Pope, *Compendium of Christian Theology* (see chap. 5, n. 2); Marshall Randles, *Substitution: A Treatise on the Atonement* (London: J. Grose Thomas and Co., 1877); Thomas O. Summers, *Systematic Theology: A Complete Body of Wesleyan-Arminian Divinity Consisting of Lectures on the Twenty-five Articles of Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John J. Tigert (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1888); John J. Tigert, "The Methodist Doctrine of Atonement," *Methodist Quarterly Review* (April 1884): 278–99; Joseph A. Beet, "The Doctrine of the Atonement in the New Testament. IX.—Rationale of the Atonement," *The Expositor* 6, no. 5 (November 1892): 343–55; Beet, *Through Christ to God: A Study in Scientific Theology* (New York: Hunt & Eaton; Cincinnati: Cranston & Curts, 1893). The Governmental theory has been regnant among American Methodists and has received some of its best statements from their hands. See especially: John Miley, *The Atonement in Christ* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1879); Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Hunt & Eaton; Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1892–1894), 2:65–240.

<sup>63</sup> Hugo Grotius, *A Defence of the Catholic Faith concerning the Satisfaction of Christ against Faustus Socinus*, trans. Frank Hugh Foster (Andover, MA: Warren F. Draper, 1889); originally published as *Defensio fidei Christianae de satisfactione Christi adversus Faustum Socinum* (Leyden: Joannes Patius, 1617).

<sup>64</sup> As, for example, Laurence W. Grensted, "Introduction," in *The Atonement in History and in Life: A Volume of Essays* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge [SPCK], 1929), 29; and many among modern-day Reformed theologians. But see especially Williams, "A Critical Exposition," 1–148 (see this chap., n. 4), who demonstrates the penal substitutionary aspect of Grotius's work. Advocates of the Governmental theory include: Robert W. Dale, *The Atonement* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1876); Alfred Cave, *The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1877; repr., 1890 under new title, *The Scriptural Doctrine of Sacrifice and Atonement*); the New Divinity movement in the nineteenth century, along with many Methodists and Baptists, among others.

Williams speaks of the misinterpretation of Grotius's *Satisfaction of Christ*, which gives birth to the Governmental theory of the atonement. This theory defends the penal conception of the death of Jesus solely on the ground that God needed to punish sin for the sake of the moral life of the community over which He presides. Practically every history of the doctrine of the atonement gives this account of the *Satisfaction of Christ*, so it is now taken for granted among historians of dogma.<sup>65</sup>

As Williams demonstrates, contrary to many, Grotius did not think that punishment arises from the exigencies of divine governance rather than from the nature of God Himself. Grotius stands solidly with the Reformers in the belief that Jesus bore the very punishment deserved by all sinners.<sup>66</sup> For Grotius, the formal cause of the death of Christ is a full payment of the penalty of sins. In Grotius's view: (1) Christ made payment for our sins. (2) He thereby bore the penalty for our sins. (3) In His death, Christ was our substitute.<sup>67</sup>

Williams cites clear evidence of Grotius's affirmation of penal substitution. For example:

Grotius made use of the word[s] "penalty" and "punishment" (Latin *poena*) three times in this statement: "God was moved by his own goodness to bestow considerable blessings upon us, but our sins, which deserved punishment, were an obstacle to this; so he decided that Christ, willingly and because of his love for mankind, should pay the penalty for our sins by undergoing the most severe tortures and a bloody and disgraceful death. Thus, the demonstration of divine justice would remain unaffected and we, through the intervention of true faith, would be liberated from the punishment of eternal death" (1. 2, 90/91).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Williams, "A Critical Exposition," 2.

<sup>66</sup> Williams, x.

<sup>67</sup> Williams, 31. See also Craig, *The Atonement*, 48–52.

<sup>68</sup> Williams, 60–61.

According to Williams, “Grotius plainly set out here to defend the Penal doctrine, and he remains faithful to his purpose throughout the work.”<sup>69</sup>

Drawing together these criticisms of the conventional reading of Grotius, it is necessary to conclude that he taught that the punishment endured by Jesus on the cross arose from the very nature of God as an example of His retributive justice and was of an equivalent value to the punishment deserved by sinners. The cross was neither just a deterrent, nor a partial penalty, nor a mere affliction. On the nature of punishment, we can go no further than saying that Grotius emphasized more strongly than his predecessors a point known to all observant exegetes of the NT, that the cross was a public demonstration of the justice of God’s rule. As Williams has demonstrated, the tradition of reading his doctrine of the atonement as a departure from the Protestant inheritance is thus only reliable at two points of comparison—in his isolation of the doctrine of the atonement, and in his increased emphasis on the conception of God as Ruler in explaining that doctrine.<sup>70</sup> Williams successfully challenges the charge that Grotius was a theological innovator:

At the end of this critical exposition of *De satisfactione* [*Satisfaction of Christ*], we have before us a substantially revised understanding of the doctrine of the Atonement which Grotius defends. Theologically, we have seen that he does indeed hold the doctrine of both the Fathers and the Reformers, and that he neither proposes a new Governmental Theory in which law dominates theology, nor separates law and theology. Indeed, his emphasis on God as Ruler serves as nothing more than a reminder of the fact that God acted in the Atonement as one who is above the law, it is in no way a denial that God acted in retribution as Judge.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Williams, 61. “Grotius evidences his belief in penal substitution when he chides Socinus for rejecting not only the word ‘satisfaction,’ but the concepts that are conveyed by it and which Grotius’ himself affirms. In Grotius’s listing of those concepts, he includes ‘by laying down his life Christ appeased for us the wrath of God’” (Williams, 59).

<sup>70</sup> Williams, 148.

<sup>71</sup> Williams, 244.

A number of criticisms have been leveled against the Governmental theory. First, detractors deny there is any scriptural basis to the theory, though Grotius cited numerous biblical texts. Second, it has been described as putting administrative expediency above justice and moral necessity. Third, it appears to some that Grotius has placed divine sovereignty in a position above divine love.<sup>72</sup> However, Williams has demonstrated that these criticisms are wide of the mark.<sup>73</sup>

### *Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*

#### *Moral Influence Theory*

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, key theologians—such as Immanuel Kant<sup>74</sup> and, most notably, Friedrich Schleiermacher<sup>75</sup>—would build on the criticisms of Socinianism and propound variations of the Moral Influence theory of the atonement. The nineteenth century was ripe for this “second coming” of Abelard with its “concern with human consciousness and experience, coupled with the tendency to reject divine retributive justice and affirm God’s love.”<sup>76</sup> Essentially, this theory asserts that Jesus’s self-sacrifice is an example to be followed, and the atonement is not to be understood in an objective substitutionary way. Also following this construal of the atonement were the prominent nineteenth-century

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<sup>72</sup> See Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:26–27 (see “Introduction,” n. 21); Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 50–54.

<sup>73</sup> Williams, “A Critical Exposition.”

<sup>74</sup> See Nathan A. Jacobs, “Kant,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 591–95.

<sup>75</sup> See Justin Stratis, “Friedrich Schleiermacher,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 739–42. For a brief summary of Schleiermacher’s view on the work of Christ in conjunction with the person of Christ, see Bruce L. McCormack, “Christology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, ed. Paul T. Nimmo and David A. S. Fergusson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 72–75.

<sup>76</sup> Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” 178 (see “Introduction,” n. 1).

theologians Albrecht Ritschl,<sup>77</sup> Horace Bushnell in America,<sup>78</sup> and Hastings Rashdall and F. D. Maurice in England.<sup>79</sup>

The Moral Influence theory<sup>80</sup> of the atonement, like the Mystical theory, attributes no objective aspect to the work of Christ on the cross such as substitution, propitiation, expiation, etc. Rather, the cross moves people to a better knowledge of God and to an appreciation of His love that breaks down human opposition to God and leads to a change of heart toward God and toward sin. The focus is on the response of the human heart to the act of sacrificial love exhibited by Christ on the cross. The cross influences people toward repentance and faith. The atonement itself changes nothing in God toward humanity; rather repentance and faith change God's disposition toward people.<sup>81</sup> Jesus becomes little more than an elevated martyr, though one who is uniquely special to God because of His relationship to God.

There are numerous variations of the Moral Influence theory, depending on how one views the means by which the cross affects the minds, hearts, and actions of people. In reality, the moral influence is more on

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<sup>77</sup> "With Albrecht Ritschl (1822–1889) we might speak of a corporate variation on an 'Abelardian' theme, moving from individual to social morality—a turn to the *intersubjective*, as it were" (Vanhoozer, "Atonement," 179; emphasis original); See also Matthew J. Aragon Bruce, "Albrecht Ritschl," in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 723–27.

<sup>78</sup> Bushnell wrote that Christ's "work terminates, not in the release of penalties by due compensation, but in the transformation of character, and the rescue, in that manner, of guilty men from the retributive causations provoked by their sin" (Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice, Grounded in Principles of Universal Obligation* [New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1865; rev. 1877], 449).

<sup>79</sup> Gunton, "Atonement: Systematic Theology," 1:156 (see chap. 7, n. 25).

<sup>80</sup> See Alister McGrath, "The Moral Theory of the Atonement: An Historical and Theological Critique," *SJT* 38, no. 2 (May 1985): 205–20.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, the seventeenth-century Socinians; the eighteenth-century Rationalists; the nineteenth-century Horace Bushnell (*Forgiveness and Law, Grounded in Principles Interpreted by Human Analogies* [New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co., 1874] and *The Vicarious Sacrifice* [see n. 78]); Albrecht Ritschl, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, ed. and trans. H. R. Mackintosh and A. B. Macaulay, 3 vols. (1870–1874; Clifton, NJ: Reference Book Publishers, 1966), 3:546–47; William Newton Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1898), 341–67; and the most prominent early twentieth-century advocate, Auguste Sabatier, *The Doctrine of the Atonement in its Historical Evolution*, trans. V. Leuliette (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), esp. 131–34.

believers than anyone else, as Peter brings out in his letters.<sup>82</sup> The Moral Influence theory does not explain how the cross works to take away sin or even how it works to draw sinners. Thus, while the Moral Influence theory is not the whole truth, and certainly not the essential truth, it can be said that it is true in and of itself in conjunction with penal substitution.

The value of the Moral Influence theory is its focus on God's love as emanating from the divine nature. However, that this love lacks any objective grounding in relationship to sinners and their sin raises at least two questions: (1) How can one subjectively appropriate the benefits of the atonement if there is no objective foundation of dealing with the sin problem in the atonement? (2) Where is the holiness and justice of God to be found? Proponents of the theory seem to have overlooked these entirely.

Though not necessarily directly connected to the Moral Influence theory, some advocates have suggested that God's love will ultimately lead to the salvation of all people (universalism). This position was expressed by Thomas Hughes in his work on the theories of the atonement: "The probabilities are that in the other life there will be a revelation of divine love so overwhelming and convincing that all who failed or refused to believe here, are subdued and won, so that no one is left outside the range of love's complete victory."<sup>83</sup> But this runs directly counter to Heb 9:27—"[I]t is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment"—not to mention a host of other Scriptures confirming that many will be eternally judged for their sin due to their refusal to believe in Christ.<sup>84</sup>

Some distinction should be drawn between the Moral Influence theory and the so-called Example theory. Though the two are related, the latter is a weaker version of the former. In the Example theory, the cross serves as an example to us as to how we should live, nothing more. Whereas the Moral Influence theory stresses the drawing power of God's love to the sinner, the Example theory stresses the exemplary nature of the cross minus any

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<sup>82</sup> See 1 Pet 2:21.

<sup>83</sup> Hughes, *The Atonement*, xxiii (see chap. 4, n. 21). In modern times, the view is advocated by many, including Rob Bell, *Love Wins! A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011).

<sup>84</sup> See the excellent critique of universalism in Michael McClymond, *The Devil's Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018).



focus on the drawing power or influence of God's love. Furthermore, the Example theory normally involves a denial of the deity of Christ while the Moral Influence theory does not. In the Example theory, the focus is not on any central meaning of the cross as much as on the consequences of the cross.<sup>85</sup> As W. T. Conner stated, "The Cross cannot be my example unless it is first my redemption."<sup>86</sup>

All forms of the moral or therapeutic theories of atonement, including contemporary iterations, in and of themselves, are problematic. Vanhoozer summarizes this well:

If the cross saves merely by manifesting some universal truth—'God is on the side of the victims'; 'God forgives us no matter what'—then it does not really *change* anything, except for our ignorance of the principle. This position suffers from two weaknesses. First, it leads to the eclipse of Jesus; for once we grasp the *principle*, the particular story and the events it relates are dispensable. Second, the preaching of the cross becomes a reassuring affirmation ("God's OK; you're OK"), not a radical transformation.<sup>87</sup>

### *Nineteenth Century Developments*

The nineteenth century witnessed a flurry of works on the atonement. Among the more significant were those by R. W. Dale,<sup>88</sup> John McLeod Campbell,<sup>89</sup> and James Denney.<sup>90</sup> Dale's *The Atonement*, which appeared at the end of the nineteenth century, was widely acclaimed as a theological effort to retain penal substitutionary atonement while avoiding some of

<sup>85</sup> Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:44.

<sup>86</sup> Walter T. Conner, *The Gospel of Redemption* (Nashville: Broadman, 1945), 86.

<sup>87</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 384; emphasis original (see "Introduction," n. 32).

<sup>88</sup> R. W. Dale, *The Atonement* (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales), 1895.

<sup>89</sup> John McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement* (see chap. 7, n. 22). On Campbell, consult Peter K. Stevenson, "John McLeod Campbell," in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, 421–26. See also David A. S. Fergusson, "Reformed Theology in the British Isles," in *The Cambridge Companion to Reformed Theology*, eds. Paul T. Nimmo and David A. S. Fergusson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 252–53.

<sup>90</sup> Denney, *The Death of Christ* (see chap. 1, n. 3); Denney, *The Atonement and the Modern Mind* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903); and Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (New York: George Doran, 1918).

the “artificiality and legalism” of the older versions. Campbell’s approach to the atonement was to substitute vicarious repentance for vicarious punishment. Campbell believed Scripture taught an unlimited atonement but could not answer the “double payment” criticism leveled by some Calvinists against unlimited atonement. Campbell fell into the same trap of commercialism as did the advocates for limited atonement. As a result, in order to salvage unlimited atonement, he felt the only solution was to jettison penal substitution as vicarious punishment and advocate for “vicarious repentance.” Campbell’s book was influential in that it started the trend in modern theology of advocating for more subjective and ethical theories of the atonement.

Perhaps a word should be said concerning Wesleyan theologies of the atonement from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. It is commonly but falsely assumed or argued, especially by many in the Reformed tradition, that Wesleyan theology generally rejects a penal substitutionary view of the atonement in favor of Grotius’s so-called “Governmental” theory. A cursory look at Wesleyan systematic theologians reveals that the majority of them have affirmed some form of substitutionary atonement, often penal substitution.<sup>91</sup> John Wesley himself held to penal substitution.<sup>92</sup>

### *Twentieth Century Developments*

#### *Christus Victor*

In the twentieth century, Gustaf Aulén<sup>93</sup> revived interest in the Christus Victor model that was first propounded by the early church fathers. The Christus Victor model focuses on Christ’s victory over Satan and the evil powers of the world by means of the cross and the resurrection. The cross defeated Satan and made provision for the release of the captives held in

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<sup>91</sup> So noted and demonstrated by Thomas H. McCall, “Wesleyan Theologies,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 797–800. See also Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 221–41.

<sup>92</sup> Allen, *Extent of the Atonement*, 285–86 (see “Introduction,” 16).

<sup>93</sup> See the short summary of Aulén by Roland Spjuth, “Gustaf Aulén,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 389–92.

bondage to their sin and death. Key texts are John 12:31; Heb 2:14–18; 1 John 3:8; and Rev 12:7–12.<sup>94</sup>

Since Aulén, it has become commonplace to categorize theories of the atonement under three broad headings: Christus Victor, objective theories such as satisfaction and penal substitution, and subjective theories such as the moral influence view.<sup>95</sup> However, Aulén's approach and categorization have not gone unchallenged, and many have shown his historical work to be far from accurate.<sup>96</sup>

Among other criticisms, some have noted that Christus Victor tends to focus more on the deity of Christ to the exclusion of His humanity. Moreover, like the Ransom theory, Christus Victor does not really explain how the atonement itself functions to deal with the sin problem, as Oliver Crisp has noted.<sup>97</sup> It functions more like a metaphor rather than a model. Thus, scholars like Bird, who think that the Christus Victor model "is the crucial integrative hub of the atonement because it provides the canopy under which the other modes of the atonement gain their currency,"<sup>98</sup> fail to reckon with the fact that the Christus Victor model focuses more on the result of the atonement in terms of what is accomplished. Only satisfaction and substitution models focus on the actual act of the atonement and

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<sup>94</sup> "John Stott has identified 'six stages' in Christ's 'conquest' of Satan: '*the conquest predicted*' (Old Testament), '*the conquest begun* in the ministry of modern Jesus,' '*the conquest achieved* at the cross,' '*the conquest confirmed and announced*' in his resurrection, '*the conquest...extended*' with the church on mission 'in the power of the Spirit,' and '*the conquest consummated* at the Parousia' (second coming). Fourth, the two motifs bridge the chasm between the objective and the subjective theories. They are objective in that the atonement is not directed to humankind. They are subjective in affording believing human beings the opportunity to participate in Christ's victory over the powers." (Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, 2:53 [see "Introduction," n. 21]; see Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 227 [see chap. 3, n. 65]).

<sup>95</sup> E.g., Morris, *The Cross in the New Testament*, 397 (see chap. 3, n. 4).

<sup>96</sup> Treat speaks bluntly to the matter: "The problem with this historical summary, as heuristically convenient as it may be, is that it is simply not true" (Treat, *The Crucified King*, 178–79). Treat cites Sten Hidal, "En segrande Christus victor? Auléns analys av ett forsoningsmotiv i backspegeln," *Svensk teologisk kvartalskrift* 86 (2010): 171–76. See also Blocher, "Agnus Victor," 74–77; Timothy George, "The Atonement in Martin Luther's Theology," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Theological & Practical Perspectives*, ed. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 268; and McIntyre, *The Shape of Soteriology*, 43 (see "Introduction," n. 22).

<sup>97</sup> Crisp, "Methodological Issues in Approaching the Atonement," 319.

<sup>98</sup> Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 414.

how sin is dealt with. Others have critiqued the Christus Victor model for relying too heavily on Paul without giving due credence to Paul's other theological emphases concerning the atonement.<sup>99</sup> Vanhoozer thinks that Aulén was "right to focus on the theme of drama, but wrong in making victory the paramount motif to the exclusion of others. He is right to think of the atonement, with Irenaeus, in terms of the *recapitulatio*—Christ's restoring and perfecting creation—but wrong in thinking of recapitulation primarily as a victory over the hostile powers."<sup>100</sup>

Nevertheless, in spite of these shortcomings, the Christus Victor theory of atonement attempts to capture a vital aspect of the spiritual doctrine of atonement.

### *Penal Substitution*

Penal substitution is the atonement model advocated by the majority of evangelical Christians today and the model that best expresses the biblical data.<sup>101</sup> The key text that asserts penal substitution is Rom 3:21–26 (see previous discussion). Human sin is a violation of God's law and is an affront to a holy God. Sin incurs God's wrath, and God's justice demands that sin be punished. God's love for sinful humanity is the primary motivation for His provision of atonement as a means to reconcile fallen humanity with God. Love is endemic to God's nature. Wrath is a derivative

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<sup>99</sup> An excellent summary and critique of Aulén and another recent advocate of Christus Victor, Youssouf Dembélé, is Blocher, "Agnus Victor," 69–78. Blocher's critique of Daniel G. Reid's article "Triumph" (in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, IVP Bible Dictionary Series [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993], 946–54) may be found in "Agnus Victor," 87–88. See also Pugh, *Atonement Theories*, 10, 23–25, for a good summary of the Christus Victor model and brief critique.

<sup>100</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 388.

<sup>101</sup> For an excellent presentation and defense of penal substitution, see Stott, *The Cross of Christ*; and Jeffery, Ovey, and Sach, *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (see chap. 2, n. 5). For bibliography on recent work on penal substitution, see Johnson, *Atonement: A Guide for the Perplexed*, 110; Donald MacLeod, *Christ Crucified: Understanding the Atonement* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014). John E. Hare has defended the penal substitutionary view of the atonement in *The Moral Gap: Kantian Ethics, Human Limits, and God's Assistance*, Oxford Studies in Theological Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 243–58; and Hare, "Moral Faith and Atonement" (lecture, Wheaton Philosophy Conference, Wheaton, IL, 1996).

aspect of God's nature brought about as a result of sin—it is His holy love in response to sin. Love precedes wrath.<sup>102</sup> The love of God is center stage when it comes to the atonement, as John 3:16 demonstrates. Penal substitution should focus first and foremost on the love of God. Christ stands in the sinner's place as a vicarious substitution. The sins of humanity are imputed to Christ, and He bears them as our substitutionary sacrifice. In the atonement, the wrath of God is propitiated and sins are expiated. God is objectively reconciled to the world by means of this atonement (2 Cor 5:18–21). Subjective reconciliation between God and individuals occurs when one repents of sin and believes in Christ for salvation. God applies the atonement to all who meet His condition of salvation: repentance and faith.

### Summary of Contemporary Scholarship on Atonement

Kevin Vanhoozer's chapter in *Mapping Modern Theology* offers a very helpful summary of atonement studies and trajectories in recent years.<sup>103</sup> I will summarize his overview.

One development is the move to consider the political ramifications of the atonement. Theodore Jennings proposed a political theology of the cross.<sup>104</sup> The cross is not so much focused on the individual but outwardly in the public square. Jennings's approach is actually not new, and Vanhoozer has offered this critique: "Jennings's turn to the (inter)subjective, like that of the other theologians here treated, assumes that the problem to be overcome through the cross is our enmity toward God, not God's toward us. In so doing, he confuses the underlying problem (alienation from God) with its outward symptom (broken political structure)."<sup>105</sup>

A second development in atonement theology concerns the rejection of substitution, especially penal substitution, preferring the concept of

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<sup>102</sup> As correctly noted by Lane, "The Wrath of God," 146–47 (see chap. 1, n. 5). As Pendleton notes, "There is a vast difference between *vindictive* and *vindicative* [wrath]" (Pendleton, *Christian Doctrines*, 235; emphasis original [see chap. 1, n. 4]).

<sup>103</sup> Vanhoozer, "Atonement," 175–202.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas W. Jennings Jr., *Transforming Atonement: A Political Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009).

<sup>105</sup> Vanhoozer, "Atonement," 180.

*representation*, which includes, even focuses on, the life of Christ more so than His cross. “It is not that Jesus suffers so much as acts in our place: he is our representative, not our substitute. It is not only his death but also his entire incarnate life that is ultimately of saving significance.”<sup>106</sup> This can be seen in T. F. Torrance’s approach to the incarnation as intrinsically redemptive and Scot McKnight’s “identification for incorporation.”<sup>107</sup> Of course, the operative question here is what must one do in order to participate in the identification.<sup>108</sup>

A third development in atonement theology rejects three major biblical concepts concerning the cross of Christ: sacrifice, satisfaction, and substitution. These are rejected as notions of “violence” and are simply not necessary conditions for the reconciliation of humanity with God. Proponents, building on René Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred* (1977), along with his *The Scapegoat* (1986), reject the traditional understanding of the atonement as fostering slavery, subordination of women, racism, sexism, imperialism, and other forms of social injustice.<sup>109</sup>

A fourth trajectory in atonement studies recapitulates the patristic Christ Victor model as propounded by Aulén but juxtaposes the emphasis on non-violence in the atonement with Christ’s victory over cultural powers rather than cosmic powers.<sup>110</sup> The cross, coupled with the life of

<sup>106</sup> Vanhoozer, 181.

<sup>107</sup> Vanhoozer, 183. “The hypostatic union (i.e., incarnation) is thus a reconciling union (i.e., atonement).” Then Vanhoozer quotes from Torrance: “[T]he incarnation and the atonement [must] . . . be thought together in terms of their intrinsic coherence in the divine-human Person of the Mediator—the incarnation [is] . . . seen to be essentially redemptive and redemption [is] . . . seen to be inherently incarnational or ontological. Union with God in and through Jesus Christ who is of one and the same being with God belongs to the inner heart of the atonement” (T. F. Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Faith*, 2nd ed. [New York: T&T Clark, 1997], 159). Vanhoozer then concludes, “In sum: the incarnation or hypostatic union *is* the actuality of atonement” (Vanhoozer, 183–84; emphasis original).

<sup>108</sup> Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” 185.

<sup>109</sup> Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” 186. For relevant examples, consult pp. 186–87. René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

<sup>110</sup> Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” 189–91. E.g., J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

Jesus and His resurrection, overcomes all oppressive systems of social injustice.

A fifth trajectory views the atonement as something that somehow affects the Godhead internally rather than externally affecting humanity. “While the various theologians treated under this heading agree that atonement is a moment in God’s triune being, they differ with respect to their understandings of the divine ontology, especially as concerns (1) the God-world relationship and (2) the relationship of the economic and immanent Trinity.”<sup>111</sup>

There are several problems here. First, how can the cross somehow “determine” the being of God? The cross is an expression of His nature, not something that somehow determines God’s being. Second, human response to the gospel would seem to be rendered non-essential. Third, atonement would then somehow be the means to a universal salvation. Defenders respond that God’s grace does not negate human responsibility but becomes the motivation for humans to live out subjectively what they now are objectively in their relationship to Christ.<sup>112</sup> The salvific condition of those who fail so to live out who they are objectively in Christ by virtue of the atonement is left unspecified.

The sixth trajectory, according to Vanhoozer, is that of penal substitution as articulated by the Princetonian theologian Charles Hodge, along with others, from the mid-nineteenth century until the present.<sup>113</sup> We have already seen that penal substitution did not originate at this point, but rather had been around since the early church fathers. However, it was revived in the nineteenth century by many evangelicals, especially within the Reformed tradition. Jesus, in His death on the cross, bore the sins of all humanity (in the case of theologians like John Stott), or the elect only (in the case of theologians like J. I. Packer). Jesus bore God’s condemnation of our sin (penal) in our place (substitution). While defenders of penal substitution affirmed divine justice and human guilt, it should be noted that they have also included God’s love as a motivating factor for the atonement, though they are often accused of ignoring or sidelining this aspect of

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<sup>111</sup> Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” 192.

<sup>112</sup> Vanhoozer, 196.

<sup>113</sup> Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” 197.

the atonement. Debates over penal substitution have continued with some escalation into the twenty-first century.<sup>114</sup>

The final trajectory, according to Vanhoozer, seeks for a unified theory of the atonement that allows room for all that is valid in the various theories throughout church history, but “focuses on Jesus’s work as mediator of a new covenant in an explicitly Trinitarian framework.”<sup>115</sup> In this approach, the various theories of atonement are not mutually exclusive but mutually supportive.

One recent important work attempts to wed the *Christus Victor* model with that of penal substitution: Jeremy Treat, *The Crucified King: Atonement and Kingdom in Biblical and Systematic Theology*. “Rejecting ‘*Christus Victor* versus penal substitution’ and not settling for ‘*Christus Victor* and penal substitution,’ I propose ‘*Christus Victor* through penal

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<sup>114</sup> It is not my intention to address the New Perspective on Paul and the debates over transformationist and relational soteriologies. These issues are less concerned directly with atonement and more concerned with how justification is achieved and what exactly it means. See also N. T. Wright, “Redemption from the New Perspective: Towards a Multi-Layered Pauline Theology of the Cross,” in *The Redemption: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on Christ as Redeemer*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O’Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 69–100. Many scholars today use the plural form “New Perspectives” or “the New Perspective(s)” instead of the singular form with the definite article—“the New Perspective”—because there is no unified perspective even within the guild of the New Perspective on Paul.

For those who criticize or outright reject penal substitution, see Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); John Goldingay, ed., *Atonement Today* (London: SPCK, 1995); Winter, *The Atonement* (see chap. 7, n. 21); Green and Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross* (see “Introduction,” n. 26); Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*; Stephen Finlan, *Problems with Atonement: The Origins of, and Controversy about, the Atonement Doctrine* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005); Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); and some contributors to Tidball, Hilborn, and Thacker, eds., *The Atonement Debate* (see chap. 7, n. 1). For an overview of critiques of penal substitution through 2007, see Michael Hardin, “Out of the Fog: New Horizons for Atonement Theory,” in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, ed. Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 54–77. Schmiechen is typical of many today in that, after surveying all the theories of the atonement, the theory that receives the most criticism is penal substitution, especially its presentation by Charles Hodge. But Schmiechen, along with most detractors of penal substitution, does not present the view in its full historical or biblical context; rather, he focuses more on wrath and transference and less on love and the true nature of imputation of sin to Christ.

<sup>115</sup> Vanhoozer, “Atonement,” 199. E.g., Sherman, *King, Priest, and Prophet* (see “Introduction,” n. 37).



substitution.”<sup>116</sup> Treat correctly noted that both theories present aspects of the problem that are clearly taught in Scripture. “Ephesians 2:2–3 brings both aspects together (amidst even more aspects of sin), describing humans as both ‘following the prince of the power of the air’ and ‘by nature children of wrath.’”<sup>117</sup> Treat properly notes that bondage to Satan is the result of our sin, which has given rise to the wrath of God. “Conceptually, penal substitution addresses the ‘how’ of the atonement and *Christus Victor* addresses its effects on Satan, demons, and death—both within the broader aim of reconciliation for the glory of God.”<sup>118</sup>

### Summary of Atonement Theories

Until the late nineteenth century, most Protestants held to something akin to the Governmental, Satisfaction, or Penal Substitution views of the atonement. Until the mid-twentieth century, most Catholics did as well. However, today most Catholics and liberal Protestants reject the Penal Substitution theory. In the late twentieth century, some Evangelicals began to question and even outright reject Penal Substitution as well.

From the perspective of historical theology, theologians tended to move in one of three general directions with respect to the atonement in terms of the terminating focus of the cross: (1) Satan, (2) man, (3) God. The first approach (Ransom theory) is almost universally rejected today.<sup>119</sup> The second is a partial truth but does not and cannot tell the whole story. As Alister McGrath declares, “It cannot be stated too forcefully that the subjective, moral, exemplarist, views of the atonement which rob Christ’s cross of its objective accomplishment should be seen for what they are: radical perversions of Christianity.”<sup>120</sup> The third approach enjoys the most biblical support but can be carried to unhealthy extremes. Most of the

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<sup>116</sup> Treat, *The Crucified King*, 193.

<sup>117</sup> Treat, 196.

<sup>118</sup> Treat, 223.

<sup>119</sup> But see Adam Kotsko, “The Persistence of the Ransom Theory of the Atonement,” in *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement*, ed. Adam J. Johnson (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 277–93.

<sup>120</sup> So noted by Alister E. McGrath, *The Mystery of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 98.

atonement theories contain some measure of truth. The problem is their incompleteness; it is not what they assert about the atonement that is sometimes problematic; it is what is left unsaid.

Geisler helpfully summarizes all the views throughout church history with respect to their singular emphasis:

The *recapitulation* view stresses God's omnipotence as He defeats Satan and reverses the effects of the Fall. The *ransom* view emphasizes God's wisdom as He out-strategizes Satan through the Cross, where Satan bites on the bait of Christ's humanity and gets caught on the hook of Christ's deity. The *moral-example* view focuses on God's love, revealed in Christ's self-sacrificial and exemplary love for us. The *optional-satisfaction* view showcases God's mercy in rescuing sinners and restoring them to Himself. The *necessary-satisfaction* view demonstrates the majesty of God, whose honor is violated and who must be appeased by His Son's death for us. The *substitution* view stresses God's justice, which must be satisfied to release His mercy on sinners. The *moral-influence* view demonstrates the motivating power of God's love in Christ's redemptive acts on our behalf. The *governmental* view is based on God's sovereignty, since, as King, He must keep the moral order of the universe. Finally, the *mystical* view zeroes in on that mysterious oneness between Christ and His church, which is based on God's attribute of unity.<sup>121</sup>

With respect to the diversity of views on the atonement and the possibility of gaining consensus, William Adams Brown accurately expressed it over a hundred years ago:

Whether we consider the Atonement from the point of view of its nature, its object, its necessity, or the means by which it is made practically effective in men's lives, we find differences of view so striking as to make any attempt at harmony seem hopeless. The atoning character of Christ's death is now found in its penal

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<sup>121</sup> Geisler, *Sin, Salvation*, 218.

quality as suffering, now in its ethical character as obedience. It is represented now as a ransom to redeem men from Satan, now as a satisfaction due to the honour of God, now as a penalty demanded by His justice. Its necessity is grounded now in the nature of things, and, again, is explained as the result of an arrangement due to God's mere good pleasure or answering His sense of fitness. The means by which its benefits are mediated to men are sometimes mystically conceived, as in the Greek theology of the Sacrament; sometimes legally, as in the Protestant formula of imputation; and, still again, morally and spiritually, as in the more personal theories of recent Protestantism.<sup>122</sup>

Sometimes discussions of the atonement are limited specifically to what occurred on the cross. While the atonement proper is best discussed initially in this fashion, Scripture does not stop there. William J. Wolf correctly points out: "The basic trouble with many theories of atonement is that they describe the breakdown in the personal relationship between God and man as though the secondary and derived level of law and responsibility were the total problem to be faced."<sup>123</sup> Of course, it does not stop here. Once sin is dealt with, God desires restored relationship followed by ongoing fellowship and obedience.

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<sup>122</sup> Brown, "Expiation and Atonement (Christian)," 5:650.

<sup>123</sup> William J. Wolf, *No Cross, No Crown: A Study of the Atonement* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1957), 188.



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## Conclusion

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To speak of the atonement irrespective of its application—that is, what it is in itself and what it accomplished—the following points are affirmed in Scripture:

1. The atonement is a completed act by God through Christ whereby Christ died for the sins of all human<sup>1</sup> sinners, past, present, and future.<sup>2</sup>
2. The purpose of the atonement was to provide a means of reconciliation between God and humanity and to reconcile all sinners who meet God’s condition of salvation: faith in Christ.
3. The motivating factor for God’s provision of the atonement is the trinitarian love for sinful humanity.
4. The atonement, in terms of its nature, was sacrificial, vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory, expiatory, and accomplished objective reconciliation between God and sinful humanity.
5. The atonement was of such nature that all the sins of humanity were imputed to Christ, which He bore when He died on the cross, making a complete satisfaction for sin.

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<sup>1</sup> I include the modifier “human” here to make clear that the atonement does not cover the sins of Satan and fallen angels.

<sup>2</sup> It would be difficult to put it any better than did Karl Barth: “The passion of Jesus Christ is the judgement of God in which the Judge Himself was the judged. And as such it is at its heart and center the victory which has been won for us, in our place, in the battle against sin. By this time it should be clear why it is so important to understand this passion as from the very first the divine action. . . . the radical divine action which attacks and destroys at its very root the primary evil in the world; the activity of the second Adam who took the place of the first, who reversed and overthrew the activity of the first in this place, and in so doing brought in a new man, founded a new world and inaugurated a new aeon” (Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, vol. 4.1 of *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956], 254).

6. The atonement was an objectively sufficient payment for sin and satisfied the just demands of the law. All legal barriers between God and humanity are removed by the atonement such that, on the just grounds of the atonement, God can save anyone who meets His condition of salvation.
7. The atonement itself justifies no one. Justification is by faith in Christ. It is imperative to distinguish between atonement accomplished and atonement applied. People are not saved by atonement; they are saved through faith in Christ on the grounds of a final, all-sufficient, atonement for the sins of the world.

Concerning the application of the atonement, God has annexed one condition upon which the atonement will be efficaciously applied to the sinner: faith in Christ. The atonement is not applied in eternity or at the cross. It is only applied in history when a sinner repents of sin and places faith in Christ.

The biblical data point to the atonement as a penal substitutionary sacrifice. It is difficult to understand why this concept would be totally repudiated by so many today. Indeed, the potent comments of Lutheran systematic theologian Francis Pieper are apropos:

It has been charged, particularly in our day, that this entire conception of God's having reconciled man with Himself by Christ's vicarious satisfaction is altogether too "juridical" and lacks "ethical" value. Answer: Your quarrel is with Scripture. Scripture demonstrates that the process of reconciling the world is in all its factors juridical. The Law of God requires of man a perfect obedience (Matt. 22:37 ff.). This is juridical. The Law pronounces the curse upon the transgressor (Gal. 3:10). This verdict is juridical. Christ, who is above the Law (Matt. 12:8), is placed under the Law (Gal. 4:4-5). This is a purely juridical procedure imputing human guilt and punishment to Jesus, making Him to be sin for us who in His own Person knew no sin (2 Cor. 5:21), God proceeded in a purely juridical manner. It is juridical throughout to exact the penalty from Christ, who had not deserved punishment, but suffered it, "the Just for the unjust" (1 Pet. 3:18). It is juridical

throughout, a pure *actus forensic*, when God no longer charges men with their sins (“not imputing their trespasses unto them,” 2 Cor. 5:19), but on account of Christ’s righteousness pronounces all men justified (Rom. 5:18). Furthermore, “the Word of Reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19), which proclaims the accomplished reconciliation, brings the grace of God, the forgiveness of sins, to all nations (Luke 24:47), and asks nothing of man but to accept it by faith, is not this message juridical? And it is because of the Gospel’s juridical character, offering grace, or the forgiveness of sins, that it creates faith in man (Rom. 10:17), by which alone (*sola fide*) man is subjectively justified before God, though he is without any righteousness of his own (Phil. 3:9).<sup>3</sup>

Several factors help explain why so many today are opposed to penal substitution. First, the biblical concept of sin is simply downplayed or denied. Sin is not taken seriously enough. The sin gulf that exists between God and humanity “is the *terminus ad quo* from which alone one may view the reconciling event of the cross.”<sup>4</sup> Second, some simply cannot imagine a perfect being who is both love and wrath and who expresses both in a perfectly consistent manner. Third, some simply have a weak view of biblical authority and are willing to deny that which is clearly taught in Scripture. Fourth, some simply privilege cultural mores over Scripture. Fifth, some fail to understand how imputation works in that Christ can be the sin-bearer for sinful human beings without literalistic transfer notions of the imputation of sin to Christ.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 2:354–55 (see chap. 3, n. 87). Pieper has misspoken when he says “on account of Christ’s righteousness pronounces all men justified.” He mistakenly equates objective reconciliation with universal justification. Only those who believe are actually justified. I suspect this is what Pieper actually means in spite of his poor choice of words.

<sup>4</sup> Thielicke, *The Doctrine of God and of Christ*, 2:390 (see chap. 3, n. 122).

<sup>5</sup> The wise words of Pannenberg with respect to the distance between the biblical witness concerning atonement and modern culture are worth repeating: “The fact that a later age may find it hard to understand traditional ideas is not a sufficient reason for replacing them. It simply shows how necessary it is to open up these ideas to later generations by interpretation, and thus keep their meaning alive. The problems that people have with ideas like expiation and representation (or substitution) in our secularized age rest less on any lack of forcefulness in the traditional terms than on the fact that those who are competent to

Proponents of penal substitution may occasionally valorize the biblical concept in an unhealthy way that lacks proper nuance and inclusion of the full-orbed biblical picture of atonement. This should be corrected and has, in fact, been corrected. As Rutledge cogently notes, rethinking substitutionary atonement does not mean eliminating it.<sup>6</sup> However, many of the critics of penal substitution prefer to simply vaporize it. In doing so, they are forced to ignore or reinterpret Scripture.

While giving the Christus Victor model its due, it must be stated that contemporary approaches to Christus Victor that want to denigrate or deny substitution and penal substitution are simply inadequate in their treatment of Scripture. Rutledge states,

It seems likely that the current popularity of the *Christus Victor* model in its most stripped-down form is based on a belief that it offers, in place of Sin, a more palatable view of Evil (and/or Death) as an impersonal force threatening humanity. This move is not only biblically impossible but also pastorally irresponsible, since it encourages people to live in denial about humanity's responsibility concerning the origins of Sin. It is not just a matter of being rescued from impersonal forces; it is Sin that has unleashed these forces. While it is essential to affirm the strength of the *Christus Victor* model in its depiction of Powers with an identity and existence of their own, it is equally necessary to understand that we humans are *accountable for* all these evils even as we are *held prisoner by* them.<sup>7</sup>

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interpret them do not explain their context with sufficient forcefulness or clarity" (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 2:422).

<sup>6</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 506 (see "Introduction," n. 41). In the same vein, Anthony Thiselton concurs: "... the *cross* and *crucifixion* belong to the conceptual domain of punishment for crimes. The antipathy toward using *penal* is understandable if or when this one aspect is overpressed, as if no other concept qualified it. Equally the term *penal substitution* becomes misleading if it is abstracted from its proper hermeneutical horizon of divine *grace* as an overarching understanding" (Thiselton, *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, 334; emphasis original [see chap. 1, n. 22]).

<sup>7</sup> Rutledge, *The Crucifixion*, 522; emphasis original. Rutledge wants to lock together substitution with the Christus Victor model so that the way in which Christ became the victor was through substitution (Rutledge, 531).



Rutledge summarizes the atonement, its substitutionary nature, and its connection to the preaching of the gospel: The theme of substitution properly arises out of the biblical narrative and is best understood as an underlying motif supporting the other themes, not in isolation from the overall biblical narrative or in competition with other motifs. Substitution is more closely linked with the virtually ubiquitous biblical teaching about God's judgment upon sin. Substitution lends itself most particularly to the proclamation of the justification of the ungodly.<sup>8</sup>

Almost 100 years ago, J. Gresham Machen ruffled not a few feathers when he mounted a strong defense of penal substitutionary atonement by arguing that failure to affirm penal substitution by substituting something else in its place was tantamount to a different religion from Christianity.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus died for the sins of the world, the whole world, every human being in the world, and therefore He died for me. That is the infallible conclusion every sinner can draw from Scripture and the true preaching of the gospel. Because Christ died for the sins of the whole world, He therefore died for me, though my name is not in the Bible. I can be assured of the truth that God gave Christ to die for my sins, inasmuch as He gave Christ to die for all. "It is enough that Jesus died; and that he died for me."<sup>10</sup>

In the cross and resurrection of Jesus we have God's great "Not Guilty!" overturning humanity's verdict "Crucify him!"

When I survey the wondrous cross  
On which the Prince of glory died,  
My richest gain I count but loss,  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,  
Save in the cross of Christ, my God;  
All the vain things that charm me most,  
I sacrifice them to his blood.

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<sup>8</sup> Rutledge, 533–34.

<sup>9</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923; reprint 2001, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 117.

<sup>10</sup> Eliza Hewitt, "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place" (1891).

See, from his head, his hands, his feet  
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!  
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet?  
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That were an offering far too small;  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my soul, my life, my all.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Isaac Watts, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (1707).

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## *Appendix*

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**A**t the 2017 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, the following resolution on penal substitution was passed by a near unanimous vote.<sup>1</sup>

### **ON THE NECESSITY OF PENAL SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT**

WHEREAS, In recent days numerous voices from the Protestant world have boldly attacked the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement; and

WHEREAS, These voices have publicly labeled penal substitution “monstrous,” “evil,” “a terrible doctrine,” and indicative of “the Father murdering a son”; and

WHEREAS, The “anti-violence” model of the cross of Christ weakens the Bible’s teaching by recasting the atonement as a basis for pacifism (in contradiction of Romans 13:4); and

WHEREAS, God is perfect in His holiness (Isaiah 6:3) and perfect in His justice (Deuteronomy 32:4), as He is also perfect in His love (1 John 4:8); and

WHEREAS, On the cross of Christ Jesus the perfect love of God perfectly applies the perfect justice of God to satisfy the perfect holiness of God in order to redeem sinners (Romans 3:26); and

WHEREAS, The denial of penal substitutionary atonement in effect denies the holy and loving God the exercise of His justice, the overflow of which in a sinful world is the outpouring of His just retributive wrath; and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2278/on-the-necessity-of-penal-substitutionary-atonement>, accessed August 14, 2018.

WHEREAS, The denial of penal substitutionary atonement thus displays in effect the denial of the perfect character of the one true God; and

WHEREAS, The denial of penal substitutionary atonement constitutes false teaching that leads the flock astray (Acts 20:28) and leaves the world without a message of a sin-cleansing Savior (Romans 5:6–11); and

WHEREAS, The denial of penal substitutionary atonement necessarily compromises the biblical and historical doctrines of propitiation, expiation, ransom, satisfaction, Christus Victor, Christus Exemplar, and more; and

WHEREAS, The Lord promised a warrior-savior who would crush the head of the serpent to obliterate the enemy (Genesis 3:15; Romans 16:20; Revelation 19:11–16); and

WHEREAS, “The sacrificial system” of the Old Testament culminated in the blood sacrifice of a spotless lamb on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:11–19); and

WHEREAS, Jesus Himself unveiled the salvific mission that necessitated His incarnation (Hebrews 2:17) when He said, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28); and

WHEREAS, The confession of the Scriptures is that Christ is our passive and active righteousness, forgiving all our sin by His death and imputing to us all His righteousness through faith (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9); and

WHEREAS, An apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ called the shed blood of the Savior “precious” (1 Peter 1:19); and

WHEREAS, The Bible teaches that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” of sin (Hebrews 9:22); and

WHEREAS, Baptist pastor-theologians and scholars with differing soteriological convictions have made the preaching of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ the foundation of their ministry, heralding the Good News all over this world; and

WHEREAS, Countless missionaries and martyrs of the Christian faith have laid down their lives in order to tell fellow sinners about the death of Christ for the wicked, thus obeying the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16–20); and

WHEREAS, Baptists preach the cross of Christ, sing about the cross, cling to the cross, share the cross, love the cross, and take up their own crosses to follow their Lord, even as the world despises His cross and the proclaimers of His cross; and

WHEREAS, The Baptist Faith & Message was revised in 2000, incorporating for the first time the language of substitution to make plain what evangelical Baptists have long since preached and believed; and

WHEREAS, Around the throne of God into all eternity, the redeemed from every tribe, tongue, ethnicity, and nation will cry out, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain . . . !” (Revelation 5:12, ESV); now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, June 13–14, 2017, reaffirm the truthfulness, efficacy, and beauty of the biblical doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement as the burning core of the Gospel message and the only hope of a fallen race.



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