

Atonement– Accomplished at the Cross
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for

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What really happened at the cross? Was the cross absolutely necessary? Questions like these have been widely debated under the topic of the atonement. An additional issue has to do with the meaning of the word atonement. Does the term refer only to the cross or are there broader and more extensive meanings in relation to work of Christ both before and after the cross?¹ The purpose of this chapter is to focus on what the Bible has to say about atonement at the cross while acknowledging the broader significance of the term. To get a full picture we need

¹English dictionaries do feature both meanings of the word, it is not an either/or situation among the major linguists. For example, *Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language* (edited by William Allan Nelson, second edition, unabridged [Springfield, MA: Merriam, 1960], 176) notes under theological meanings both “the saving or redeeming work of Christ wrought through his incarnation, sufferings and death,” and “reconciliation between God and men, esp. as effected by Christ.” The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (edited by William Morriss [New York: American Heritage Publishing, 1970], 84) also gives two theological meanings: 1) “redemptive life and death of Christ,” and 2) “reconciliation of God and man as brought about by Christ.” Joel Green agrees with this assessment of the biblical materials in saying, “In doctrinal statements in the Christian tradition, (atonement) typically denotes Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. . . . In the biblical materials, however, the concept of “atonement” refers more broadly to various means by which particular persons (or humanity) are restored to right relationship with God.” See Joel B. Green, “Atonement,” in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, volume one of five volumes, edited by Katharine

to begin with the English word “atonement.”

The English Word *Atonement*

The English word “atonement” does not originate in ancient or biblical languages as many other theological words do. It is a compound word constructed from English components.² It seems to have originated early in the 16th Century with the word “onement,” then came “at onement,” and by the end of the century appeared the full form as we know it, “atonement.”³

The closest root meaning is “reconciliation”⁴ with an extended meaning in English of “propitiation, expiation.”⁵ Elaborations of the root meaning include “restoration of friendly relations,” “the state or act of bringing into concord,”⁶ “the condition of being at one with others,” “the action of setting at one after discord or strife,”⁷ and/or “amends or reparation made for an injury or wrong.”⁸ To “atone for” wrong is to take an action that cancels out the ill effects

Dook Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 344-345.

²Raoul Dederen, “Christ: His Person and Work,” *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series, volume 12, edited by Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 173; C. L. Mitten, “Atonement,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, 4 volumes, edited by George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 1: 309.

³*The Oxford English Dictionary*, edited by James A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie and C. T. Onions, 12 volumes (London: Oxford University Press, 1933, 1961 reprint), 1: 539; Green, *NIDB*, 344.

⁴Dederen, 173; Mitton, *IDB*, 309; W. S. Reid, “Atone, Atonement,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, fully revised in four volumes, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 1: 352; *SDABD*, 74; Clark M. Williamson, “Atonement Theologies and the Cross,” *Encounter* 71:1 (Winter 2010): 2.

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

⁶Green, *NIDB*, 344-345; *Webster’s New International Dictionary*, 176.

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

⁸*The American Heritage Dictionary*, 84.

of alienation and restores harmonious relationship.⁹

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

It is clear from the major English dictionaries that linguists see a two-fold application of the word atonement in the arena of theology. On the one hand, atonement refers to the redeeming work of Christ achieved by His life, suffering and death.¹¹ But the word atonement is also recognized to apply to the outcome of the cross in effecting reconciliation between God and the human race.¹² So it is not an either/or situation in terms of the English word. Atonement occurs both at the cross and in the application of what the cross achieved.

Greek and Hebrew Words Translated *Atonement*

In the King James Version of the English Bible the word “atonement” occurs 81 times in

⁹Dederen, 173.

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

¹¹Gabriel Fackre, “A Theology of the Cross,” *Andover Newton Quarterly* 16:2 (November 1975): 147; *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1: 539; *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 84.

¹²*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1: 539; *The American Heritage Dictionary*, 84.

the Old Testament¹³ and only one time in the New.¹⁴ Of the 81 occurrences in the Old Testament 77 are clustered in the section of the Pentateuch that focuses primarily on the regulations for the Hebrew tabernacle.¹⁵ All of them belong to the *kpr* Hebrew word group.¹⁶ Fifteen of the occurrences are in Leviticus 16, which describes the services on the Day of Atonement.

The root meaning of *kpr* in the Hebrew is to cover (as in cover one's face) or cover up (trouble or sin).¹⁷ It has the extended meaning of making amends, and providing reconciliation, expiation, cleansing and atonement.¹⁸ An expanded noun form of *kpr* is *kapporeth*, which is used 23 times for the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant.¹⁹ The Ark, of course, played a central role in the services on the Day of Atonement.

When you look at the context in which these words for atonement are found you find

¹³11x in Exodus, 49x in Leviticus, 17x in Numbers, 2 Sam 21:3, 1 Chr 6:49, 2 Chr 29:24, and Neh 10:33.

¹⁴Romans 5:11. Cf. Mitton, *IDB*, 310.

¹⁵From the second half of Exodus through the book of Numbers.

¹⁶The noun form *kippur* and the verb form *kaphar*. The noun form *kippur* occurs nine times and the verb form *kaphar* occurs 72 times.

¹⁷William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament: Based upon the Lexical Work of Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971), 163. Some scholars suggest a related meaning, to “wipe or rub.” See ; Green, *NIDB*, 345; Mitton, *IDB*, 310; *SDABD*, 74; Christopher J. H. Wright, “Atonement in the Old Testament,” in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 75-76.

¹⁸Holladay, 163. See also G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic Press, 2011), 487-488.

¹⁹Another related word, *kôpher*, implies ransom or redemption. See Henri Blocher, “Biblical Metaphors and the Doctrine of the Atonement,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47:4 [December 2004]:644.

some interesting things.²⁰ The passage that seems to most clearly define atonement is Leviticus 17:11.²¹ This passage could easily leave the impression that “atonement” in every case is focused solely on blood and its manipulation.²² And this is certainly true of the Day of Atonement, in which the blood of a bull (Lev 16:14) and a goat (Lev 16:15) is applied in front of the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies and also on the horns of the altar in the Holy Place (16:18-19), thus making atonement for the Most Holy Place (16:16) and the whole assembly of Israel (16:17).²³ But the larger picture of the word group’s usage in the Old Testament requires us to qualify this impression. Atonement in the Old Testament is not always made by sacrifice and application of blood, but can be granted on the basis of a number of other actions as well.²⁴

²⁰In order to be able to weigh all the evidence carefully, I felt it would be important to examine every instance in which the Hebrew words underlying the English word “atonement” occurred and each in its larger context. The categorizations of this evidence are my own and can certainly be disputed, but I think the larger picture is reasonably clear and not affected by the fine points of these categorizations.

²¹Terry Briley, “The Old Testament ‘Sin Offering’ and Christ’s Atonement,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 3 (Spring 2000): 97-100; Samuel J. Mikolaski, “The Cross of Christ: The Atonement and Men Today,” *Christianity Today*, March 13, 1961, 3-4; Leon Morris, *The Atonement: Its Meaning and Significance* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 53. “For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it *is* the blood *that* maketh an atonement for the soul

(νp , $\text{N} < \text{ï} \text{B} ;$.)” Lev 17:11, KJV. The serious importance of blood in atonement is underlined further in Leviticus 10:16-20, where Moses chides the sons of Aaron for burning the sin offering rather than bringing its blood into the sanctuary.

²²Sacrificial atonement was not limited to lambs (Lev 4:35; 5:6, etc.) and bulls (Lev 1:3-9; 16:6, 11, 17, etc.) but in various cases utilized goats (Lev 5:1-6; 16:10, etc.), rams (Lev 5:14-19; 6:1-7, etc.), turtledoves (Lev 5:7-10; 15:13-16, etc.), unspecified small birds (Lev 14:48-53) and pigeons (Num 6:9-12) as well.

²³See the discussion in Beale, *NT Theology*, 487.

²⁴Green, *NIDB*, 345; Mitton, *IDB*, 310. There are multiple passages in which there is an absence of blood and sacrifice and the atonement is granted on other grounds. Atonement can be granted on the basis of application of oil (Lev 14:29), burning flour (Lev 5:11-13), burning

A number of Greek words are used to translate *kpr* in the Greek Old Testament (LXX). The most common translation is by the verb *exilaskomai* (evxila, skomai) and the noun *exilasmos* (evxilasmo, j). And the Hebrew word *kapporeth* (– mercy seat) is normally translated *hilasterion* (i`lasth, rion). On occasion, the LXX translates *kpr* with the Greek word *lutron* (lu, tron), which means ransom or redemption.²⁵ Since variations of these words are found in the New Testament, they will assist us in understanding how atonement occurred at the cross of Jesus Christ.²⁶

Atonement Language in the NT

In Romans 5:11 according to the King James Version of the New Testament atonement is clearly in the context of the cross:²⁷ “. . . We also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.” While the KJV wording (“we have now received”) can be read in terms of the ongoing process of intercession in the heavenly sanctuary, the aorist indicative form in the Greek (*elabomen*, evla, bomen) points to a singular conclusive action in

incense (Num 16:41-50), payment of money (Exod 30:11-16), execution (Num 25:1-13; 2 Sam 21:1-6), gifts of jewelry (Num 31:48-54), the release of a live animal (Lev 16:10) and simple appeals to God (Exod 32:30), through words. In the Psalms, sin is put right largely in the absence of sacrificial or atonement language. See Christopher J. H. Wright, 81-82. In the non-ritual texts of the Old Testament, the proper atonement for moral wrong doing is repentance. See J. Milgrom, “Atonement in the OT,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Supplementary Volume, edited by Keith Crim (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 80-81. Sacrifice can also be used for purposes other than atonement. See Blocher, 642.

²⁵Based on the “ransom/redemption” meaning of the related Hebrew word *kôpher*. See Milgrom, *IDB Supplement*, 80.

²⁶Mitton, *IDB*, 311.

²⁷Romans 5:1-10 is about the benefits that flow from justification and Romans 5:12-21 contains the famous Adam/Christ typology in which death and sin enter the human race through Adam and these are undone through the obedient life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

the past, at the cross of Christ,²⁸ the benefits of which are now (nun, nu/n) made available to those who are rejoicing (present continuous tense– *kauchômenoi*, καυχόμενοι) in Him. So a full picture of the atonement language in Scripture should warn us against an either/or approach.²⁹

It is interesting that the KJV translates only the noun form of the word for “atonement” (*katallagên*, καταλλαγῆν) as “atonement.” Verbs forms of the same word occur in verse 10 (*katallagên*, καταλλαγῆν– “were reconciled,” *katallagentes*, καταλλάγετε– “having been reconciled”) and are translated as “reconciled.”³⁰ So the King James translation actually masks the fact that “reconciled” in verse 10 is a different form of the same word as “atonement” in verse 11. The more modern translations, therefore, are correct in using the English term “reconciliation” instead of “atonement” in Romans 5:11. Furthermore, since the translators of the King James used “atonement” for the noun form but translated “reconciled” for the verb form, it is clear that they understood “atonement” as a synonym of “reconciliation.”

Extended Meaning of The Greek Word *katelassô*

The root meaning of the verb form *katelassô* is difficult to determine, but it has a basic

²⁸Beale, *New Testament Theology*, 541.

²⁹Romans 5:11 is at the heart and pivot of the whole chapter. See the analysis in Beale (*New Testament Theology*), 540-542. Romans 5:11 defines atonement as follows: Through the death of Christ people have been restored from a state of hostility into a peaceful relationship with God. This builds on verse one of the same chapter (NIV), where believers, “having been justified by faith. . . have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The hostile state of alienation from God introduced by the first Adam is overcome by the death and resurrection of the last Adam (Rom 5:12-21).

³⁰For those interested in such things, there are no differences in Romans 5:10-11 between the Byzantine text (upon which the King James Bible was based) and the scholarly text generally accepted today. So text critical issues do not impact the interpretation of these verses.

idea of “change” or “exchange.”³¹ From there it isn’t far to the idea of “reconcile,” as in “exchanging hostility for a friendly relationship.”³² When applied to God, the verb is always active, when applied to human beings it is always passive.³³ So reconciliation is something that flows from God to us, not the other way around. The noun form *katellagê* corresponds to the meaning of the verb, with the sense of “exchange” or “reconciliation.”³⁴ Surprisingly, both terms are extremely rare in the LXX (Greek Old Testament). Within the canonical books, *katellagê* is found only in Isa 9:5 and there its meaning is obscure.³⁵

Reconciliation in the New Testament

The Bible begins with the assumption that humans from the beginning were designed to be in harmonious relationship with God (Gen 1:26-28). But a radical breach has broken this unity (Gen 3:22-24; Isa 59:1-2 Rom 5:12; Eph 2:1).³⁶ So human beings are alienated from God (Eph 4:18), estranged and hostile to God and each other (Col 1:21; Rom 5:10; 8:7).³⁷ This is not only true of Gentiles (Rom 1:23ff.), but also of Jews (Rom 3:9-20, 23). The cause of this estrangement is human disobedience toward God and His law (1 John 3:4) arising out of a lack

³¹Friedrich Büchsel, a, lla. ssw, etc.” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel, translated and edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ten volumes (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 1: 254.

³²*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, third edition, revised and edited by Frederick Danker, based on Walter Bauer’s *Griechisch-deutsches Woerterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der fruehchristlichen Literature*, sixth edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 521.

³³Büchsel, *TDNT*, 1: 255.

³⁴Büchsel, *TDNT*, 1: 258. In the Bauer/Danker lexicon (521), *katellage* is defined as “reestablishment of an interrupted or broken relationship.”

³⁵Büchsel, *TDNT*, 1: 258.

³⁶Mark L. Y. Chan, “The Gospel and the Achievement of the Cross,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33 (1, 2009): 20; Reid, *ISBE*, 1: 353.

of trust (faith) in who He is (Rom 14:23).³⁸ This is where the concept of “reconciliation” comes in.

The concept of reconciliation is grounded in the realm of personal relationships, severed and restored.³⁹ In contexts where there is enmity, distrust or broken relationships of all types, reconciliation is about the healing and restoration of those relationships.⁴⁰ So atonement in the New Testament has to do with how the cross of Jesus Christ heals the breach between God and the human race. To gain a clearer understanding of this concept we will look briefly at the main texts where this word group is used, beginning with Romans 5:8-11.⁴¹

Paul declares in Romans 5:8 that the death of Christ, which occurred at a time when we were still sinners (before we turned to God), demonstrates God’s own love toward us.⁴² When the cross took place, we were not only sinners, but enemies of God (verse 10) and the death of God’s Son reconciled us to God. Sin was the root cause of the enmity, since humans were unable

³⁷Mitton, *IDB*, 311.

³⁸Dederen, 173-174.

³⁹I. Howard Marshall, “The Theology of the Atonement,” in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 60; Morris, *The Atonement*, 132-150; C. M. Tuckett, “Atonement in the NT,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, six volumes (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 1: 521.

⁴⁰Dederen, 181.

⁴¹Although Paul is the only writer of the New Testament who uses the terminology of reconciliation (Rom 5:8-11; 2 Cor 5:14-21; Eph 2:11-16; Col 1:20-23), it is central to his understanding of the cross and is implied in many other parts of the NT, such as Luke 15:11-31 and Matthew 5:23-24. A related concept is the word “peace,” which describes the outcome of the reconciliation process. Those in Christ have peace with God and also with others (Acts 10:36; Rom 5:1; 8:6; Gal 5:22; Eph 2:14-17; Col 1:20). See ; Green, *NIDB*, 346-347.

⁴²Green, *NIDB*, 347; Jewett, “Atonement,” *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, edited by Merrill C., Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 1: 410. This reconciling love was demonstrated at the cross, but goes all the way to eternity past (John

to remove it, God put it out of the way at the cross.⁴³ Paul's use of "were reconciled"⁴⁴ clearly places the reconciliation in the past rather than the present from the point of our experience. As a passive, the word also makes it clear that the reconciliation that took place on the cross was entirely God's work, we had no part in it.⁴⁵ It is objective, outside of us.

Paul reiterates his point in verse 11, but from the standpoint of the converted person rather than preconversion. Through our Lord Jesus Christ "we have now received the reconciliation (or atonement)." The "now" in verse 11 is in contrast with the time of the believer's enmity and sinfulness. Paul moves from the time of the cross (in verses 8 and 9) to the moment when that past act of atonement is applied to the new believer (verse 11). Reconciliation is something to be "received" (*elabômen, evla, bomen*), it exists objectively before we experience it, it is outside of and prior to our response.⁴⁶ Arising out of God's love, the cross was God's act of reconciliation and atonement which is applied to human beings through the preaching of the gospel.⁴⁷ While Jesus Christ is the active agent of reconciliation, the Father is its author.⁴⁸ "The grief of the Father is as important as the death of the Son."⁴⁹ The death of Christ,

17:6ff.; Eph 1:4; 2 Tim 1:9-10). See Reid, *ISBE*, 1:353.

⁴³Dederen, 181; I. Howard Marshall, "The Death of Jesus in Recent New Testament Study," *Word and World* 3:1 (Winter 1983): 18;

⁴⁴This translation of the aorist passive participle *katallage, ntej (katallagentes)* is standard, being found, for example, in the King James Version, the New International Version and the English Standard Version.

⁴⁵Dederen, 181.

⁴⁶Dederen, 181; Morris, *The Atonement*, 139.

⁴⁷Rohintan K. Mody, "Penal Substitutionary Atonement in Paul," in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 116.

⁴⁸Dederen, 181; Arland J. Hultgren, "Salvation: Its Forms and Dynamics in the New Testament," *Dialogue: A Journal of Theology* 45:3 (Fall 2006): 216, 221.

⁴⁹Fackre, 155, quoting Juergen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, translated by R. A. Wilson

then, somehow made it possible for a holy God to do for sinners what otherwise He could not have done.⁵⁰

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

He elaborates in verse 19. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. J. I. Packer expressed this beautifully: “The two loves, love of Father and Son, are one.”⁵¹ That reconciliation is grounded in “not reckoning to them their sins” (my translation). The message regarding that reconciliation is then committed or entrusted to “us.” This last point is elaborated in verse 20. Paul and the apostles have become God’s ambassadors to invite others to participate in that reconciliation.

The passage in 2 Corinthians 5 makes several critical points. First, it clearly distinguishes the work of Christ on the cross from the prior purpose of the Father to provide the reconciliation. Christ does not change the heart of the Father by the action he does at the cross, the Father

and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974), 243.

⁵⁰Dederen, 182.

⁵¹J. I. Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974): 40. Packer does not see any contradiction between the full, loving engagement of the Father in the atonement and the concept of penal substitution. To him, penal substitution heightens the love of God rather than diminishes it. The highest measure of divine love is seen in Jesus experiencing the full measure of the divine reaction against sin.

Himself was acting in our behalf through the work of Christ.⁵² Second, there is a “now and not yet” aspect to reconciliation.⁵³ It is a completed action at the cross, outside of us, once for all.⁵⁴ On the other hand, reconciliation is also a task humans are to do (verses 18-19), it has not yet happened in the fullest sense.⁵⁵ Reconciliation is only complete when humans beings respond to what God has already done.⁵⁶ Third, there is a strong sense of exchange or substitution in the passage. Through one death “all died” (5:14, NIV, NKJV), and the one who knew no sin was made sin so “that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (5:21, KJV).

In Colossians 1:19-22, the concept of reconciliation is expanded beyond the human race to the entire universe.⁵⁷ Christ is the image of the invisible God (Col 1:15), pre-eminent (1:18), and one in whom all the fullness of God dwells (19). Through Him everything in heaven and earth is reconciled,⁵⁸ making peace through the blood of the cross (20). What happened on the cross, therefore, provides atonement not just for the human race, but for the entire universe. In verse 21 Paul steps back and addresses the condition humanity was in before the cross. Human

⁵²This point is also made by Jesus in John 3:16 and 14:10. See Grace Adophsen Brame, “The Cross: Payment or Gift?” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33:2 (summer 2005): 170-172. In the New Testament, God and Jesus are always portrayed as the subject of the atonement, never as its object. If God were the object, Jesus would be giving up His life to appease God. If Jesus were the object, God would be punishing Jesus in His death. But the atonement is never expressed in the latter two ways. Green, *NIDB*, 346.

⁵³Dederen, 181.

⁵⁴Greek expresses this in the indicative mood combined with past tenses. Reconciliation is an established fact that cannot be altered.

⁵⁵In verse 20 this is expressed with an aorist imperative (*katallagête*, *katalla*, *ghte*), which means it does not fully happen until humans respond to what God has done. Reconciliation is not only an established fact, it is an invitation to human response.

⁵⁶Morris, *The Atonement*, 145.

⁵⁷Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 521.

⁵⁸Aorist infinitive (*apokatallaxai*, *avpokatalla*, *xai*), implying a point in time rather

beings were alienated (estranged), hostile (enemies) in mind and doing evil deeds. These very same people were reconciled⁵⁹ in the body of His flesh through death (22). The end result is human beings who are holy, blameless and unrepachable in God's sight.

The passage in Colossians 1 brings out a number of important things. The focus in this passage is not on the Father (as was the case in 2 Corinthians 5), but on Jesus Christ, who carries the fullness of God in Himself and thus is qualified to be the agent on God's side of the reconciliation process. The one-time death of Jesus Christ on the cross has reconciled (made atonement) to God not only the human race, but in some sense the entire universe. While not denying the biblical teaching about continuing atonement in the heavenly sanctuary, Paul is clear in this passage that the decisive act of atonement occurred on the cross. And atonement does not end at the cross, but results in transformed lives.

The final text that centers on the language of reconciliation is Ephesians 2:11-16. The focus there is not on God's side in the atonement, but on its impact on humanity.⁶⁰ The condition before conversion of the Gentiles Paul was writing to is described in verse 12 (ESV) as "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." But "now" (2:13) in Christ, those who were afar "have been brought near"⁶¹ through the blood of Christ, a reference to the cross.⁶² In the flesh of Christ on the cross (2:14), He brought an end to the hostility

than a process.

⁵⁹Aorist indicative (*apokatêllaxen*, *avpokath, llaxen*), a point in past time, in context clearly a reference to Christ's death on the cross.

⁶⁰Dederen, 182; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 521.

⁶¹Aorist passive indicative (*egenêthête*, *evgenh, qhte*), implying a one-time act in the past that the Ephesians had nothing to do with, but that had a powerful effect on their lives.

⁶²Arland J. Hultgren, "Salvation: Its Forms and Dynamics in the New Testament,"

(enmity) between God and humanity and also the “dividing wall” (2:14, ESV) between humans. Through Christ Gentile and Jew have become one. Christ acted on the cross as He did in order that He “might reconcile”⁶³ both Jew and Gentile to God and to each other (16). The impact of the cross included “killing” (2:16, ESV) the enmity.

This passage in Ephesians reiterates the one-time act on the cross as the decisive event in the atonement, but focuses more than the previous passages on the outcome of the cross, the ongoing nature of the atonement in its effects on the Ephesian church. While there is no talk here of a heavenly sanctuary, or Christ’s ongoing intercession in heavenly places, the atonement on the cross and the ongoing atonement in the sanctuary are not in conflict with each other. They are two parts of larger concept. Reconciliation and atonement involve both an indicative (past, completed action) and an imperative (something that still needs to happen).⁶⁴

Conclusion

Our examination of the English word atonement and its biblical equivalent, reconciliation, has led to some significant conclusions. First, while atonement is not limited to the cross, it is clearly grounded there in the biblical sense.⁶⁵ It is a one-time objective act that

Dialogue: A Journal of Theology 45:3 (Fall 2006), 220.

⁶³Aorist active subjunctive (*apokatallaxê*, ἀποκατάλλα, xh|). The subjunctive express probability, in this context, the purpose of God, so there is an implication of future reconciliation here.

⁶⁴This is beautifully expressed by N. T. Wright (*Evil and the Justice of God* [Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006], 98): “The cross is not just an example to be followed, it is an achievement to be worked out, put into practice.”

⁶⁵While Ellen G. White can say “The intercession of Christ in man’s behalf in the sanctuary above is as essential to the plan of salvation as was His death upon the cross” (EW 260), she is also very firm that “The sacrifice of Christ as an atonement for sin is the great truth around which all other truths cluster” (*SDABC* 5: 1137) and “the cross. . . is the means of man’s

removes all barriers to reconciliation except the human response. Second, there is a now and a not yet sense to atonement. The cross is an established fact, a one-time event in the past. But atonement and reconciliation don't end there, they continue in the work of Christ in heaven and in the ministry of reconciliation on earth.⁶⁶ These continuing actions work effect that human response that was not completed at the cross. So in one sense, atonement is complete at the cross, and in another sense it is not.

The Problem of Metaphor

A small aside will be helpful here. When it comes to spiritual matters it is very difficult to use direct speech. Knowing God is like gazing into the sun.⁶⁷ God is real, yet in our everyday experience we do not see, hear or touch God (in the Bible, Moses and Jesus were notable exceptions).⁶⁸ All talk of God involves the stretching of human language. So when it comes to

atonement" (6T 236). In speaking about the cross she could say, "The conditions of the atonement had been fulfilled" (Ms 138, 1897). On Ellen White's view see Denis Fortin, "The Cross of Christ: Theological Differences Between Joseph H. Waggoner and Ellen G. White,," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14:2 (Autumn 2003): 134-139. An excellent summary of what the New Testament has to say about the centrality of the cross can be found in John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 17-46. An argument for a much more marginal role for the cross in the New Testament can be found in Robert M. Price, "The Marginality of the Cross," *Journal of Unification Studies* 6 (2004-2005): 23-38.

⁶⁶Joel B. Green and Mark K. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 133.

⁶⁷Packer, 7-8, also notes scriptural support for this theme in Ephesians 3:19 (ESV: "the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge"), Romans 11:33-36 (KJV: "How unsearchable are His judgments, His ways past finding out"), and 1 Corinthians 13:9, 12 ("For we know in part and we prophesy in part").

⁶⁸"It is a unique kind of knowledge which, though real, is not full; it is knowledge of what is discernible within a circle of light against the background of a larger darkness; it is, in short, knowledge of a *mystery*, the mystery of the living God at work." J. I. Packer, "What Did

spiritual matters, we generally speak about God using metaphors, analogies or other figures of speech.⁶⁹

When it comes to getting right with God, for example, the Bible frequently makes use of law court metaphors. The human condition is described in terms of guilt and condemnation.⁷⁰ We are legally out of synch with God. Salvation is then described in legal terms such as justification, acquittal and vindication. On the other hand, if the human condition is described in terms of debt (a banking or financial metaphor), the appropriate salvation word would be forgiveness or possibly redemption.

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

When it comes to explaining how the cross of Jesus Christ reconciles us to God, we move immediately into the realm of metaphor. Metaphor is based on a similarity between something that we cannot describe directly and something that we know from our everyday experience. The analogy between the two conceptual worlds expresses something that is real and true, but it rarely does so in a complete way.⁷¹ There is both commonality and difference. To press any

the Cross Achieve : The Logic of Penal Substitution,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 25 (1974), 6.

⁶⁹Green and Baker, 38-43, 124; I. Howard Marshall, “The Theology of the Atonement,” in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 50.

⁷⁰Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:518.

⁷¹A good discussion of the definition of metaphor can be found in Blocher, 634-640.

single metaphor into doing the job of explaining everything is to distort our understanding of the whole.

This does not imply some sort of post-modern “anything goes” approach to Scripture. Even God speaks in analogies and models, but they are “revealed models” or “controlling models.”⁷² God’s models are revelation, not speculation. They are ways of thought that God Himself has taught us. The biblical metaphors operate as controls for unrestrained theological modeling.⁷³ While we know only in part, what the Bible teaches us is adequate for both salvation and a living relationship with God.

Throughout history, Christian theology has often focused on one or another New Testament model of the atonement and tried to absolutize that metaphor, as if it explained everything. But that is never the perspective of the New Testament writers, as we will see.⁷⁴ We will best do justice to atonement at the cross if we are open to the great variety of metaphors and figures of speech that the New Testament writers used to express how God used the cross to reconcile the world to Himself.⁷⁵

⁷²Packer, 14-16.

⁷³Packer, 11.

⁷⁴Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 518; Ben Wiebe, “Cross Currents: Rethinking Atonement (with Reflection on Campbell, Stone, and Scott),” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 13 (Fall 2010): 202.

⁷⁵Packer (10) recalls Calvin, who noted that God’s love for us and hostility to sin (at one and the same time) are compatible “in a way that cannot be put into words.” See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, xvii. 2. See also Mark D. Baker, “How the Cross Saves,” *Direction* 36:1 (2007): 45; Steve Chalke, “The Redemption of the Cross,” in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 37; Mark L. Y. Chan, “The Gospel and the Achievements of the Cross,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 33:1 (January 2009): 23-24; Green and Baker, 124-126, 134. Scot McKnight (quoted in Hood, 284, n.12) suggests that as one pulls different clubs from a golf bag, depending on one’s location

Coming back to Romans 5:8-11, we note the wide variety of metaphors for the atonement that occur in that single passage. The language of sin and blood (verses 8 and 9) is drawn from the cultic context of the ancient tabernacle. The language of enmity and reconciliation comes from the realm of relationships. And the language of justification comes from the law court. Paul does not limit himself to a single metaphor to describe what happened at the cross and he can mix several metaphors into a single paragraph!⁷⁶ When it comes to describing what God did for us in Christ, human language is exposed in all its weakness. The Word of God is expressed in the language of men!⁷⁷

Why and How the Cross?

Though conservative Christians agree on the facts of Jesus' death and resurrection, they differ widely on the why of the cross.⁷⁸ Throughout Christian history churchmen and scholars have debated the meaning of the cross as atonement without coming to a settled conclusion.⁷⁹

on the golf course, so different aspects of atonement are employed at different times as needed.

⁷⁶Green and Baker, 41; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 521.

⁷⁷Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages, Book One*, 21 (from Manuscript 24, 1886).

“The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God’s mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

“It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man’s words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God.”

⁷⁸S. Mark Heim, “Cross Purposes: Rethinking the Death of Jesus,” *Christian Century*, March 22, 2005, 20.

⁷⁹A good summary of the classic views on the meaning of the atonement can be found in

Most of these debates were grounded at one point or another on specific metaphors or models found in the New Testament. There was often the attempt to put forward a particular metaphor as if it were the only possible one. But, as we have seen, the full richness of the biblical testimony will be perceived to the degree that we take the entire witness of the New Testament to the meaning of the cross into account. So I will close this chapter with a survey of the main metaphors⁸⁰ by which the New Testament writers expressed their understanding of what the atonement was all about.⁸¹ These are usually grounded both in the Old Testament Scriptures and in the writer's perception of who Jesus was and is.⁸²

The Cross as a Sacrifice

As noted above, the Hebrew words for atonement (*kpr*, *kapporeth*) are heavily associated

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

⁸⁰Green and Baker (41, 123) list five major metaphors in the New Testament, as does Blocher (629-630). Wayne Northey ("The Cross: God's Peace Work towards a Restorative Peacemaking Understanding of the Atonement," in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, edited by Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007], 356-357) lists ten, as does Mark D. Baker, "How the Cross Saves," *Direction* 36:1 (2007): 46-55.

⁸¹One could argue that "reconciliation" is one metaphor among many in the New Testament. And that is certainly true. But since the goal of this paper is an understanding of the "atonement" (an English word) and atonement is a translation of *katalassô* in Romans 5:11, it seemed appropriate to begin with reconciliation as expressing the fundamental meaning of what the translators of the King James Bible and the Adventist pioneers understood by atonement. Further aspects of the atonement at the cross will be discerned by looking at other metaphors of what God did on the cross.

⁸²N. T. Wright, "The Reasons for Jesus' Crucifixion," in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, edited by Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 135-142.

with the Old Testament sacrificial system (Exod 29:36; Lev 4:20; Num 15:25).⁸³ So given the nature of Christ's death, it is not surprising that the New Testament uses sacrificial language to describe the cross.⁸⁴ It is a major theme in Hebrews, where Jesus is described as the fulfillment and extension of that sacrificial system.⁸⁵ Other explicit references to the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice include 1 Corinthians 5:7 (KJV: "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us"); Ephesians 5:2 (ESV: "a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God").

The cross as a sacrifice is also implied in frequent references to the blood of Christ (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Rom 3:25; 5:9; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Col 1:20; 1 Pet 1:18-19).⁸⁶ It is also implied in

⁸³Briley, 94-97; Dederen, 175; Green, *NIDB*, 345-346. Briley points out that while sacrifice was widespread in the ancient world, there were significant differences between pagan and Hebrew sacrificial understanding. In the Hebrew understanding there was no magical power in the sacrifice, it's value was solely in the blessing of God. Also blood played on role in ancient pagan sacrifices, and holiness was required of the offerer.

⁸⁴Dederen, 175-180; Paul Jewett, "Atonement," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, five volumes, edited by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 1: 408; Marshall, *The Atonement Debate*, 59-60; Mikolaski, (March 13, 1961), 3; Mitton, *IDB*, 312; Kathryn Tanner, Incarnation, Cross and Sacrifice: A Feminist-Inspired Reappraisal," *Anglican Theological Review* 86:1 (Winter 2004): 48-56; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 518-520. Sacrifice was also a common model of salvation in the non-Jewish world in the time of the apostles. See Brame, 167. Among the Church Fathers, the sacrificial metaphor appears relatively late in Cyprian, Eusebius and John of Damascus. See G. W. Bromiley, "Atone; Atonement: History of the Doctrine," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, four volumes, edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 1: 356.

⁸⁵Dederen, 176; Green and Baker, 131; Geoffrey Grogan, "The Atonement in the New Testament," in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 92; Steve Motyer, "The Atonement in Hebrews," in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 136-149. Explicit texts in Hebrews include 9:13-15, 22-28; 10:10, 12, 26 and 13:11-12.

⁸⁶James D. G. Dunn, "Paul's Understanding of the Death of Jesus," in *Reconciliation and Hope: New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L. L. Morris on his*

John 1:29, where Jesus is described as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”⁸⁷ (NIV) For the writers of the New Testament, the great OT text that led them to apply sacrificial language to the death of Christ was Isaiah 53,⁸⁸ where the Suffering Servant was led as a Lamb to the slaughter (Isa 53:7) died as “an offering for sin” (Isa 53:10, KJV), and “bore the sins of many” (53:12).

Why the cross? The metaphor of sacrifice implies that death is the penalty for sin (Gen 2:16-17; Ezek 18:4, 20) and that the death of a sacrificial victim would substitute or be exchanged for the death of the sinner.⁸⁹ Since the book of Hebrews denies that the sacrifices in the OT sanctuary were the ultimate basis for remission of sin, the sacrifice of Christ is not one sacrifice among many, but the single sacrifice that was truly meaningful and put an end to all others (Heb 9:25-26; 10:1-14). Through the sacrifice of Christ, the sins of the world could be

60th Birthday, edited by Robert Banks (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1974), 125-141; Morris, *The Atonement*, 52-53, 63; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 518. Dederen (175-177) points to Leviticus 17:11 as a key text in the association of sacrificial blood with the atonement.

⁸⁷George L. Carey, “The Lamb of God and Atonement Theories,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 32 (1981): 97-122. On the relation of Passover to sacrifice, see Bruce H. Grigsby, “The Cross as an Expiatory Sacrifice in the Fourth Gospel,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 15 (July 1982); Morris, *The Atonement*, 88-105. See also Green and Baker, 130-131; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 518.

⁸⁸Mikolaski, (March 13, 1961), 3; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 518-519. Excellent interpretations of Isaiah 53 in light of atonement at the cross can be found in Chan, 21-22; E. Robert Ekblad, “God Is Not to Blame: The Servant’s Atoning Suffering According to the LXX of Isaiah 53,” in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, edited by Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 180-204; Sue Groom, “Why Did Christ Die? An Exegesis of Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12,” in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 96-114.

⁸⁹Dederen, 176, 178. According to 2 Corinthians 5:14, in this one death “all died.” (NIV, NKJV) The concept of substitution or an exchange is also clear in verse 21 of the same chapter.

forgiven.⁹⁰ Unfortunately, the biblical texts concerning sacrifice never fully reveal the inner logic behind such ritual acts. It is clear that sacrifice is effective in restoring right relations with God, how this is so is less clear.⁹¹ Jesus' death was "for us" (1 Thess 5:10), "for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3),⁹² and "for the forgiveness of sins" (Mark 14:24, NIV, ESV).

The Cross as a Ransom or Redemption

We also noted that in the LXX the Hebrew words for atonement (*kpr*, *kapporeth*) were sometimes translated by the Greek word for ransom/redemption (*lutron*, *λυτρον*). So it should not be surprising if *lutron* and its derivatives (*apolutrosis*, *απολυτρωσις* and *antilutron*, *αντιλυτρον*) are used to explain the atonement in the New Testament.⁹³ In any case, the language of ransom or redemption had a rich background in the First Century. In the Gentile world slaves and prisoners of war could be "redeemed" by paying a suitable ransom price.⁹⁴ Among the Jews this language was grounded in the Israelite deliverance from Egyptian slavery at the time of the Exodus (Exod 6:6; 15:13; Deut 7:8).⁹⁵

In the New Testament, the cross of Christ is described in ransom/redemption language

⁹⁰Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 519.

⁹¹Briley, 93; Green, *NIDB*, 345. Perhaps the meaning of sacrifice in biblical times was so self-evident to the ancients that it needed no explanation.

⁹²For an in-depth look at the implications of this significant text for the death of Christ see Chan, 29-30; Grogan, 88; Martin Hengel, *The Atonement: The Origins of the Doctrine in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 36-39; Mitton, *IDB*, 312.

⁹³The ransom idea was very popular among the Early Church Fathers. It was mentioned by Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, and in the Epistle to Diognetus. See Bromiley, *ISBE*, 1: 355-356.

⁹⁴Morris, *The Atonement*, 107-110; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 520.

⁹⁵Green, *NIDB*, 346; Green and Baker, 126; Morris, 113; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 520.

(Mark 10:45 and parallels; Rom 3:24; Heb 9:12, 15; Eph 1:7; 1 Pet 1:18-19).⁹⁶ Paul can also use the language of having been “bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23). Scholars have debated whether God’s redeeming of Israel in the Exodus and of the human race at the cross did indeed require the payment of a price or not.⁹⁷ But there is a strong sense of substitution or equivalence in the Greek form *antilutron* (*avnti*, *lutron*: “ransom in place of,” see 1 Tim 2:6) and the way ransom is expressed in Mark 10:45 (“ransom [*lutron*] in place of [*anti*] many” – my translation).⁹⁸ Ransom in the NT, however, may be less about transaction than about the value that God places upon us.⁹⁹

If one understands that the New Testament points to the payment of a price, there is no indication to whom the price was paid, whether to God, Satan or some other entity.¹⁰⁰ What is clear from this language is that the atonement at the cross was costly to the godhead. The forgiveness that we receive is free to us through the cross, but it was not cheap to God. What Jesus endured on the cross was in behalf of, in place of, all of us.¹⁰¹

The Cross as a *Hilasterion*

A third Greek word associated with Old Testament atonement language is *hilasterion*

⁹⁶Marshall, *The Atonement Debate*, 60.

⁹⁷The classic debate over whether the language of redemption in the Bible requires payment of a price was between Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, third edition, first edition was in 1955 (London: The Tyndale Press, 1965, reprinted 2000), 11-64 and David Hill (*Greek Words and Hebrew Meanings: Studies in the Semantics of Soteriological Terms*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, 5 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967], 49-81). See also Green, *NIDB*, 346; Morris, *The Atonement*, 116-119.

⁹⁸Dederen, 177-178; Green and Baker, 127; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 521.

⁹⁹Brame, 172.

¹⁰⁰Green and Baker, 128; Jewett, *ZPEB*, 1: 410. This issue was a major point of contention in the course of church history. See Bromiley, *ISBE*, 1: 355-360.

(i`lasth, rion), which was consistently applied in the LXX for the mercy seat on the ark of the covenant (Lev 16:2ff., etc.). It is transliterated here because there is no settled English equivalent. In Hebrews 9:5 *hilasterion* is used in common OT fashion to describe or name the mercy seat in the Most Holy place of the Hebrew sanctuary.¹⁰² There is no direct theological meaning stated there.¹⁰³

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

Hilasterion in Romans 3:25 is usually translated as “propitiation” (KJV, ESV, etc.) or as “expiation” (RSV, NAB, etc.). The NIV clarifies without clarifying by translating *hilasterion* as

¹⁰¹Dederen, 178.

¹⁰²G. K. Beale applies this meaning also to Romans 3:25 (G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011], 486-489), while Morris argues strongly against applying this usage to Romans 3:25. See Morris, *The Atonement*, (168).

¹⁰³Related nouns and verbs are found in Hebrews 2:17 and 1 John 2:1-2 and 4:10. See Morris, *The Atonement*, (170-172) for a discussion of these. They have similar meaning to the likely usage in Romans 3:25.

“sacrifice of atonement.” In pagan Greek sources *hilasterion* carries the idea of propitiation, to turn away someone’s anger, to conciliate, usually by the offer of a gift.¹⁰⁴ In Jewish and Christian sources the word usually means expiation, to cancel guilt or pay the penalty for a crime, to nullify sin and its effects.¹⁰⁵ The first meaning sees *hilasterion* in personal terms, the second sees it in impersonal terms.¹⁰⁶ Pagan views of wrath and propitiation are absent from the Scriptural view of God, He is not a capricious and vindictive deity whose mind must be changed by an overwhelming sacrifice.¹⁰⁷ But in the context of Romans 3:25, wrath and negative judgment are too central to ignore in relation to the solution that God provides, so there is an element of propitiation in Paul’s use of *hilasterion*.¹⁰⁸ How does one reconcile the love of God

¹⁰⁴Dederen, 178; Rohintan K. Mody, “Penal Substitutionary Atonement in Paul,” in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, edited by Derek Tidball, David Hilborn and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 124-127; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 519.

¹⁰⁵Dederen, 178; C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London: Hodder, 1935), 82-95; ; Green, *NIDB*, 345; Milgrom, *IDB Supplement*, 80-81; Mitton, *IDB*, 313; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 519.

¹⁰⁶Morris, *The Atonement*, (151-152) says you can propitiate a person, but you expiate a sin or a crime. So this translational dilemma has major significance for the role of God in the atonement. Is there someone who needs to be addressed or only an object that needs to be removed?

¹⁰⁷Dederen, 178; Dodd, 82-95.

¹⁰⁸Dederen, 179; Mitton, *IDB*, 310. For a strong defense of propitiation as an important aspect of *hilasterion* in the New Testament, see Morris, *The Atonement*, 151-176. Some recent scholars are concerned that views such as this encourage violence in the name of God. See, for example, Juergen Moltmann, “The Crucified God: Yesterday and Today: 1972-2002,” translated by Margaret Kohl, in Marit Trelstad, *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 127-138; Marit Trelstad, *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006); J. Denny Weaver, “The Nonviolent Atonement: Human Violence, Discipleship, and God,” in *Stricken by God? Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, edited by Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 316-355.

with His wrath against sin?¹⁰⁹

God's holiness made the penalty for sin inescapable. But God's love endured the penalty of sin in our place. God took upon Himself the penalty of sin. "What the holiness of God required, His love provided."¹¹⁰ At the cross both God's wrath against sin is revealed and His love for the sinner. There justice and mercy kiss each other (Psalm 85:10). Love does not gloss over sin, but effectively grapples with it.¹¹¹ Whatever we understand by the phrase "the wrath of God," it is important to note that the wrath of God is not removed by human activity, its removal is due to none less than God Himself.¹¹² He dealt with this while we were still sinners, so the way to reconciliation is completely open to us.

This element of wrath and propitiation does not diminish the love of God, rightly understood it raises it to unimaginable heights.¹¹³ The greater the challenge that sin presents, the greater the action of love that was needed to overcome it. The challenge of sin highlights the love of God all the more. While *hilasterion* as a metaphor is challenging in today's world and easily misunderstood, it too provides a needed dimension for understanding atonement at the cross.

¹⁰⁹For an extensive discussion of the wrath of God in both testaments and its implications for today, see Morris, *The Atonement*, (153-157, 163-166).

¹¹⁰Dederen, 179.

¹¹¹Dederen, 179-180.

¹¹²Morris, *The Atonement*, (157)

¹¹³Packer (41) notes that the divine withdrawal from Jesus on the cross was all the more intense because Jesus had experienced the full depth of the Father's love. For him, penal substitution demonstrated the depth of the Father's love, what He was willing to take on Himself to save humanity. Timothy Keller (*King's Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* [New York: Dutton, 2011], 141-142) points out that when you love wounded or needy people, there is always a cost to yourself. Philip Yancey points out that only someone who has been hurt can forgive. At Calvary, God chose to be hurt. Philip Yancey, "Surveying the Wondrous Cross: Understanding the Atonement is about more than grasping a theory," *Christianity Today* 53:5 (May 2009): 72.

The Cross as Acquittal in Court (Justification)

Why the cross? If the problem of sin is described in terms of a broken law that results in a state of guilt, the solution is acquittal (justification) in God's court of judgment.¹¹⁴ This acquittal is provided by the cross exhausting the penalty for breaking the law and the perfect law-keeping of Jesus in our place providing the "righteousness" that is needed before the final judgment (Rom 3:21-26; 5:12-21; 8:3-4).¹¹⁵ To put it in other terms, Christ redeemed the human race from the curse of the law, having become that curse for them (Gal 3:13). The concept is used in a similar fashion outside of Paul in Luke 18:9-14.

Today, "legalism" is a dirty word, leading to a negative connotation for the Bible's concern for covenant, law, righteousness and judgment. But legal systems do not need to be seen in impersonal terms as harsh, cold and unfeeling. Rightly handled, constitutional law enables people with differing goals and interests to live together in peace. And the application of even-handed justice comes very close to mercy in the experience of those whose wrongs have been set right.¹¹⁶

Paul argues that God is completely just in both condemning and punishing sin and in

¹¹⁴The Greek word for justification (*dikaïosunê*, *dikaïosu, nh*) means essentially the same thing as righteousness and/or acquittal. It can mean actions in harmony with God's law or covenant (righteousness) and a declaration of innocence in the judgment (acquittal) when determining whether or not these laws have been kept (Psa 72:1-4; 143:2; Prov 17:15; Isa 5:22-23; 43:9). See Mikolaski, (March 13, 1961), 4; I. Howard Marshall, "The Death of Jesus in Recent New Testament Study," *Word and World* 3:1 (Winter 1983): 17-18; Morris, *The Atonement*, 183-185.

¹¹⁵The only Church Father who comes close to expressing this viewpoint is Cyril of Jerusalem. See Bromiley, *ISBE*, 1: 356.

¹¹⁶Morris, *The Atonement*, 178-179.

pardoning and accepting sinners (Rom 3:23-26).¹¹⁷ Jesus Christ, acting on the sinner's behalf has both put away human sin by His death (3:25; 5:9) and fulfilled the just requirement of the law by His perfect thirty-three and a half years on this earth (8:4). So according to this model, God not only saves sinners, but He saves them justly, in a way that accords with what is right. Christ's sacrifice is not a compromise of justice, but actually demonstrates it (3:26). Because of justification, relationship can be restored, which is what the atonement is all about.¹¹⁸

It is important to note at this point that all of these first four metaphors of atonement have an element of substitution in them. God in Christ does for the sinner what the sinner is incapable of doing.¹¹⁹ Many writings on atonement, therefore, highlight substitution as a metaphor of atonement in the New Testament.¹²⁰ I have chosen not to do so, simply because there is no Greek word for substitution in the New Testament. I see substitution as a natural by-product of most other metaphors rather than a central metaphor in its own right. It is assumed rather than proved and explained.¹²¹

¹¹⁷Dederen, 180.

¹¹⁸Dederen, 180.

¹¹⁹According to the Scriptures, at the cross Jesus substituted for both Adam and Israel. Hans Boersma, "Eschatological Justice and the Cross: Violence and Penal Substitution," *Theology Today* 60 (2003): 186-199. See also Richard L. Mayhue, "The Scriptural Necessity of Christ's Penal Substitution," *Master's Seminary Journal* 20:2 (Fall 2009): 139-148; Thomas R. Schreiner, "Penal Substitution View," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, edited by James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 67-98.

¹²⁰The language of substitution, representation and/or vicarious suffering was extremely popular among the Early Church Fathers, being expressed by Irenaeus, the Epistle to Diognetus, Tertullian, Athanasius, Eusebius, Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Chrysostom, Nestorius of Constantinople and Augustine. See Bromiley, *ISBE*, 1: 355-356.

¹²¹While some prefer words like "representation" and "vicarious" to "substitution," Packer (17) notes that the three words are essentially synonyms, meaning putting a person or thing in place of others. To do something so others don't have to do it (Rom 5:8; Gal 3:13). See

The Cross as a Victory over Satan/Sin/Evil

The idea of ransom/redemption recalls the Exodus, where God's redemption of Israel proved also to be a victory over the evil powers under Pharaoh.¹²² In fact, Israel's freedom could not have been obtained without such a prior victory. The language of victory is widespread in the New Testament.¹²³ It presupposes a somewhat dualistic view of the universe in which spiritual powers and sin hold sway over the human race.¹²⁴

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

also Marshall, "The Death of Jesus," 20; Samuel J. Mikolaski, "The Nature of Atonement; The Cross and the Theologians," *Christianity Today*, March 29, 1963, 5.

¹²²The classic exposition of this view of the atonement is by Gustav Aulen, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement*, translated by A. G. Herbert, reprint of 1931 original (London: SPCK, 1965). More recent summaries of the "Christus Victor" view are in Gregory A. Boyd, "Christus Victor View," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, edited by James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 23-49; Paul R. Eddy and James Beilby, "The Atonement, an Introduction," in *The Nature of the Atonement: Four Views*, edited by James Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 12-14; Weaver, 321-337. See also Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 521.

¹²³It was also popular among the Early Church Fathers, including Justin, Origen, Eusebius, and Augustine. See Bromiley, *ISBE*, 1: 355-356.

¹²⁴Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 521. Sin is seen as a malignant power in itself in Romans 7:7-11.

accuser of the brethren and is overcome on earth by “the blood of the Lamb.”¹²⁵ The ultimate victory, of course, is the victory over death (1 Cor 15:57), won by Christ at His resurrection and culminating in the resurrection of those who believe in Christ (1 Cor 15:20-22).

Why the cross? Because it was needed to defeat the powers of sin and Satan, freeing human beings to return to God.¹²⁶ Jesus is our champion (substitute) who defeats Satan for us (cf. 1 Sam 17:8-11).¹²⁷ Exactly how the cross defeats Satan is less clearly worked out,¹²⁸ but may be hinted at in the next idea of how the cross effects the atonement.

The Cross as the Revelation of God’s Character

While the New Testament models of atonement addressed so far all focus on what God has done by way of sacrifice, redemption, propitiation/expiation and victory to pave the way for human beings to be reconciled to Him, this model of the atonement focuses on the human side of the equation, the effect the cross has on human beings.¹²⁹ One way the New Testament portrays the human condition is in terms of ignorance or darkness.¹³⁰ Jesus is the one who brings light and knowledge and reveals the true character of God.¹³¹ This perspective is particularly prevalent in the Gospel of John.¹³²

¹²⁵See further references such as John 12:31; 16:11; Rom 8:35-38; 1 Cor 15:24-25; Phil 2:9-11; Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Rev 5:5-10. This perspective often puts more emphasis on the cosmic significance of Christ’s death than its role in human salvation. See Boyd, 33.

¹²⁶Theung-Huat Leow, “The Cruciality of the Cross: P. T. Forsyth’s Understanding of the Atonement,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2:2 (April 2009): 197-198.

¹²⁷Chan, 26-27; Packer, 20.

¹²⁸Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 521.

¹²⁹Packer, 19.

¹³⁰Green and Baker, 132.

¹³¹Chan, 24-26; Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 521.

¹³²Chan, 24-26; Terence Forestell, *The Word of the Cross* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press,

In the Prologue to the Gospel of John, the coming of Jesus reveals the knowledge of God (John 1:14). Jesus' intimate relationship with God enables Him to rightly "exegete" (*exêgêsato*, *evxhgh, sato*) God (1:18). Jesus is the "light of the world" (8:12; 9:5) who not only reveals God but exposes the true character of human beings as well (3:18-21; 13:1-17). Helping His disciples to know God is at the core of His mission (17:3). And at the center of that "making known" is the cross, which in John is described as a "lifting up" which enables all to see the glory of God (17:1). The cross of Christ is, therefore, the supreme moment of revelation.¹³³

In the Gospel of Mark, everyone, including the disciples of Jesus, struggle with who Jesus is from the beginning (Mark 1:27; 2:6-7; 3:21; 4:10-13; 8:13-21). It is only at the moment Jesus dies that the centurion recognizes what the narrator and God have been saying all along, Jesus is the Son of God (Mark 1:1, 9-11; 9:2-8; 15:39).¹³⁴ It is the cross that reveals who Jesus is.

This focus on knowledge is not gnostic in character, rather Jesus' echos the Hebrew concept of knowledge as involving close personal relationships (Gen 4:1,17,25; Deut 34:10; 2 Chr 33:13; Isa 55:5; Hos 6:3; 13:5).¹³⁵ Why the cross? To provide human beings with the kind of knowledge that will draw them back to God.¹³⁶

1974), 113, 120: Green and Baker, 132-133. Church Fathers who speak of the atonement in these terms include Justin, Clement of Alexandria and Origen. See Bromiley, *ISBE*, 1: 355-356.

¹³³Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 521.

¹³⁴Green and Baker, 132.

¹³⁵Tuckett, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1: 522.

¹³⁶This model seems most effective when combined with one or more of the objective models of atonement like sacrifice, ransom or justification. The cross best reveals the love of God if was necessary, if it had a purpose other than revelation as well. See Chan, 25-26. A parent racing into a house to save a child demonstrates love. Racing into an empty burning house to "demonstrate love" is not nearly as effective. See Blocher, 645; Marshall, *The Atonement Debate*, 62-63.

The Cross as a Pattern/Model

While “What would Jesus do?” is a common enough phrase, we are not here addressing Jesus’ life as a model for human beings to imitate, but specifically His death on the cross.¹³⁷ The New Testament frequently encourages believers to imitate the crucified Christ in particular.¹³⁸ The cross as a pattern or model for Christian behavior is explored under two other terms, “missional suffering” and “cruciformity.”¹³⁹ There are multiple passages in the New Testament that call on believers to self-sacrificial suffering in behalf of the kingdom after the pattern of Jesus’ suffering on the cross.¹⁴⁰

Perhaps the best-known call to “cruciformity” is found in the gospels. In Mark 8:34 (NAB) Jesus said, “Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me” (cf. 8:35-38, cf. Matt 16:24-27; Luke 9:23-26). It is in the context of the cross that Jesus invites the first to be last and to become servant of all (Mark 9:30-35, cf. Matt 17:22-23; 18:1-5; Luke 9:49-50; 17:1-2). The cross sets a new standard for leadership, servant leadership (Mark 10:42-45; Matt 20:25-28). Jesus invites His followers to follow him in the context of the cross (John 12:26, cf. 20-25), then sets the example by washing the disciples’ feet (13:12-17, cf. 34-35; 15:12-13). Hebrews 12:1-2 describes Christian life as a race looking ahead to the crucified Christ as a model. John exhorts the believers that if they know Jesus laid down His life for them, they should do the same for each other (1 John 3:16). And nowhere in the New Testament is this message clearer than in 1 Pet 2:21 (ESV): “For to this you have been called,

¹³⁷Church Fathers who spoke of the cross as an example or model include Justin, Origen,

¹³⁸Hood, 286.

¹³⁹Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 35, 48; Hood, 287-291.

¹⁴⁰Hood, 287.

because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.”

Paul delights in becoming one of Christ’s “fools” and urges the Corinthians to follow his steady and constant example of living the cross (1 Cor 4:8-17; 11:1). For Paul, this is not so much a doctrine as a “cruciform way of life.”¹⁴¹ This cruciform teaching becomes explicit in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 where he urges that one died for all so that we may be constrained to live no longer for ourselves, but for the one who died for us (cf. Gal 5:24; 6:14,17; Eph 5:1-2). This teaching reaches an exalted height when Paul counsels the married in Ephesians 5:25-28 (KJV): “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” So for Paul it is clear that the self-sacrificing love of cross provides the model for every aspect of life.¹⁴²

The Cross as a New Covenant

This model comes last for two reasons only. First, it has only received attention in the last few years as a model of the atonement,¹⁴³ and, second, I realized as this chapter was almost complete that I had written on this model in the past without connecting the idea to “the

¹⁴¹Hood, 288.

¹⁴²In the title of a book, Richard Hays identifies the cross as one of the main sources of New Testament ethics. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation, a Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999).

¹⁴³Michael J. Gorman, “Effecting the New Covenant: A (Not So) New, New Testament Model for the Atonement,” *Ex Auditu* 26 (2010): 26-59. Gorman builds on the work of R. Larry Shelton, *Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2009) and Thomas F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, edited by Robert T. Walker (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 2009).

atonement.”¹⁴⁴ This is probably my favorite model of the atonement because it is so solidly biblical and clearly goes back to Jesus Himself.

According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus offers His own interpretation of the cross in His comments at the last supper (Mark 14:24; Matt 26:28; Luke 22:20).¹⁴⁵ In all three versions, the cup represents the blood of the covenant and Luke clearly adds the qualifier “new”: “the *new* covenant in my blood.”¹⁴⁶ Jesus’ (new) covenant blood is “poured out for many” (Mark 14:24), “for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28), or simply “for you” (Luke 22:20).

When Jesus says “*the* covenant” He could only be talking about the one and only covenant of the Old Testament, grounded in the fundamental event of Israel’s history, the Exodus.¹⁴⁷ After all, Jesus was presiding at a Passover meal as He spoke these words and a review of the events of the Exodus was part of the Passover ritual.¹⁴⁸ *The* covenant of the Exodus was the covenant with Abraham, which is grounded in the language of Eden.¹⁴⁹ Clearly, Jesus saw His upcoming death as the decisive event in all of Israel’s history, and by extension, the history of the whole human race.¹⁵⁰

The language of Jesus’ comments over the cup at the last supper echoes the covenant-

¹⁴⁴Jon Paulien, *Meet God Again for the First Time* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 77-112, 126-136. It was the reading of Gorman’s article (previous note) that made me realize he and I were saying the same things, but he was talking about atonement on the cross.

¹⁴⁵Gorman, 29.

¹⁴⁶Some manuscripts leave out Luke 22:20 entirely and some manuscripts of Matthew and Mark add the word “new,” but in the main body of this article I am working with the standard scholarly Greek text.

¹⁴⁷Gorman, 29.

¹⁴⁸Paulien, *Meet God Again*, 102-103; Gorman, 29.

¹⁴⁹Paulien, *Meet God Again*, 29-34.

¹⁵⁰Paulien, *Meet God Again*, 55-75.

renewal blood in Exodus 24:6-8 in particular and the atoning sacrifices of Leviticus more generally.¹⁵¹ The connection with forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28) also connects the death of Jesus with the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 and the new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Jesus' death is the means by which the people of God are liberated, forgiven and brought into a new covenant relationship with God.¹⁵²

In the only New Testament account of the last supper outside the gospels (1 Cor 11:23-25), Paul passes on a similar tradition, "this cup is the new covenant in my blood" (verse 25). In the book of Hebrews, the word "covenant" appears 16 times, nearly half the 33 occurrences in the New Testament as a whole. Jesus is there described as the mediator of a new (Heb 9:15; 12:24), eternal (13:20) or better (8:6) covenant that is made effective by His blood or by His death (10:19; 12:24; 13:20, etc.). Not only that, the new covenant promise of Jeremiah is quoted twice in the book (Heb 8:8-13; 10:16-18).¹⁵³

What makes this line of interpretation exciting is that covenant is not only a major category throughout the New Testament,¹⁵⁴ even where the word "covenant" is not used, but this model has the potential of drawing a common thread through nearly all of the previous models.¹⁵⁵ In summary, the new covenant promised in the Old Testament (Jer 31:31-34; Ezek 11:17-20; 36:23-28) was to be a transforming, creative act of God that would generate a renewed covenant people of God. They would be liberated, restored, forgiven, empowered and

¹⁵¹See more detail on this point in Price, 26-29.

¹⁵²Gorman, 29-30.

¹⁵³Gorman, 30-31.

¹⁵⁴Jon Paulien, *Meet God Again*, 77-112, 126-136.

¹⁵⁵Gorman's working attempt to do this is on pages 55-58 of his seminal article.

permanent.¹⁵⁶ The New Testament writers understood that transforming act of God to have occurred at the cross.¹⁵⁷

Conclusion

We have seen that there are a wide variety of metaphors for the atonement in the New Testament. Not only are these metaphors diverse, but they tend to be intertwined with each other, making it difficult to impossible to separate them and to favor one over the others. The more we understand and respect these various metaphors, the more people can be reached with the message of the cross, as people of a variety of personalities tend to be drawn to one or the other of them. And as the gospel is present to a variety of cultures, we may be led to new biblical metaphors that we had overlooked before or even be led by the Spirit to express the cross in a way the New Testament writers had not thought of. But in all thinking regarding the atonement, we need to be guided by the inspired models placed for us in the Scriptures.

What conclusions can we draw from this brief survey of the relationship between the atonement and the cross?¹⁵⁸

1) The English word for atonement is most closely related to the concept of reconciliation. Atonement provides the means and the incentive for human beings to become reconciled to God.

2) In the New Testament atonement is clearly focused on the cross, but in Hebrews the principle of the atonement continues in the heavenly work of Jesus Christ.

¹⁵⁶Gorman, 33-36.

¹⁵⁷Spelled out from Matthew to Revelation in Gorman, 36-55.

¹⁵⁸This conclusion is modeled on the style of the conclusion to the article by W. S. Reid, "Atone, Atonement," in *ISBE*, 1: 354-355.

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

4) Although sin is a barrier between God and the human race, God does not require sacrifice in order to desire reconciliation with the human race, instead He Himself lovingly provides the sacrifice/ransom/atonement needed to reconcile all to Himself.

5) Human beings are called to respond to God's reconciling action with an action of their own.

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

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

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