

One of the most enduring errors, the root fallacy presupposes that every word has a meaning bound up with its shape or its components. In this view, meaning is determined by etymology; that is, by the root or roots of a word.

-D. A. Carson

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The student should learn once and for all that every single letter added to a Greek root adds something to the idea expressed by the root.

-William Douglas Chamberlain

## MORE THAN ATONEMENT: WORD PICTURES OF HIS PASSION

A major problem in getting the message of salvation straight is confusion in the terms used. Starting with erroneous definitions of terminology, will probably lead to erroneous conclusions. Much of the confusion and tension in contemporary theology stems from sloppy definitions, which have developed over centuries. Somehow, more recent linguistic work, massive as it has been, has not corrected many of these past errors.

Communists talked about “rectification of terms,” but unfortunately they frequently distorted word meanings to their own nefarious ends. In biblical studies, honest and careful definition of crucial terms is imperative to arrive at sound results in doctrine. The Old Testament picture of atonement and New Testament terms, such as, sacrifice, propitiation, ransom-redemption, redemption-liberation, and reconciliation, require precise definition.

### Old Testament Atonement

There is a serious anomaly in theological literature in the widespread usage of the word ‘atonement’ for the cross, when in fact, this word does not occur in the New Testament (except in the KJV). Its continued use has been justified on the basis of its overwhelming usage for centuries and the difficulty in changing at this stage of the game. However, there may also be some theological bias in its continued use. Many feel that the difference between atonement and the actual Greek New Testament words is so insignificant that change is not worthy of serious consideration.

It is clear that the three major New Testament terms, redemption, propitiation, and reconciliation, are not synonymous. Indeed, Lewis Sperry

Chafer, John Walvoord, and Robert Lightner have highlighted the distinctions between these terms and shown their importance in understanding the cross<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, there are eight different Greek words for redemption, and there is a significant difference of meaning between these words. Since this is so, it is irresponsible to continue to use a blanket term which obscures all of these distinctions. To continue to call the passion of Christ ‘the atonement,’ when in fact the word is never used in the New Testament, is not conducive to the kind of precision for which a science such as theology should be known. Such imprecision would be blameworthy in the physical sciences and ought to be also in the “queen of sciences” as well.

The term atonement is especially objectionable since it only describes the Levitical sacrifices, which were not a final dealing with sin and only anticipated the saving death of Christ. The anticipation clearly falls far short of the fulfillment, as the writer of Hebrews emphasized (Heb. 7:18-9; 8:6-13; 10:1-14). Therefore, it would be helpful to suggest another, better term for theological usage which would be both accurate and comprehensive enough to include the many New Testament words. Perhaps sacrifice, cross-work, and/or passion would be more helpful. The benefit of distinguishing distinct terms is to enable investigation of the distinction between objective and subjective aspects of salvation, so essential to a precise understanding of the cross. Most significant is the character of the one sacrificed. The Lord Jesus was not just a man—He was the God-man!

### **The Uniqueness of the One Sacrificed**

Jesus the Messiah is not to be compared with the animal sacrifices, but rather contrasted starkly, even though they typified Him. He was not just a man, but God incarnate in human flesh. Many don’t adequately emphasize His uniqueness in preaching and writing today. The unique Old Testament prophecies of His virgin birth, death, and resurrection have just been highlighted in the previous chapter. Missionary statesman, Patrick Cate, has shown how even the Qur’an gives testimony to some aspects of the unique and supernatural character of the Lord Jesus. This must be pursued.

***His uniquely sinless life.*** Not only did the Lord Jesus claim to be without sin (“**Which of you convicts Me of sin?**” Jn. 8:46), but also the Gospel records portray Him as such. Both Paul and Peter affirmed His sinlessness (2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Pet. 2:21-4; 3:18), making it clear that for Him to be a sacrifice for our sins, He Himself had to be sinless. The Levitical sacrifices had to be without blemish or spot to portray Him adequately. Some skeptics, such as Bertrand Russell, have picked at imagined flaws, but without success. For example, he criticized the Lord for cursing the fig tree in frustration, when it is clear Christ was making an object lesson of the tree, as a picture of fruitless Israel. Could Russell cause a shrub to wither by his word? No other world religious leader claimed sinlessness. For example, although Muslims claim the sinlessness of all the prophets, Muhammad is said to have re-

pentecost ninety-nine times a day.

***His unique miracles of compassion.*** Most of the forty miracles of Christ recorded in the Gospels were interventions of love and compassion for hurting people. This stands in bold contrast to the purported miracles in the fabricated Gnostic gospels from centuries later, which had absurd miracles performed like a magic show. Giving sight to the man born blind, restoring the centurion's servant, the nobleman's son, the man with the withered hand, the ten lepers cleansed, and most of all raising the son of the widow of Nain, Jairus's daughter, and Lazarus— all come to mind. No other founder of a world religion claimed to have done anything like this.

***His unique mastery over nature.*** Most of the rest of Christ's miracles show an incredible mastery over the forces of nature, starting with turning water into wine, the miraculous draft of fish, and walking on water. The multiplication of bread and fishes to feed great crowds happened twice, having Peter catch a fish to supply the coin for the temple tax, and most impressively, the stilling of the storm, are a few of the more significant miracles. No other founder of a world religion claimed to have done such.

***His unique and penetrating teachings.*** The teachings of other founders of world religions are chaff compared with the Sermon on the Mount and the other significant teachings of the Lord Jesus. Even the great Hindu political leader, Mahatma Gandhi, thought that the Sermon on the Mount was the best, but did not become a Christian because of the exclusivity of the gospel. Just the Golden Rule alone stands above all their utterances.

***His gentle, confrontational witness.*** Nothing in the life of any other religious leader compares with the witness of the Lord to Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman (and subsequently the people of Sychar), the rich young ruler, Matthew the tax collector, Zaccheus the extortioner, etc.

***His bold confrontation of apostate religious leaders.*** Time and again the Lord Jesus came into conflict with the leaders of His own nation, who had fallen into the opposing errors of Phariseism and Sadduceism. He exposed their hypocrisy, externalism, and evil motives (Mt. 15, 23, etc.).

***His unique prophetic ministry.*** Although Islam recognizes the Lord Jesus as one of the prophets, the Bible is very clear that He was much more than a prophet. Although they call Muhammad the capstone of the prophets, he did not make any predictions. But the Lord Jesus was not only a forth-teller of God's truth, but like the Old Testament prophets He was also a fore-teller. In His upper-room discourse, He predicted the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. In the Olivet discourse, He predicted the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which happened in AD 70, and implied a longtime Gentile occupation of Jerusalem (Lk. 21:5-6, 20-24). Some of the end time prophecies are beginning to be fulfilled already:

earthquakes, plagues, famines, continuance of warfare, lawlessness, persecution of Christians, false Messiahs, love growing cold, etc. (Mt. 24:4-12; Lk. 21:8-19). Most striking is the persistence of the Jews and the restoration of Israel as a nation (Mt. 24:32-34, *genea*= race or nation). The catastrophic tsunami in 2004 fits the warning of Luke 21:25-6.

***His predicted, intentional passion.*** Few Christians seem aware that the Lord Jesus predicted His own crucifixion and resurrection a dozen times in the last few months of His ministry. Here are the references for further study: Matthew 16:21; 17:9; 17:22-3=Luke 9:43-5; John 10:1-21; Luke 13:31-4; 17:25; Matthew 20:17-9=Luke 18:31-2; Mark 10:45=Matthew 20:28; 26:2; 26:12=Mark 14:8=John 12:7; John 12:20-36; Matthew 26:26-9.

***His victorious resurrection and ascension.*** Muslims believe that Muhammad's body is in a tomb in Medina, but that the "prophet Jesus" has ascended to heaven (although they deny His death and resurrection). This is an embarrassment for Muslims to explain and illustrates how unique the resurrection and ascension of Christ is.

### A Substitutionary, Expiatory Sacrifice

***Pre-cross predictions.*** The most basic representation of Christ's death, both in Old Testament prophecy and New Testament fulfillment, is as a substitutionary sacrifice, to take away the sin of all mankind. The prophecies are so explicit that a basic theology of the cross can be developed from them alone. Although Psalm 22 mostly focused upon the physical details of His crucifixion, my tenth-grade English teacher explained why Christ cried out from the cross, "**My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?**" Although I was not yet a born-again Christian, her explanation stuck in memory that He was pointing the onlookers' attention to this marvelous prophecy of His crucifixion. Because He was bearing the sin of the world, the Father had to hide His face from Him.

But Isaiah 52:13-53:12 gives much more of the *significance* of His sacrifice, indeed, the word guilt-offering is used in 53:10. Nine times mention is made of His sacrifice being for sin, iniquity, and transgressions. Three times it was said that the LORD did it. The contrast between the reference to "all" in 53:6 and "many" in 53:11 & 12 is most significant. Since the identification of "**all of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way**" (v. 6) is clearly a reference to the whole human race, the usage of the same expression must be the same: "**But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him**" (53:6). Two truths emerge. His death was substitutionary, and He became a *substitute for all sinners*. But in 53:11 a limitation is found: "**By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities.**" Here the beginnings are seen of a contrast between the objective, historical aspect of His sacrifice and the subjective and personal.

Centuries later, the last prophet of the old order, John the Baptizer, gives

testimony: **“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (Jn. 1:29). This allusion to the Passover lamb must have seemed enigmatic to the disciples who heard it, but in the light of subsequent revelation it is loaded with meaning. By the Holy Spirit, John confirmed the emphasis of Isaiah 53:6, that Messiah’s death was substitutionary, expiatory, and universal in its availability.

**Christ’s own statement.** The Lord Jesus dealt first with the highest priority issues in His ministry. Much of the Gospel accounts is taken up with the issues of human sin, His deity, and the demands of the proffered kingdom. He said little about the significance of His coming sacrifice and even less about the nature of the salvation which would be based on that sacrifice. Thus Matthew 20:28=Mark 10:45 stands out: **“just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”** He left it for the Apostles to explain the full significance of the cross doctrinally, but the word ransom implies substitution.

**Apostolic testimony.** The Apostle Peter’s testimony is substantial. In addition to reference to redemption in 1:18-19, he gave three other descriptions in First Peter: **“And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed”** (2:24); **“For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit”** (3:18); **“since Christ has suffered in the flesh,…”** (4:1). Here also the substitutionary aspect is undeniable.

Curiously, the Apostle Paul made little use of this picture, probably because he uniquely developed the two other pictures of redemption and reconciliation. His passing reference in 1 Corinthians 5:7 is most significant: **“For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.”** This builds upon John the Baptizer’s Passover lamb allusion. Reminiscent of Isaiah 53, he wrote, **“He made Him who knew no sin to be sin[offering] on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him”** (2 Cor. 5:21). Seeing Christ as a fulfillment of Levitical animal sacrifices he wrote: **“just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma”** (Eph. 5:2).

Predictably, the author of Hebrews made the most of this foundational understanding of the Messiah’s death. In 1:3, he introduced the idea: **“When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.”** Then in developing the idea of Christ’s high priestly office, he contrasted Him with the Levitical high priest: **“who does not need daily, like those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins, and then for the sins of the people, because this He did once for all when He offered up Himself”** (Heb. 7:27). What a remarkable picture of *the high priest offering up himself* instead of an animal sacrifice!

As he developed the analogy of the symbolism of the Levitical temple and sacrifices, he reinforced the contrast:

**... and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.... how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:12, 14).**

His blood obtained eternal redemption by cleansing the conscience of the believer from the sin which the dead works of Judaism could not expiate.

**A single sacrifice.** After developing the covenantal (or better testamental) nature of salvation as a basis for this (Heb. 9:15-21), the Apostle emphasized the singleness of the sacrifice, which he had brought into the previous passages, but now has highlighted:

**...nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood not his own. Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.... so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many ... ( Heb. 9:25-28).**

Then the climax of his development is reached:

**By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. . . . but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God, . . . For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified (Heb. 10:10, 12, 14).**

Notice the seven times here where He reinforces the once-for-all nature of the sacrifice. The consequence of this single sacrifice of the Savior is a once-for-all salvation for the ones who have been sanctified by it. If there were no other passage in the Bible to teach eternal security, these passages alone would be adequate. The book of Hebrews has more words for confidence, boldness, and assurance than any other book. Yet it has been so badly misunderstood as to deny assurance to so many believers. (See Chapter 13 for a fresh discussion of the warnings of Hebrews harmonious with this, especially Hebrews 6, which is so troubling to Arminians today.) When the Lord Jesus cried out on the cross, "**It is finished,**" He signaled the completion of the objective dimension of His sacrifice, by which a complete salvation is available to all sinners who come by faith.

**The basis of substitution.** The idea of substitution is clear in the Isaiah 53 prophecy. Although denied by many Arminians and all liberals, substitution in the cross is unambiguous in the New Testament. The use of the preposition *anti* in Matthew 20:28=Mark 10:45 and in 1 Timothy 2:5-6 should be adequate proof, since it clearly means 'instead of.' This makes irrelevant the false claim that the preposition *huper* does not mean "instead of" but merely "on behalf of." In any case, the very idea of Christ's death as a

ransom price for sinners is undeniably substitutionary. Moreover, some of the clearer passages in which *huper* is used in a substitutionary sense are: Romans 4:25; 8:3; 1 Corinthians 15:3; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 1:4; 2:20; 3:13. Clearly the Levitical and Passover sacrifices were substitutionary, and the book of Hebrews makes clear that Christ's death was a fulfillment of those sin offerings (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). Christ died both for our benefit and as a substitutionary sin offering.

### Propitiation

The New Testament words for propitiation or satisfaction (*hilaskomai*, *hilastērios*, *hilasmos*) come from the word for mercy, which is infrequently used in the New Testament. The connotation of mercy comes out very clearly in the prayer of the publican in Christ's parable as Luke used the verb *hilaskomai*: "**God, be merciful to me, the sinner**" (Lk. 18:13). Take note that this parable was given before the cross, so the same words must not be used in our prayers. God is merciful and has proven His mercy in the cross. This also comes out clearly in the description of the Lord Jesus as a "**merciful and faithful high priest**" (Heb. 2:17).

Hebrews 9:5 is the link to the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant in the Levitical system: *hilastērion* is used here of the mercy seat. Then Paul uses this same word for Christ's sacrifice as the fulfillment of the mercy seat:

**... being justified by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed (Rom. 3:24-5).<sup>2</sup>**

Although Christ's death is thus linked to the Levitical mercy seat, its efficacy goes far beyond it. Paul alluded to this in his reference to God passing over the sins previously committed, ie. of pre-cross saints (cf. Heb. 9:15). Now God has displayed the cross as the new mercy seat by which He declares that He is satisfied with the blood of Christ as a full satisfaction for sin and a basis for justification. This is where He demonstrated His mercy.

The Apostle John used the noun *hilasmos* twice:

**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 *those of the whole world* (1 Jn. 2:1-2); 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 Jn. 4:10).**

For whom is Christ the propitiation? John's use of the word 'world' clearly indicates that he is referring to all mankind. This would be harmonious with the truth of Isaiah 53:6, just examined. This is the objective, historical aspect of Christ's death, which is available to all mankind. Chafer had argued that propitiation is a God-ward work of Christ.<sup>3</sup> How wonderful to know that God

is perfectly satisfied with the sacrifice of Christ for the sins of the whole world.<sup>A</sup> *God is indeed propitious!*

### Two Distinct Dimensions of Redemption

The tendency of translators and theologians to lump together the diverse ideas behind the eight Greek words related to redemption obscures a significant distinction. These words fall into two categories, one with an emphasis upon the objective, historical payment of the ransom price which the Lord Jesus paid through His passion, and the other, upon the subjective liberation of the individual captive from sin.

The usage of the different words must be examined. It should not be assumed that because they are all derived from two roots the usage relates to their derivation. Contemporary linguists emphasize the importance of *usage over derivation*. Carson warns of the danger of the root fallacy: "One of the most enduring of errors, the root fallacy presupposes that every word actually *has* a meaning bound up with its shape or its components. In this view, meaning is determined by etymology; that is, by the root or roots of a word."<sup>4</sup> The usage of *agoradzein*, *lutron*, and *antlutron* refer to the objective ransom price paid by Christ's death. On the other hand, *exagoradzein*, *lutrotes*, and *apolutrosis* most clearly refer to the subjective liberation of the captive. The verb, *lutroein*, from which four of the nouns are derived, and the noun, *lutrosis*, are general words encompassing both concepts.

### Both aspects undistinguished

***Lutroein and lutrosis.*** The usage of the verb *lutroein* includes both dimensions, the objective and the subjective. Indeed, the BAG lexicon lists both: "1. *free by paying a ransom, redeem...* 2. *gener. set free, redeem, rescue*". They cite 1 Peter 1:18 under the first and Luke 24:21 and Titus 2:14 under the second.<sup>5</sup> This is confirmed by Buchsel's study of the secular usage. The Septuagint and Jewish usage, however, only minimally have the idea of the ransom price and stress the liberation phase.<sup>6</sup> The same is true of the abstract noun *lutrosis* as well. The BAG lexicon lists the two phases separately, but list the three scriptural usages (Lk. 1:68; 2:38; Heb. 9:12) under the liberation locus and cite the Didache under the ransom aspect.<sup>7</sup>

### Focus on the objective, historical aspect: ransom

Three of the Greek words focus on the objective, historical dimension, that is, a purchase by the payment of a ransom price.

***Lutron.*** The noun *lutron*, in secular usage, meant "price of release, ran-

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A. Some extreme Calvinists claim that John is referring to the sins of Jewish Christians and then to Gentiles as well. However, no New Testament introduction says that First John was written to Hebrew Christians. There is no hint of this in the epistle which is part of the "general epistles," so clearly universal by having been written from Ephesus in the 90s.

som”<sup>8</sup> It especially referred to money paid for prisoners of war or slaves. The Septuagintal usage is the same, especially as an equivalent to a forfeited life. Thus it is clear that the focus of Christ's usage in Mk. 10:45 and Mt. 20:28 is on the substitutionary ransom price: “**just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.**” There is no basis for thinking that the consequent meaning of the release of the prisoner is in view. This is totally objective, historical, and general.

**Antilutron.** Paul's usage of *antilutron* in 1 Tim. 2:6 is clearly based upon Christ's ransom statement, except that instead of using the preposition *anti* separately, Paul follows the Hellenic Greek liking for compounds: “**For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time.**” “Materially *antilutron* is the same as *lutron*.”<sup>9</sup> Thus understanding the focus to be upon the objective payment of the ransom price helps to explain how this ransom can be for “all”. There would be a serious theological problem if the focus were to be on the liberation of the captive, since obviously all have not been liberated. Extreme Calvinists have tried to solve the problem by insisting that ‘all’ does not mean ‘all’ in this and other contexts. A much simpler solution is simply to note the objective focus of this word. There is no theological incongruity to the idea that the objective ransom price Christ paid was sufficient for all without exception, even though not all have been liberated.

**Agoradzein.** Least controversial would be the meaning of the verb *agoradzein* since it has a vast secular usage, “to buy, to purchase.”<sup>10</sup> Clearly the overwhelming focus is upon the active purchase, and it is frequently used in this sense in the Gospels. Paul's usage in 1 Corinthians 6:20 and 7:23 mentions the price (*timē*): “**For you have been bought with a price...**” This helps to explain how Peter could use this word in reference to unregenerate false teachers in 2 Peter 2:1: “**... just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.**” Christ paid the objective price, but Peter does not have the liberation of the captive in view. This is confirmed by his later reference to the false teachers in 2:19 as “slaves of corruption.” The usage in Revelation 5:9 and 14:3, 4 might possibly include the liberation dimension, but its basic meaning makes perfect sense in the context.

### Focus on the subjective, experiential aspect: liberation

The remaining three words focus upon the emancipation of the slave.

**Apolutrosis.** The abstract compound noun *apolutrosis* shows a clear semantic shift caused by the prefix *apo*, from the ransom price to the release of the captive. Thus the BAG lexicon only lists “release”, both literally and figuratively.<sup>11</sup> Buchsel in *TDNT* confirms this understanding most explicitly:

How far is the idea of a *lutron*, a ransom or the like, still implied in *apolutrosis*? Are we to assume that whenever *apolutrosis* is used there is

also a suggestion of *lutron*? In none of the *apolutrosis* passages is there any express reference to a ransom.... **They think only of the act of emancipation itself, and of what it implies. ... The true rendering, then, is "redemption" or "liberation," not "ransom." "Release" is also possible in Hb. 11:35 and "remission" in Hb. 9:15 (emphasis mine).**<sup>12</sup>

Thus it is clear that the addition of the prefix *apo* has resulted in a very significant semantic shift from the usage of *lutron*. Chamberlain's statement in his grammar is very important, "*The student should learn once and for all that every single letter added to a Greek root adds something to the idea expressed by the root.*"<sup>13</sup> Chamberlain's point again is very relevant.

**Lutrotēs.** The one New Testament usage of the personal noun of agency *lutrotēs* (redeemer, liberator) in Acts 7:35 also focuses upon the liberation phase by referring to Moses as the liberator. Moses did not pay any ransom price to liberate Israel from Egypt. It is not used in the secular Greek, and its Septuagintal usage is harmonious with this.<sup>14</sup>

**Exagoradzein.** Paul's usage of the compound verb *exagoradzein* is harmonious with this. It is used in secular Greek in reference to the manumission of a slave. All of the New Testament usages are by Paul. "**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.... in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons**" (Gal. 3:13, 4:5). Paul's emphasis in Galatians on the liberation of the Christian from the slavery of the Mosaic Law makes it clear that he had the liberation dimension in mind. Buchsel confirms this: "The predominance of an objectivising understanding of *exagorazen* has led most of the exegetical and biblico-theological work on the passage astray." He goes on to clarify, "*exagoradzo* also means, in accordance with the sense of the *ek* in many composites, an 'intensive buying,' i.e., a buying which exhausts the possibilities available." He sees the usage in the prison epistles as harmonious with this (Col. 4:5; Eph. 5:16).<sup>15</sup> In conclusion, the addition of the prefix *ex=ek* ('out of') radically shifts the emphasis of the word from the price paid to the liberation of the slave. *Agoradzein* and *exagoradzein* must be seen as two distinct words, with distinct, even contrasting ranges of meaning. Chamberlain's point is equally relevant here also. Therefore, *exagorazein* is a subjective, personal term.

### Clarification of the contrast

Thus it is clear, not only that the linguistic evidence supports a distinction between the objective ransom phase of Christ's death and the subjective liberation phase in the life of the Christian, but also that such a distinction is of great value theologically. It helps to explain how the ransom price could be connected with unregenerate false teachers (2 Pet. 2:1) and all mankind (1 Tim. 2:5-6), when the liberation has been effective for only a limited number. Thus, it helps resolve the tension between these two truths. Christ's ransom price was sufficient for all mankind and provisionally avail-

able to all, but the liberation has been effectual only for those who believe.

An illustration helps to understand the importance of this distinction. When heiress Patty Hearst was kidnapped by the Symbionese Liberation Army some years ago, her father paid a ransom price of two million dollars. However, Patty, having been brainwashed into sympathy with her captors, even joined them in a bank robbery and refused to be liberated. The *lutron* (ransom price) had been provided, the act of *agoradzein* (paying the ransom) had been fulfilled, but there was no *apolutrosis* or *exagoradzein* (liberation) effectuated. The objective provision was made, but the subjective release did not occur because of the will of the captive. Just so the objective ransom price for the sins of the whole human race was provided on Calvary, but the subjective release of the majority of the captives has not taken place because of their own willful rejection of the redeemer.

### Reconciliation

Paul uniquely developed the picture of reconciliation through the cross, using three related words: *katallassein*, *katallagē*, & *apokatallassein*. There is little controversy about the meaning of these words, the first word means “to change, exchange, reconcile” and is used twice in Romans 5:9-11:

**Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while 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 this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.**

This basic context makes it clear that reconciliation is directed at man’s alienation from God, and that believers are said to have been reconciled to God, even from a state of total enmity toward Him. Since Paul designates our prior state as enemies of God, it is clear that this is subjective and individual rather than objective and historical. This happens in the life and experience of the believer as a part of the conversion process. It is also clear that the idea that God was somehow historically reconciled is not supported here or in any of Paul’s other passages. Reconciliation is always manward. Believers have received this reconciliation.

This passage is also a wonderful basis for the security of the believer, since Paul made it clear that if God was able to reconcile us when we were at enmity, He is even “much more” able to complete that salvation through Christ’s resurrected and ascended life now interceding for us at the Father’s right hand (Heb. 7:25). *Amazingly, he said that our future salvation is even more sure than the present.*

The interpretation of 2 Corinthians 5:18-20 is not as straightforward:

**Now all *these things* are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely that God was in**

**Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg [sic. you] on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**

Paul's use of an aorist\* participle in 5:18 in reference to the believer's reconciliation as a past event is harmonious with Romans 5. But Paul's use of a periphrastic\* present participle in 5:19 in reference to the reconciliation of the world is more difficult. The finite verb 'was' is imperfect and together they have an imperfect force.<sup>16</sup> Thus it could be fairly said that, *in the cross, God was in the process of reconciling the world*. Obviously the world has not yet been reconciled. But the cross was the foundation of that *process* of reconciliation, which has been going on since that day, as sinners one by one respond to the good news.<sup>17</sup> This is confirmed by Paul's statement that God gave to believers a ministry of reconciliation and a word of reconciliation. Then he explained in 5:20 how this works— God entreats the world through us, His ambassadors, as we plead with sinners to be reconciled to God (note that the 'you' in v. 20 is not in the Greek). From this it is clear that the work of reconciliation is subjective and personal, not objective and historical.

Paul used the stronger compound word *apokatallassein* in Ephesians 2:16, speaking of the goal of the cross to thoroughly reconcile Jew and Gentile together in one body, the Church. Abbott-Smith suggests that the prefix *apo* signifies a more complete and thorough reconciliation.<sup>18</sup> Then in the parallel passage in Colossians 1:20-22, Paul expanded the purview to "all kinds of things" to be thoroughly reconciled in the end time, including the reconciliation of the Colossian believers in their day (cf. discussion on p. 58, *BCAA*). This is harmonious with his earlier use of these words.

### Conclusions

With so many distinct Greek words used to portray the cross of Christ, it is fuzzy thinking which perpetuates the use of the Old Testament term 'atonement' in theological literature, especially since it only refers to the prefiguring of the Christ's sacrifice in the Levitical system, which was far short of the reality. However, the pre-cross predictions are most instructive, coupled with the apostolic references to His death as a substitutionary expiatory sacrifice. The book of Hebrews especially contrasted the Levitical offerings with the ultimate efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, an efficacy which guaranteed eternal redemption to the believer.

In the focus upon the words for propitiation, an objective universality is revealed, which confirmed the picture of sacrifice. The work of propitiation thus was God-ward in that Christ's death was a perfect satisfaction to the Father for the sins of the whole world.

*Two dimensions in the broad concept of redemption emerged: ransom-redemption, focusing upon the objective ransom price paid; and liberation-*

*redemption, focusing upon the subjective liberation of the sinner from slavery.* Ransom-redemption, like propitiation, is potentially universal in its intent. However, liberation-redemption consistently is limited to believers, as also is reconciliation. These terms portray a subjective application of the merits of Christ's sacrifice to those who claim it in repentant faith.

For centuries there has been endless debate over limited atonement vs. general redemption.\* The whole debate is beside the point. Atonement is not a New Testament word! The best terms are an 'unlimited or general ransom price or purchase' and a 'limited or particular liberation'. The whole question arose because of failure to do the careful word studies needed as a basis for sound theology. Chapter 16 builds upon this linguistic foundation to examine the view of extreme Calvinists that Christ died only for the elect.

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1. Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, III, pp. 86-96, 190-93; Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died: A Case for Unlimited Atonement*, pp. 73-91; *Sin, the Savior, and Salvation*, pp. 117-27; John F. Walvoord, *Jesus Christ, Our Lord*, pp. 163-90.
  2. The NIV has reverted back to the erroneous use of 'atonement' here.
  3. Chafer, III, 93-96.
  4. D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies*, p. 26.
  5. Arndt and Gingrich, *Lexicon*, p. 484.
  6. Buchsel, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, IV: 349-50.
  7. Arndt and Gingrich, p. 484.
  8. *Ibid.*, p. 483.
  9. Buchsel, p. 349.
  10. Arndt & Gingrich, p. 12.
  11. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
  12. Buchsel, pp. 354-5.
  13. William Douglas Chamberlain, *An Exegetical Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 11.
  14. Buchsel, IV: 351.
  15. *Ibid.*, I: 125-8.
  16. Wallace, *Grammar*, pp. 647-48.
  17. There is exegetical criticism of the KJV and NAS translation that "God was in Christ" in favor of the NIV that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ." However, it doesn't affect the conclusions significantly.
  18. Abbott-Smith, *Lexicon*, en loc.