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Terms that Describe Aspects of Christ's Accomplishments

Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the single most important event in the history of mankind. Coupled with His resurrection, the Almighty God of the universe brought salvation to the whole world. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul and other writers of the New Testament described aspects of Christ's accomplishments using significant terms such as retribution, atonement, propitiation, expiation, justification, and sanctification. These key words help explain the theological significance of Christ's life, death, and resurrection in relation to mankind's sinful condition.

The term "retribution" can be defined as "the concept of repaying persons in kind, according to their just deserts" (Towner 865); "the act of paying back to someone according to his just deserts" (Buis 83). Although the term does not appear in the KJV nor the NASB, retribution is used twice in the *Revised Standard Version* to translate the Greek words *antapódoma* (Rom. 11:9) and *misthapodosía* (Heb. 2:2) and has a primary meaning of "recompense" (Herion 154). In reference to Hebrews 2:2, retribution "signifies 'punishment' as a recompense to warn readers against not heeding the New Testament message of salvation which is greater than that of the Old Testament" (Vinyard 14: 203). The idea of retribution is expressed throughout Scripture "in reference to the wrath of God, vengeance, punishment, and judgment when God 'will give to each person according to what he has done' (Rom. 2:6)" (*Retribution* 859).

Divine retribution is nested within the Biblical drama of God seeking to restore fallen mankind to a right relationship with Himself (Towner 866). Because the character of God consists of righteousness, justice, and omnipotence, God desires to and has the ability to punish evil and reward good. Since human beings have broken their relationship with God, sinned, and offended a holy God, they justly deserve His wrath. However, God's retributive nature and "His justice is tempered by His mercy . . . Mercy is not simply a matter of ignoring evil, but God in Christ crucified takes the just deserts of sin upon Himself rather than letting sin go unpunished" (Buis 84). Believers receive better than they deserve from God because of the atonement.

The term "atonement," according to Morris, means "'a making at one', and points to a process of bringing those who are estranged into a unity" (*New Bible* 104). It is used extensively in the Old Testament as the verb *kāphar*, whose primary meaning is "to cover over" (*Atonement* 108). In the New Testament, the word "atonement" appears only once in the *King James Version* (Rom. 5:11) and represents the Greek word *καταλλαγή* (*katallagē*), whose meaning is "reconciliation" (Vine 43). This Greek word also appears in Rom. 11:15 and 2 Cor. 5:18-19. Brown says that *katallagē* "generally denotes in classical Gk. the restoration of the original understanding between people after hostility or displeasure" (3: 166). Thayer notes that atonement means "reconciliation, restoration to favor" and in the New Testament it refers to "the restoration or the favor of God to sinners that repent and put their trust in the expiatory death of Christ: 2 Co. v. 18" (333). Brown concurs saying, "The *katallagē* is the expression of the transformation of the relationship (of enmity) between God and man, which has been brought about by the new Adam (Rom. 5:12 ff.), Jesus Christ" (3: 168).

The atonement in the Old Testament was obtained by the shedding of blood of a sacrificed,

unblemished animal (Lev. 17:11). Morris states, "Atonement is secured, not by any value inherent in the sacrificial victim, but because sacrifice is the divinely appointed way of securing atonement" (*New Bible* 104). Similarly, out of love, God secured atonement for the world by Christ's vicarious, substitutionary, sacrificial death on the cross. On the contrary, "Atonement is not a matter of passing over sin as had been done previously (Rom. 3:25)." Morris further states, "The cross shows that God is just, at the same time as it shows him justifying believers" (*New Bible* 105). This can be seen more clearly in the terms "propitiation" and "justification."

The term "propitiation" is used three times in the *King James Version* (once for *hilastērion* in Rom. 3:25; twice for *hilasmos* in 1 John 2:2, 4:10) and the *New American Standard Bible* uses it a fourth time (*hilaskomai* in Heb. 2:17). However, the *Revised Standard Version* translates these Greek words as "expiation" instead (Toon 828). "A propitiation is a sacrifice or gift which averts the wrath of God and enables Him to be merciful and favorable to the sinner" (Gilbrant 63). Morris emphasizes that the term implies that "God is angry when people sin and that, if they are to be forgiven, something must be done about that anger. . . . the death of Christ is the means of removing the divine wrath from sinners" (*The Atonement* 152). "Expiation" is "a term associated with the removal, cleansing, or forgiveness of sin; it is often confused with 'propitiation'" (Alsup 291).

Morris explains the differences of the terms "propitiation" and "expiation" in his book entitled, *The Atonement*:

Propitiation means the turning away of anger; expiation is rather the making amends for a wrong. Propitiation is a personal word; one propitiates a person.

Expiation is an impersonal word; one expiates a sin or a crime. (151)

Expiation focuses on "the object causing the broken covenantal relationship (sin)," while propitiation focuses on "the subject initiating and sustaining the covenant (God)" (Alsup 292). Palma encourages the use of propitiation and defines it as "appeasing God's wrath through Christ's atoning sacrifice" (138). He further summarizes:

In general, liberal theologians and biblical scholars prefer the translation *expiation* because *expiation* is a more neutral, less offensive word than *propitiation*. However the problem with this choice is that the concept of expiation does not imply that God is angry with the ungodliness and wickedness of people and needs to be appeased, but the concept of propitiation includes both of these aspects. (138-39)

Bruce strongly argues that "there is no reason for excluding from the meaning of *hilastērion* the averting of divine wrath" because the context warrants "the inclusion of the averting of divine wrath in the meaning of *hilastērion* in Romans 3:25" (100). In support of this, Romans 1:18 says, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness" (NASB). Propitiation is included in justification.

The term "justification" can be defined as "that judicial act of God by which, on the basis of the meritorious work of Christ, imputed to the sinner and received through faith, God declares the sinner absolved from sin, released from its penalty, and restored as righteous." More simply, "it is being placed by God in a right relationship with himself" (Bass 559). The word "justification" is used three times in the *King James Version* (twice for *dikaiōsis* in Rom. 4:25, 5:18; once for *dikaiōma* in Rom. 5:16). In Rom. 4:25, "the parallel use of the preposition *dia* ('because of') indicates that 'through' His death on the cross and 'through' His resurrection on the third day, Jesus procured all that was necessary for our justification. Paul always considered the death and resurrection of Christ as one interrelated act" (Vinyard 12: 145). Bruce comments that both events were necessary and "his sacrificial death would not have been efficacious apart from the

resurrection" (113).

The gospel's central theme in Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Romans is that justification of sinners is obtained by faith alone, apart from 'works of righteousness'. "On the basis of Christ's sacrifice," a sinner extends faith and Christ's righteousness is imputed to him and he is constituted righteous (Pecota 119). Therefore, justification is both declarative and actual. Ladd aptly states:

The doctrine of justification means that God has pronounced the eschatological verdict of acquittal over the person of faith in the present, in advance of the final judgment. The resulting righteousness is not ethical perfection, it is "sinlessness" in the sense that God no longer counts a person's sin against him or her (2 Cor. 5:19). The righteous one is not "regarded as if he were righteous"; the individual really is righteous, absolved from sin by God's verdict. . . . the God of the universe who is both lawgiver and righteous judge pronounces the verdict of acquittal. Therefore, in the sight of God an individual is not a sinner but a righteous person. (488)

Cole correctly emphasizes "that being 'put right' with God involves and issues in a subsequent total change in our moral behavior, though this in itself could never commend us to God" (122). Justification "does not destroy our old sinful nature, nor does it instantly transform us into Christ's image" (Palma 152). The gradual process of conformity to Christ's image is a part of sanctification.

"Sanctification", by definition, is "the process or result of being made holy" (*Sanctification* 894). The term "sanctification" is used several times in the New Testament for the Greek word *hagiasmos* (ἁγιασμός). Sanctification is separation of a believer from evil things and ways and a dedication to God (Vines 545). Although believers "are already (objectively) sanctified in Christ" (1 Cor. 1:30), they "are called to show that consecration in their lives" (1 Thess. 4:3; 5:23). "Because believers are holy in Christ (set apart for God by his sacrificial atoning blood), they are to be holy in practice in the power of the Holy Spirit" (*Sanctification* 894-95). Sanctification involves "progressive conformity to the mind or image of Christ here and now (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10)" (Bruce 168).

While justification is reckoned to a believer, he must count or reckon his sanctification. The progress of sanctification "depends on the individual Christian's willingness to understand and accept what God has already provided for him" (Palma 156). Palma makes an apt comparison:

A person is justified when he believes in Christ, and he is also sanctified--set apart--at that time. Yet, the practical outworking of sanctification is progressive in nature because sanctification is really the visible manifestation of justification. . . . Sanctification is "justification-in-practice." (161).

"As justification implies deliverance from the penalty of sin, so sanctification implies deliverance from the pollutions, privations and potency of sin" (Walters 1069). God's ultimate goal is for people to be more and more like Him during the progressive subjective state of sanctification (Pecota 167) after having experienced the objective aspects of atonement, retribution, propitiation, expiation, justification, and sanctification.

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