

Article

Rediscovering a Biblical and Early Patristic View of Atonement through Orthodox–Evangelical Dialogue

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Abstract: One of the most effective ways to discover (or rediscover) truth is through dialogue. I believe that both Orthodox and Evangelicals have something important to offer for a reconstruction of a holistic biblical concept of atonement. Orthodox theology has an important perspective to offer, which is not well-known in Western theology—an ontological perspective on atonement. However, Orthodox theologians have lacked assertiveness, clarity, and comprehensiveness in their presentation of this view, especially in connection with biblical texts. In Protestant theology, we can find many critiques of inadequate existing views as well as in-depth biblical study of separate atonement ideas, but what is lacking is a holistic concept of atonement that would be able to harmoniously integrate various biblical atonement metaphors and also faithfully reflect the early patristic view. I believe that an ontological perspective on atonement combined with the integration of key biblical atonement ideas and metaphors can bring us back to the heart of the apostolic and early church gospel message. Several issues have hindered accomplishing such a project in the past. I will point to these problems and show some possible solutions. Finally, I will present the ontological perspective and show how it can integrate various biblical atonement metaphors.

Keywords: atonement; redemption; ransom; metaphor; concept; theory of atonement; kerygma; Orthodox; Evangelical; theology



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1. Introduction

Christ's atonement is at the very heart of the Christian faith. Unfortunately, among Christians there is very little unity regarding what it means and what exactly was accomplished on the cross. David Hoekema states this sad fact: "Due to the lack of a single doctrinal concept of atonement, the traditions of different ecclesiastical bodies have diverged in the interpretation of this teaching" (Hoekema 1999, pp. 225–26). Many theologians of different streams have offered their perspectives on what atonement is all about, but none of the existing "theories of atonement" have been able to gain wide support.

1.1. The Present Situation in Regards to the Theology of Atonement among Protestants and Orthodox Christians

1.1.1. General Overview of Dominant Protestant and Orthodox Perspectives on Atonement

Usually, in a standard Evangelical theology textbook's overview of the main theories of atonement, we will find the following: (1) ransom (from Satan) views (RV)¹, (2) moral influence theories (MIT) (3) the satisfaction theory of Anselm of Canterbury (ST), and (4) the penal substitution atonement theory (PSA) (e.g., Grudem 1994, pp. 695–711; Erickson 1990, pp. 783–800). In recent decades, the *Christus Victor* (CV) perspective has also become popular, but I agree with the criticism of Kathryn Tanner that CV cannot be considered a theory of atonement since it offers no mechanism of atonement and should rather be viewed as an important biblical motif (Tanner 2010, p. 253). There are a number of other perspectives, but they remain marginal.

Among Orthodox scholars we can find three major perspectives (Козлов 2010, pp. 304–11; Гнедич 2007, p. 439): (1) the legal view², (2) the moral view³, and (3) the organic or ontological

view⁴ (Козлов 2010, pp. 304–11), while Gnedich uses the term “ontological understanding” (Гнедич 2007, p. 439).. As an example of the variety of approaches on atonement among Orthodox scholars, we can look to the works of theologians of the Russian Orthodox Church. However, a similar diversity of views can be found in the theological works of other Orthodox churches. Gnedich offers an important study of the history of atonement teaching in the Orthodox theology of Eastern Europe from the late 19th through the mid-20th century (Гнедич 2007). Gnedich shows how, at that time, Orthodox theology lacked a clear doctrinal presentation on this issue, so many theologians filled the gap by presenting a teaching on atonement within a legal framework, borrowing ideas from Catholic and Protestant theology. For example, legal language very similar to Anselm’s satisfaction view can be found in the writings of St. Theophan the Recluse and in major systematic theology textbooks in Russian by Metropolitan Makary (Bulgakov) and Archbishop Filaret (Gumilevsky). Moreover, theologians and scholars like Pavel Svetlov, Mikhail Tareev, Victor Nesmelov, and others felt that a legal explanation of atonement was a move in the wrong direction, and they offered to look at atonement through a moral perspective. Archimandrite Sergius (Stragorodsky) also put significant emphasis on the moral aspect of salvation, often neglecting the objective aspect accomplished through Christ’s death and resurrection.

In response to these tendencies, Orthodox theologians like Florovsky and Lossky called for a return to the dominant Eastern patristic perspective and offered what is called an “organic” or “ontological perspective” (OP) (or theory) of atonement⁵. Florovsky emphasized that “it was necessary to return to the Fathers more fully,” especially to the ontological component of the doctrine of atonement (Флоровский 2009, p. 557). Unfortunately, Florovsky was not able to finish his book on atonement, in which he wanted to provide an alternative to various, in his opinion, mistaken trends in Orthodox theology⁶. Therefore, an ontological perspective was never fully developed and clearly presented, especially in connection with the biblical material and integration of various biblical metaphors, themes, and ideas into this concept.

Other names that are sometimes used to refer to this view are “biological,” “physical,” “naturalistic,” “magical,” and “mystical.” Most of these names are used by liberal scholars, often to describe what is sometimes called the “physical theory of atonement,” which teaches about the transformation of human nature due to Christ’s Incarnation. The term “ontological” is used primarily in Orthodox literature in Eastern Europe and describes the view that holds that Christ through His death and resurrection delivers human nature from death and corruption and imparts to it qualities of immortality and incorruption. This view differs from the “physical theory” by its emphasis on the death and resurrection of Christ to achieve redemption.

Some Orthodox also talk about redemption from Satan’s power, but this idea usually serves as an addition to other perspectives, rather than as a separate theory. At the same time it is possible to find marginal views among the Orthodox like that of Metropolitan Antony (Khrapovitsky) who taught about redemption through Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane.

Archpriest Maxim Kozlov summarizes the current state of affairs in this field of theology in the following way: “There is no single doctrine of atonement, at least in Russian Orthodox theology, in contrast to most other sections of dogma. For example, the doctrine of the Incarnation, the doctrine of the Trinity in almost all dogmatic systems, in all textbooks of dogmatic theology are presented identically—there may be different shades, but, as a rule, there are no significant differences. There is no such consensus about the doctrine of atonement. Different authors . . . understand and teach about the atonement in very different ways, there are several different ‘theories’, none of which can claim to be completely official, as the only one claiming to be the final expression of church truth” (Гнедич 2007, p. 13). I believe it is important to finish the project that Florovsky started and to present OP not just as an Orthodox or Eastern patristic theory but also as a biblical view, which avoids many problems that are present in other popular perspectives. However,

before we can firmly lay the foundation of this view, it is important to clear the ground first and remove the obstacles that may hinder formulation of this position on atonement.

The goal of this article is to highlight the main issues that have been preventing formulation of the holistic concept of atonement built on OP, to offer ways of dealing with the obstacles, to present an ontological perspective on atonement, and to provide general guidelines regarding how it can integrate various biblical atonement metaphors. Since this article was written in the context of Orthodox–Evangelical dialogue, I interact primarily with theological views of these two streams of Christianity. However, I believe that the conclusions made will also be significant for Catholic theology, which, according to the words of Catholic theologian François Brune, today is at a “dead end” regarding their contemporary atonement theology (Брюн 2019, p. 32).

1.1.2. The Present Situation Regarding Dialogue between Orthodox Christians and Evangelicals on the Issue of Atonement

Unfortunately, we see very little real dialogue between Orthodox and Protestants on the issue of atonement. There are several reasons for this. First of all, there has been little familiarity in the West with Orthodox theology in general. Only in recent decades do we see a growing interest in Orthodox theology and Eastern patristics among Protestants, which is reflected in a number of new books, articles, and dissertations in this area. Yet, if we talk specifically about the issue of atonement, unfortunately, it seems that Protestants have not yet been able to see that Orthodox theology can offer something substantial on this topic. As we have shown already, most Evangelical theology textbooks do not offer an ontological perspective on the atonement as a valid option since, most likely, the authors are not even familiar with it. There have been various attempts among Protestants to rediscover the patristic view of atonement, but very often such endeavors are either too general to provide a clear picture of the patristic perspective or they try to show the historicity of a certain view, but they fail to take their research far enough.

At the same time, many Evangelicals, holding Scripture as the highest authority, did not feel that they could consider as a valid option any position that ignores or rejects the legal language of Scripture, which is also quite prevalent in writings of the Church Fathers. Many Orthodox theologians, even in the best presentations, have a tendency to reject or to ignore legal metaphors in the Bible. For example, Florovsky in his presentation of the atonement is quite cautious toward legal metaphors and even calls them “colorless anthropomorphism” (Florovsky 1976b, p. 101, see also pp. 102–3).

Moreover, those who hold to OP have not been able to offer much to show the biblical foundations of their position. For example, Florovsky had difficulty in integrating the biblical concepts of “sacrifice,” “ransom,” and “justice” into his view of atonement (Florovsky 1976b, p. 101). The problem was that he viewed these concepts through an interpretation, which he himself criticized as “legal” and “transactional.” At the same time, in many contemporary Protestant works we see an attempt to reinterpret many legal theological concepts (justice, justification, judgement, punishment, etc.) in order to avoid unbalanced views. We can also find much excellent research of the biblical concepts of “sacrifice,” “ransom,” etc., which could be harmoniously integrated into an ontological perspective of atonement. Despite similar critiques of incorrect interpretations and passion to represent faithful biblical teaching among many Protestant and Orthodox theologians, there is very little theological dialogue between them on these issues.

Certain Protestants’ distrust of the Orthodox teaching on atonement is caused by what Fr. Andrew Louth calls “a tendency among Orthodox theologians to play down the crucifixion and lay all the emphasis on the resurrection” (Louth 2019, p. 32). At the same time, the Orthodox view on atonement is integrated into the theology of deification, which many Protestants are not very familiar with and also look at with suspicion.

Probably, other than the works of Georges Florovsky, one of the best presentations of the ontological perspective has been offered not by Orthodox but by Protestant scholar Benjamin Myers, though he calls it a “patristic atonement model” (Myers 2015). Yet, in Myers’ article, we do not see any references to Orthodox theology on atonement. I

believe that as we have more dialogue about this perspective, OP can become not only a sound alternative to many existing views, but it also has the powerful potential to become a unifying perspective on atonement that can be embraced by Orthodox, Catholics, and Protestants.

2. Key Obstacles to the Formation of a Comprehensive Concept of the Atonement

Despite much research in the area of the atonement and soteriology in general, several theological issues have been hindering the process of formation of a comprehensive concept of atonement. I want to point these issues out and offer some solutions to each one of them.

2.1. Lack of Clarity in Soteriological Terminology

One of the first and most basic problems is the way various terms that describe salvation and atonement are used by various authors. Such terms as *salvation*, *atonement*, *reconciliation*, *redemption*, *work of Christ*, etc. are used by some to refer to the totality of Christ's salvific work and, by others, to a particular aspect of salvation. In some soteriological perspectives, terms like "salvation" and "work of Christ" are reduced to the objective work on the cross and thus miss the idea that these terms can also be applied to other aspects of Christ's salvific work. Obviously, such a diversity of theological positions and use of terminology brings much confusion and misunderstanding and hinders the formation of a unified perspective on atonement. I will use the term "salvation" to describe all the fullness of Christ's salvific work, and the words "atonement" and "redemption" will be used to describe specifically Christ's objective work accomplished through His death and resurrection.

2.2. Misuse of Metaphorical Language

The process of theological interpretation can become even more complicated by misunderstanding how metaphorical language works both in Scripture and in theology. In addition to the diverse usage of soteriological terminology in literature on atonement, we can find a variety of terms used to describe metaphorical language, such as *metaphor*, *image*, *model*, *theory*, *analogy*, etc., that can refer to very different metaphorical constructs. We may have a situation in which certain metaphors or images found in the writings of a certain theologian or Church Father are viewed as proof that he holds to a certain "theory of atonement." Such evaluations may be very superficial, missing the real essence of the teaching of the author. A proper understanding of any theological position that uses metaphorical language can be hindered by the lack of clear definition for various metaphorical categories. I believe that the works of Protestant scholars like Oliver Crisp (Crisp 2015, 2017), Ian Barbour (Barbour 1974), Ian Ramsey (Ramsey 1957, 1971, 1973), and many others can be very helpful in bringing some clarity into the area of use of metaphorical language, especially dealing with models and theories as key elements of the formation of any theological concept. In this article, I attempt to show the difference between these categories (metaphors, models, theories) and show the importance of such distinctions in atonement theology.

2.3. Separation of Atonement Theology from the Apostolic Kerygma

I believe that the neglect of the centrality of apostolic kerygma in the formation of the concept of the atonement has led to many incorrect interpretations. N. T. Wright is right when he points to the danger of detaching various theories from the biblical story and shows that, in these cases, "their central themes can be subtly transformed to carry significantly different meanings" (Wright 2016, p. 185). This is what happened in various attempts to reconstruct the biblical concept of atonement, when theologizing about this issue was removed from the biblical narrative and especially from the story presented in apostolic kerygma. Sometimes we desperately look for the answer while it lies right on the surface in front of us. For example, Simon Gathercole provided a very solid defense of the biblical idea of substitution and summarized it in a short statement: Jesus "did something,

underwent something, so that we did not and would not have to do so" (Gathercole 2015, p. 15). Many theologians develop very complex theories about that "something" He underwent, while dozens of New Testament passages clearly state it: Christ died and rose again. It is here, in this simple apostolic kerygma, that we have the key to a reconstruction of the biblical atonement concept.

2.4. Lack of a Holistic Hamartiological Perspective

Atonement as a solution to a certain problem is closely connected to the way we view sin and other related problems (guilt, punishment for sin, etc.) that need to be resolved. Scot McKnight observes that our view of "sin defines how we approach atonement" (McKnight 2007, p. 48). Therefore, in order to understand atonement properly, we must clearly see the problem it is dealing with. If we fail to do this, we will end up with a distorted or reductionistic view of sin, which will lead to a distorted or reductionistic view of salvation and atonement. This is exactly what has happened in many atonement perspectives. Everyone would agree that atonement is supposed to resolve the problem of sin. However, in many atonement theories, their view of sin reflects more of their own culture than of a biblical understanding of sin. If we want to grasp the biblical view of atonement, we need to return to the right understanding of the biblical concept of sin.

2.5. Lack of a Holistic Soteriological Perspective

One of the biggest areas of confusion in many works on atonement results from a very reductionistic view of salvation and the work of Christ. Many Christians and Christian theologians associate salvation with the redemption accomplished on the cross, or forgiveness of sins, or justification. Yet, we need to remember that "salvation" is a biblical metaphor that can be used in very different ways and indeed can mean forgiveness of sins, or sanctification, or redemption. So, it is possible to use this word in any of these specific narrow senses. However, if we talk about salvation as God's complete salvific mission, it is much broader than any of these narrow aspects, and it includes God's response to all aspects of the problem of sin and its consequences. What Christ has accomplished through His death and resurrection is part of God's holistic salvific work but is not the totality of it. Problems with understanding atonement cannot be avoided if we fail to see the broad holistic picture of salvation and the place of atonement as one of its key elements.

3. Building a Holistic Concept of Atonement on the Foundation of an Ontological Perspective

Having looked at some particular issues that can prevent us from being able to form a holistic concept of atonement, now I want to present a general outline of the atonement perspective, which I believe is both faithful to the Scripture and to the early patristic tradition. As I said earlier, in Orthodox theology we can find some important foundational guidelines, which then can be enriched by contemporary Protestant biblical scholarship for our task of presenting a concept of atonement that is both Scriptural and patristic. Before I present an ontological perspective on atonement and its biblical foundation, I need to respond to the main problems mentioned in the previous section since the answers will serve as a foundation of the view that I present.

3.1. Metaphors as Key Building Blocks of the Concept of Atonement

Since many contemporary scholars recognize that theological language is fundamentally metaphorical (Boersma 2006, p. 105), we could say that the history of many Christian doctrines, including the doctrine of atonement, is the history of the use and abuse of metaphors in theology. In biblical teaching on atonement, metaphors are the main means through which biblical authors verbalize the concept of atonement. Therefore, proper interpretation of these metaphors is the key to grasping the biblical concept and formulating it. Using the biblical metaphor of "ransom" as an example, I briefly present how biblical metaphors have been used and abused in the formation of models, theories, and concepts of the atonement.

C. S. Lewis provided a simple definition of metaphor: “thinking (and often then speaking) of a lesser known reality in terms of a better known one that is in some significant way similar to it” (Macky 1982, p. 206). In each metaphor we have a partial mapping of these similarities from the source domain to the target domain. Each metaphor highlights only certain aspects of the object or concept we are describing. Zoltan Kovecses distinguishes between a simple metaphor and a complex metaphor and shows that simple metaphors can form a cluster of metaphors, which together form a complex metaphor (Kovecses 2010, pp. 103, 145), which can work as a metaphorical model. For example, in Scripture we find a number of simple metaphors (*slavery, freedom, price paid, Redeemer*, etc.), which together form a *biblical model of ransom* that presents to us a metaphorical perspective on what has been accomplished by Christ on the cross: we were in “slavery,” but through the “price” of Christ’s life (or blood) we have been “redeemed” (delivered) and now we are “free.” Using a familiar first-century reality of slavery and the redemption from slavery, the biblical authors provided us a partial revelation of our target domain (what happened on the cross).

We need to remember that not every element of the source domain is mapped into the target domain. In other words, analogy is always limited. For example, Scripture never tells us to whom the price is paid, what happens with the price that was paid, etc. These elements are not part of the metaphorical analogy intended by the original author(s). Therefore, metaphors and metaphorical models always provide us only a limited presentation of reality. If we try to get from a metaphor more than it is supposed to provide, we begin to distort the meaning of the metaphor. No single metaphor is able to present a full picture of reality. This is why we need multiple metaphors in order to reconstruct a biblical concept of atonement, where each metaphor will provide a certain fragment of the larger conceptual picture.

Unfortunately, on the way to reconstructing a biblical concept of atonement, many have taken a wrong route. In order to get a full picture (or outline) of the concept, they began to extend metaphorical analogy and to develop new entailments deduced from the source domain. For example, Origen began to ask: “to whom is the price of redemption paid?”, and as a result, he added new elements to the limited biblical model of ransom. As a result, in RV they may often talk about the devil as the one who had legal rights to hold humanity in slavery and God had to pay him the price to make us free. We see the development of what we can call a *theological atonement theory*, which takes a limited *biblical metaphorical model* and begins to develop it by adding new elements of analogy to interpretation. What we have in the end is a literalization of metaphor and the formation of a new narrative, which becomes dominant in a certain atonement perspective. Thus, a limited *biblical ransom model* that shows us that God made us free through the costly act of Christ, turns into a “full story” *theological ransom theory* that provides a complete explanation of how redemption has been accomplished.

Something similar happened with the cluster of legal metaphors of Scripture. The biblical model of release from condemnation of death through Christ’s death and resurrection turned into a number of *legal theological theories*, with PSA as the most famous of them. According to PSA, on the cross, Christ takes upon Himself God’s legal punishment that we deserve: God pours out His wrath against sin on Jesus and turns His face from Him, and Christ experiences the terrible condemnation of spiritual death. Once God’s judgement is accomplished, His wrath is appeased, and there is now no condemnation for those for whom Christ suffered. Again, we see how a limited *biblical metaphorical model* of release from condemnation obtains new details in order to become a “full picture.” However, as we said, metaphorical presentation of concept can never provide a “full picture” since it goes against the very nature of metaphor. Thus, what we have as a result of such a process is the literalization of metaphorical presentation and the formation of a completed model or narrative, while Scripture always provides only a *limited metaphorical model*.

Because of such literalization, in each theory of atonement we have a new narrative of what happened on the cross, which often becomes the central dominant narrative. In PSA,

it is the story of God punishing Christ instead of us with spiritual death. In RV, it is the story of God paying the devil the ransom price. The problem is that neither of these two narratives are found in the New Testament. We will not find them in the apostolic kerygma in the book of Acts nor in the apostles' reflections in their epistles when they talk about what happened on the cross. These two narratives are only constructed in the process of *a particular interpretation* of certain metaphorical fragments. At the same time, in Scripture we have a clear redemptive narrative, which is repeated dozens of times in different forms but is often neglected in many atonement theories, as I will show further.

In my view, forming a biblical concept of atonement through the literalization and development of a certain *biblical model* into a full *theory of atonement* is a wrong approach since it goes against the very nature of a metaphor and how it works. For example, when Scripture uses the metaphor "Jesus is the bread of life" it maps only certain features of the source domain ("bread") to the target domain ("Jesus"), such as the idea of providing what is needed for life. Yet, if we, not satisfied with such a limited perspective, decide to develop entailments of the source domain and begin to map such ideas as the "origin of bread," "what happens to bread as we eat it," etc., we will end up with wrong ideas that will result in a distorted understanding of the person and work of Christ. The same is true for any other metaphor or metaphorical model. Metaphor always provides us with only a partial understanding of the fragment of reality it describes. Any attempt to add new elements to a *limited biblical metaphorical model* in order to have a "fuller picture" will automatically distort our understanding of the metaphor and of the concept it forms.

How should we form our concepts then? In many ways, the work of a theologian is similar to someone who puts together a big picture of a jigsaw puzzle. Irenaeus of Lyon uses a powerful image that describes the importance of the process of the formation of doctrine (Irenaeus, *AH* 1.8.1 (see also 1.9.4))⁷. He compared biblical images with precious stones, from which the artist made a beautiful image of the king. However, others take these precious stones and make of them an image of a dog or a fox but call it the image of a king, indicating that they use the same stones. Irenaeus, using such a vivid metaphor, skillfully shows that in order to see and understand the true "image of the king," it is not enough to just use the "precious stones" of Scripture, but these "stones" must be correctly placed in the right relationship to each other, because only when they are placed in the right order can they present us with the right image.

Various New Testament texts present different elements of the reality of Christ's atonement, and we have quite a difficult task to bring all of these elements together and integrate them into one holistic concept of atonement. In order to do that, we need to have some structure or contours that provide us with the shape of the big picture. We noticed that in any perspective on atonement, we find a key narrative. Michael Root highlights that narrative is unavoidable in soteriology since it "presumes two states of human existence, a state of deprivation (sin, corruption) and a state of release from that deprivation (salvation, liberation), and an event that produces a change from the first state to the second," which forms "the sufficient conditions of a narrative" (Root 1986, p. 145).

Therefore, we could say that the biblical concept of atonement is presented through a number of what we would call *metaphorical narrative models*, which we could associate with root metaphors (redemption, reconciliation, forgiveness, justification, etc.). These models usually present a problem (debt, slavery, guilt, etc.), a state of freedom from this problem, and some additional details (e.g., "price of ransom"). It is interesting to notice that the event that produces change in most cases is the death and resurrection of Christ.

I think here it is important to differentiate between *historical narrative* and *metaphorical narrative*, which serves as one of the ways to present *historical narrative*. In describing the past event of my visit to a friend and giving him a book (*historical narrative*), I can say: "I paid him my debt." Depending on the context, giving a book and paying my debt could be two different things (two lines of *historical narrative*), or it could be that "paying the debt" is a metaphorical way of describing the returning of a book to my friend (*metaphorical narrative*). Thus, one of the most critical issues in the theology of atonement will be the

decisions we need to make, whether, in different descriptions of what happened on the cross, we are dealing with *historical narrative* or *metaphorical narrative* that presents historical narrative through metaphor. I believe that one of the main problems with many atonement theories is that they literalized metaphors and interpreted certain *metaphorical narratives* as historical narrative. By doing this, they not only took a wrong route but also often ignored or diminished the importance of key redemptive narratives of the New Testament. This brings us to the next point.

3.2. The Apostolic Kerygma as a Basic Structure of the Concept of Atonement

I believe that it is in the apostolic kerygma that we find the key redemptive narrative, which provides us with the structure of the concept of atonement. As we said earlier, instead of trying to reconstruct some hidden narrative of “what really happened” on the cross, we need to pay careful attention to the message of the apostles. In the message of the apostolic church, what happened on the cross is presented to us in the form of a short narrative statement: Jesus died, was buried, and rose again on the third day (see 1 Cor. 15:3–4⁸). This was the central element of the Gospel (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) (1 Cor. 15:1) or the apostolic “kerygma” (τὸ κήρυγμα) (1 Cor. 15:14), and later it became the central element of what St. Irenaeus called the “rule of faith,” which he called the “foundation of the edifice” of all Christian teaching (AP, 6)⁹.

We are so used to this basic narrative of the creed that often it becomes just a statement of belief in the historical event and we may miss the powerful theological meaning that goes with it, which describes the very essence of atonement. Christ died, having experienced real human death in His nature, but on the third day He rose again, not simply returning back to life (as Lazarus did), but raising His human nature to a new state of immortality and incorruption. Therefore, kerygma proclaims not only a historical event but also a deep theological truth: *Jesus died and rose again, having overcome death in His human nature once and for all*. Apostolic preaching was not about settling with the devil the issue of who owns humanity nor it was about settling legal issues of our status before God. It was about what happened with Christ in his human nature and the benefits it provides for us and our salvation.

This is what provides a foundation and a structure for the further development of a concept of atonement. Obviously, having such a basic structure, we still need more enlightenment about the nature of what happened and what it has done for us, but here we enter a reality that is very difficult to explain. This is why biblical writers use metaphors as one of the main means to talk about reality, which is abstract or unknown to us. According to C. S. Lewis, when we describe things like incarnation, redemption through death, and the resurrection of Christ, we are dealing with two things: “the supernatural, unconditioned reality, and those events on the historical level which its irruption into the natural universe is held to have produced. The first thing is indescribable in ‘literal’ speech, and therefore we rightly interpret all that is said about it metaphorically. But the second thing is in a wholly different position. Events on the historical level are the sort of things we can talk about literally” (Lewis 1947, p. 97). Therefore, in the NT we have the historical narrative of Christ’s death and resurrection presented through a number of metaphors and metaphorical models (or narratives).

We should notice that in the New Testament the apostolic kerygma is often followed by a short but very important statement: all this happened “for our sins”¹⁰, that is, to deal with the problem of “sin”. Here we come to the issue, which is the foundation for a holistic ontological concept of atonement.

3.3. The Biblical Concept of Sin as the Foundation of the Biblical Concept of Atonement

Earlier I stressed that our view of sin will determine the way that we view atonement. It is interesting that in Orthodox theology we can find a perspective on sin and its consequences that is somewhat different than a traditional Western understanding. This perspective reflects the view of many Eastern Church Fathers and is much closer to the

biblical Hebrew notion of sin, which we desperately need to return to, since only then will we have a solid foundation for reconstructing a biblical concept of atonement.

Sin in the OT is a complex concept. First, sin has to be viewed primarily through a relational perspective. This is why the Ten Commandments and the whole OT law are presented in the context of covenantal relationships with God. In the New Testament, sin is most of all a failure to live in love toward God and toward neighbors, expressed in the two greatest commandments, which are relational at their core. Often the NT talks about sin in the singular, pointing to the most fundamental *SIN* of broken relationships with God expressed in the failure of trust in, submission to, love for, and worship of God as the ultimate center of human life. This is why one of the main works of the Holy Spirit is to “convict the world concerning sin” (Jn. 16:8 NAS), which is expressed in that “they do not believe in Me” (Jn. 16:9 NAS). This *SIN* leads to multiple *sins* as a distorted dynamic of human life (wrong acts, thoughts, desires, will, etc.), which does not correspond to God’s intention and purpose for human life.

But the Hebrew concept of sin also has another dimension. Jay Sklar points out that Old Testament terms for sin “refer not only to the wrong itself, but also to the consequences for the wrong” (Sklar 2005, p. 12). One of the best summaries of the various aspects of the Hebrew concept of sin we find in Mark Biddle’s study of sin: “the Bible does not separate the act from the effects that follow fluidly and organically. As a result, usages of the Hebrew noun¹¹ can be roughly classified into three categories along the deed-consequence continuum: (1) to refer to the wrongful act itself; (2) to denote the state of guilt into which the agent enters; (3) to indicate the consequences suffered by the agent and the environment as guilt ‘matures’ into results” (Biddle 2005, p. 117). All these meanings are part of one organic continuum, which shows that *sin* as an *act* leads to the condition of “bearing *sin*” as *guilt* or responsibility for one’s action and results in *sin* as the devastating and deadly *consequences* that sin triggers. Therefore, guilt and punishment should not be viewed as separate external legal categories but rather as ontological realities closely connected to sin as an act. Mark Biddle stresses that “the biblical viewpoint . . . views sin and its consequences in holistic, organic terms” (Biddle 2005, p. 122).

We can see this very clearly in many NT passages that show the organic unity between sin and death. Death “entered” the world through sin (Rom. 5:12). Paul clearly shows the natural cause-and-effect relationship between sin and death using a variety of organic phytomorphic and farming metaphors: “sinful passions” bring forth “the fruit of death” (Rom. 7: 5), and he who nourishes the sinful desires of the flesh will “reap corruption” (Gal. 6: 8). Death is the “τέλος” of sin, that is, the ontological completion, the culmination of sin (Rom. 6:21). Therefore, it is not so much God who “punishes” with death as sin itself that “kills” a man (Rom. 7:11) and “produces death” (Rom. 7:13). As a result, a person “dies” in his/her sins (Jn. 8:21, 24). A similar relationship, but through the metaphor of conception and birth, is also presented by the apostle James: sin, which begins with desire, “begets death” (James 1:15). It is in light of such an organic connection that we should view the idea that death is a “payment” for sin (Rom. 6:23), but not in a retributive sense. Thus, the relationship between sin and death can be seen as a “law,” “the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:2), the principle of organic connection, which is especially evident in the Hebrew concept of “sin,” in which sin itself and its consequences are called by the same word, as parts of one single concept.

OP has a concept of guilt, but it is viewed in an organic connection with sin and its consequences. Guilt is not a separate legal reality that has to be dealt with in a special way. Guilt is acknowledgement that a person is liable to suffer consequences for his/her sinful act or the condition of the heart. The language of guilt is a way to describe the ontological reality of sin and its consequences by legal terms.

Though we can see the rediscovery of this aspect of the Hebrew concept of sin in many studies of Protestant biblical scholars, not much work has been done in connecting this concept with Christ’s atonement. It is in the works of some Eastern Church Fathers that we

can find these ideas brought together. They may express this idea in different ways, but because of the limitation of this work, I will provide only one example.

St. Maximus the Confessor clearly shows us what he calls the “proper distinction between the two senses of the word ‘sin’” (Maximus the Confessor 2018, p. 244). In Question 42 of his *The Responses to Thalassios*, he deals with the question of how “the Lord is said to have ‘become sin’ without knowing sin.” His answer is that the word “sin” in Scripture is used in two senses: “the first sin” is “the fall of free choice from the good toward evil,” whereas “second sin,” a consequence of and the result of the first, is an “alteration of nature from incorruptibility to corruption” (Maximus the Confessor 2018, p. 241). Thus, we see that St. Maximus understood that the word “sin” can mean sin itself and the consequences of sin, which corresponds to how this word was used in the Old Testament. In order to distinguish these two aspects, he uses the phrases “first sin” and “second sin.” “The first sin” is what we normally call “sin” as a failure to live according to God’s intent. “The second sin” is the natural consequence of the first and is “corruption and mortality in nature” (Maximus the Confessor 2018, p. 243). What Christ deals with in His redemptive work is “the second sin” of corruption and mortality of nature, which Christ restored and “brought about through the resurrection, a return of impassibility, incorruptibility, and immortality” (Maximus the Confessor 2018, p. 244). This does not mean that “the first sin” is not important or that Christ does not deal with that through His salvific work. He does, but the way He does it can only be understood if we have a holistic picture of God’s salvation. The next section will deal with a holistic perspective on salvation as the context of the biblical understanding of the atonement.

3.4. Holistic Concept of Salvation as the Context for a Biblical Understanding of the Atonement

If we do not distinguish between various aspects of salvation, we will mix and confuse these realities and will not be able to come to a correct understanding of the atonement. We will define *salvation* in its broad sense as *God’s work of restoration and perfection of all aspects of human life to God’s ultimate purpose*. As such, it includes, first, the restoration of relationships with God, dealing with what we called *SIN*, relational alienation from God. This *SIN* is dealt with in conversion, when a person through the work of the Holy Spirit returns to his Creator in faith, trust, and total commitment of his life to God in order to live according to His will, restoring the most fundamental relationship of his life. Paul talks about this aspect of salvation as deliverance from the *dominion (lordship) of SIN* by coming under the lordship of Christ/God: “you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness . . . you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God” (Rom. 6:17–18, 22 ESV)¹². Conversion and commitment to God and to the way of discipleship brings freedom from the dominating power of *SIN*.

Yet, through conversion a Christian does not become perfect. There are various areas in a person’s behavior, thought, life, passions, desires, motives, etc. where there is the *presence of sin*, and in which he needs freedom. Jesus described the sanctifying process of discipleship in the following way: “Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free’” (Jn. 8:31–32 ESV). When we abide and live in the truth of Christ, we continue in the process of sanctification (Rom. 6:22), becoming and staying free from the presence of sins. Though a Christian has already put off “the old self” in conversion, he needs to continue to be renewed into the image of Christ (Eph. 4:20–32; Col. 3:9–14, etc.).

However, there is another “*sin*” that has to be dealt with. In the Hebrew concept of sin, the consequences of sin were also called “sin.” St. Maximus the Confessor called it “second sin,” which is mortality and the corruption of nature. Christ deals with this “sin” through His death and resurrection, delivering human nature from mortality and corruption and imparting it with incorruption and immortality. Through the same faith through which we were reunited with God and Christ, we also become partakers of Christ and what He has achieved for us in atonement. Calvin talked about the double grace we receive through

faith: justification and sanctification (*Inst.* III.3.19). Probably it would be better to talk about the triple grace of deliverance from all aspects of sin: to deliver people from *SIN* as the distorted fundamental relationships of human life, Christ called people to come back to Him/to repent and to believe in Him/to deny themselves and to commit to Him and His discipleship (Mk. 1:15; 8:34) (conversion); to make people free from *sins*, He called them to abide in His teaching (Jn. 8:31–32, Mt. 28:20), so that God’s truth may sanctify them (Jn. 17:17) (sanctification); but, deliverance from “sin” (as a consequence of the sinful dynamic of life resulting in death and corruption) is accomplished through the death and resurrection of Christ (redemption).

3.5. Ontological Perspective on Atonement

It is in Orthodox theology that we find a clear statement about the particular area of the problem Christ deals with on the cross. Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky states, “The redeeming work of the Son is related to our nature” (Лосский 2000, p. 287). We have already seen in the writings of St. Maximus the Confessor that in His death and resurrection, Christ deals with “second sin,” that is, mortality and corruption of our nature, which is the result of sin¹³. This clear understanding of the target of the redemptive work of Christ shows the inadequacy of a moral interpretation of atonement both in Protestant and Orthodox theology and was rightly criticized by many theologians. We understand that many moral atonement views were a reaction to the neglect or lack of emphasis on Christ’s dealing with sins as a moral problem. However, the solution is not a reinterpretation of atonement through moral categories but is pointing to the teaching role of Christ and the deliverance from sins through abiding in His teaching (as was shown above). We also recognize that Christ teaches us by His words and example even on the cross, and therefore, there is indeed moral influence through his suffering, but it is not the main meaning of His death.

I believe that an ontological perspective provides a clear biblical explanation of what happened in redemption, basing it on the apostolic kerygma (or apostolic Gospel), which states: “Christ died and rose again.” This is very simple, but it is also a deep proclamation about what Jesus “underwent” in order to redeem us: He underwent death and resurrection in His human nature, in His body. It is in his resurrection that death has been overcome permanently: “We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him” (Rom. 6:9 ESV), and now in His nature “the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality” (1 Cor. 15:54 ESV). Christ “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10 ESV).

An ontological perspective clearly shows that the problem Christ deals with on the cross is *ontological* related to the consequences of sin in human nature. Sin leads to death, destroying human nature through corruption. Christ voluntarily goes to the cross to experience real death, but because of the inseparable presence of divine nature in the person of the Son, death is able to lay hold of Christ only for as long as He allows it. Being the true Life of the world, He has ultimate control of the situation, not death. On the third day, through the power of divine life, which was inseparable from His human nature even in death, Christ breaks the control of death over His human nature, and not only brings His human nature back to life but also transforms it, imparting immortality and incorruption. We could say that Christ heals the human nature and sanctifies it. This is the essence of atonement.

An ontological perspective on redemption is inseparable from an important biblical teaching, which is central both in Reformed theology and in Orthodox theology: union with Christ. It is only in spiritual union with Christ through faith that we become partakers of Christ (Heb. 3:14) and only through being “in Him” that we have all the benefits of His redemption: “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins” (Eph. 1:7 KJV). Believers already have the right to these benefits, but they will experience these blessings of the redemption of our nature on the last day in the Resurrection of the

dead. This is why Paul, who said that in Christ we already have redemption (Eph. 1:7, Col. 1:14), also said that we “wait eagerly for . . . the redemption of our bodies” (Rom. 8:23 ESV).

In light of this ontological perspective on atonement, we may understand much better some other important biblical truths. For example, in this view, resurrection is not so much God’s confirmation that He has accepted the satisfaction/payment for our sins (as in some legal perspectives), but it is an essential element of atonement. Only from an ontological perspective can we understand why the problem of sin (as consequences) is not resolved, if Christ has not risen¹⁴ and what it means that He was “raised for our justification” (Rom. 4:25 ESV). In this perspective, we can understand why faith in the full humanity and divinity of Christ was so important to the early Church, especially for their understanding of the atonement. Christ heals what he assumes¹⁵, but this is possible only through the hypostatic union of His human nature with His divine nature in His person. St. Basil shows very clearly the importance of divine nature in the atonement: “death in the flesh . . . was swallowed up by the divine nature”¹⁶ (Basil 1939, p. 83).

This perspective on atonement is not something new, but rather is the oldest tradition of understanding atonement present in the writings of practically all of the Church Fathers, in Church creeds, and in early liturgies. I believe it is sufficient to provide one quote from Calvin to show that this understanding of atonement was never lost from Christian theology. Calvin said: “Death held us captive under its yoke; Christ, in our stead, gave himself over to its power to deliver us from it . . . By dying, he ensured that we would not die, or—which is the same thing—redeemed us to life by his own death.”¹⁷ Unfortunately, when Calvin makes a major emphasis on the spiritual death of Christ, then the ontological perspective, which was the heart of the message of the early Church, becomes secondary, giving place to a new narrative about Christ paying “a greater and more excellent price in suffering in his soul the terrible torments of a condemned and forsaken man” (Inst., 2.16.10) (Calvin et al. 2006, p. 516), a narrative which we will not find as part of apostolic kerygma or early creeds. As mentioned above, the problem of “spiritual death” (or *SIN*) is resolved not by Christ “dying spiritually” instead of us but through conversion of a person to God¹⁸.

3.6. Integration of Atonement Metaphors into an Ontological Perspective

It goes beyond the scope of this article to show in detail how multiple biblical metaphors and metaphorical models of atonement represent various aspects of the meaning of Christ’s death and resurrection. Yet, in this section, I want to show a general direction regarding how these metaphors can be integrated into an ontological perspective on atonement.

I believe that the ontological reality of Christ’s deliverance of human nature from death and corruption is clearly presented in Scripture in the apostolic kerygma, but it is also described by numerous atonement metaphors. Gordon Fee is right when he says: “A careful reading of Paul’s letters reveals that all of his basic theological concerns are an outworking of his fundamental confession: ‘Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; he was buried, and he was raised’ (1 Cor 15:3–4)” (Fee 2013, p. 483).

As previously said, in His work accomplished through His death and resurrection, Christ deals primarily with the *ontological problem* of the consequences of sin for human nature. This ontological problem and its solution are described in Scripture by different metaphors taken from various domains of human life (legal, cultic, commercial, accounting, etc.). Therefore, we should not hold the view that on the cross Christ had to resolve the problem of a certain spiritual debt that we owed, or the legal condemnation we were under, etc. According to the view of many Church Fathers, our mortality and the corruption of our nature is our “debt” that we need to have “forgiven”; it is our “slavery” that we need to be “redeemed” from; it is our “condemnation,” and therefore, we are in need of “justification.” Christ is our “Passover lamb” whose shed blood saves us from the “plague” of death. Christ is our “sin offering” who gives His life so that we could live, have our sins forgiven,

and not have to experience the consequence of death for sin. It is insightful, for example, to look at how Irenaeus uses various metaphors in connection to death so that we might see how rich the metaphorical language can be, as it describes the same concept through different images. For example, Irenaeus describes death as “slavery” (AH 4.22.1), “debt” (AH 3.19.1, 4.22.1, 5.23.2), “captivity” (AH 3.23.1), “exile” (AH 4.8.2), “power” (AH 3.18.7), “condemnation” (AH 4.8.2), “reign” (D, 31, 39), “dominion” (AH 5.13.3), and “oppression” (AP, 31). We can find similar language in many Church Fathers and in Scripture. In Romans 5:16–17 we see how the word pair “condemnation”—“justification” is paralleled with “death”—“life”.

Therefore, atonement metaphors do not describe separate (legal, slave market, cultic, accounting) realities nor do they represent some *invisible historic narratives* that happen parallel to Christ’s death and resurrection. They all describe the same ontological reality, using different metaphors taken from various source domains. Each of these metaphors present a limited metaphorical model out of the general scheme of *problem-agent-process-result* in atonement in which it may highlight only some aspects of the scheme and exclude others. The narrative of each such model is metaphorical and it is never complete according to the very nature of how metaphor works; it is always fragmental with missing elements from a “full story” of the source domain. In the “redemption” metaphorical narrative there is no “receiver of ransom payment.” Legal metaphors do not explain *how* those under “condemnation” (of death) are now “justified.” “Filling in” such information goes against the limited function of a metaphor and automatically distorts the meaning of a metaphor. The Bible never tells us that guilt or sin was legally transferred to Christ (somehow) or that the Father punished His Son or poured His wrath on Him, as we find it in some legal theories. The legal metaphorical model is limited, and through powerful imagery it only points our attention to *the problem* and *the result* of atonement. Often “what is missing” may be highlighted by an element of another biblical metaphorical model of atonement or by some other biblical statements. This is why we need all the biblical metaphors and models, but we have to embrace them and integrate them into the concept of atonement in their limited nature.

As we evaluate the views of early Church Fathers on atonement, we have to be careful not to confuse their use of certain biblical (or their own innovative) metaphors and models as proof that they support or hold to a certain “theory of atonement” that was developed based on this metaphor/model. We can say that they hold to a certain theory only if they present the full narrative of this theory and take it literally.

At the same time, we need to remember that many metaphors in Scripture are used to describe different aspects of truth. For example, the metaphor of “slavery” can refer to various spheres: “slavery to sin,” “slavery to death,” or even “slavery to the devil,” and therefore, the same metaphorical phrase, such as “deliverance from slavery” or “redemption” may mean “liberation from the slavery of death”¹⁹ or “liberation from the slavery of sin,” etc. The same metaphor in a different context may apply to different aspects of soteriology (i.e., redemption vs. sanctification). Therefore, before we interpret any specific metaphor, we need to understand its cultural and theological context and locate each metaphor in its proper place in the large soteriological picture.

Thus, when we talk about integration, it is not the integration of “theories of atonement” into one concept, but it is the integration of limited biblical metaphors and metaphorical models into a holistic concept of atonement. This process has to be part of a larger work of integration of other soteriological metaphors into a holistic concept of salvation, discerning where each metaphor belongs and how it fits into this larger soteriological picture. This task requires a separate extended presentation.

Finally, special attention also needs to be given to the presentation of the ontological view in the context of the biblical meta-narrative. Due to the limited scope of this paper, we have not dealt with this issue, but there is great potential to show a beautiful harmony of the larger biblical story with Christ’s redemption viewed through an ontological perspective. For example, many authors, like N. T. Wright, have pointed out that early Christians

viewed Christ's death as the New Exodus. Wright also stresses the importance of temple theology and the topic of forgiveness in light of the biblical story (Wright 2016). However, I want to suggest that Wright's approach could be greatly enriched if he looked at these issues through the OP on atonement. Through Christ, we have the Final Greatest Exodus from the ultimate slavery of death. It is the ultimate Forgiveness of sin through Christ's sacrifice that the prophets prophesied about. Through Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, humanity has access back to the paradise from which it was expelled. He is a New Temple and we, being connected to Him, are living stones in this Temple. There are many other themes that could be brought together as we connect the OP on atonement and the biblical meta-narrative.

Atonement has to be seen as part of the larger ultimate purpose of God. In such a perspective, a special emphasis of Orthodox theology is extremely important. According to Greek patristic tradition and many Orthodox theologians, the redemption of humanity is only a step towards God's larger purpose, which is deification. Andrew Louth emphasizes the need to see "the full story of God's dealing with the world that begins with creation and runs through to deification, which is the consequence of union with God that he intended for creation through the human" (Louth 2019, p. 42). According to Louth, "redemption is not an end in itself: its purpose is to facilitate God's original and eternal purpose for his created order, to draw it into union with himself, to deify it" (Louth 2019, p. 36). Therefore, according to OP, Christ's death and resurrection accomplishes not only redemption but also deification of human nature, which is part of God's ultimate purpose for humanity and, in turn, is an integral part of transformation of the whole cosmos.

4. Conclusions

In this article, I pointed to the need in Christian theology to formulate a holistic concept of atonement that would be firmly biblical, would avoid the problems that many existing views have, and would indeed reflect the dominant perspective of the early church. I showed some of the major theological problems that hindered the formation of such a concept and pointed to various solutions to these problems. I believe that the process of the formulation of the biblical concept of atonement can be very productive through dialogue in which Orthodox theology can offer important foundational interpretive guidelines, while the commendable study of Scripture of many Protestant scholars in the area of biblical studies and the sphere of metaphorical theology can provide solid biblical support for such a concept of atonement. It is in Orthodox theology that we find an ontological perspective on atonement that shows that Christ's work accomplished through His death and resurrection deals with the consequences of sin for human nature (death and corruption). The basic structure for this perspective is presented in the apostolic kerygma, and it is also expressed through numerous biblical metaphors and metaphorical models of atonement that highlight the different aspects of this teaching. I pointed to the problem of the literalization of these metaphors and the construction of new narratives of atonement, which form new main lines of interpretation, creating new theories around these literalized *metaphorical narratives*. Such an approach will always lead to a distorted understanding of both the metaphors under consideration and the concept of atonement they form.

The ontological perspective is based on the historical narrative of the apostolic kerygma and understands various biblical metaphors of atonement as the way to express its basic message: *Christ through His death and resurrection delivers human nature from the consequences of sin, which are death and corruption, heals and transforms it, imparting it with immortality and incorruption*. Through a spiritual union with Christ by faith, we become partakers of the benefits of Christ's atonement and will fully experience these benefits in our human nature in the Resurrection of the dead. At the same time, I tried to show that an ontological perspective on atonement has to be seen as part of the larger picture of God's salvific work, which is multifaceted, as Christ brings salvation and restoration not only to our nature but to all aspects of human life.

In light of an ontological understanding of atonement, we need to look afresh at the teaching of the Church Fathers on this topic and instead of trying to find “proofs” of various “theories,” we need to look carefully at their usage of metaphors, their view of various aspects of the human predicament, and the different aspects of Christ’s work in response to each area of human problems. This approach to understanding of the atonement requires a more in-depth study to show how each atonement metaphor and metaphorical model corresponds to different aspects of the ontological perspective and how other soteriological metaphors are part of a larger soteriological scheme²⁰. I also think that it is promising for OP to show how this view is dominant in early liturgies. Study in this area can help us comprehend anew the beauty and the power of Pascal Troparion’s proclamation: “Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death!”

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Notes

- ¹ Here and further, I will often use abbreviations instead of the full name of the various views or theories.
- ² Usually this is a modified version of ST.
- ³ Using very similar approaches to many Protestant MIT positions.
- ⁴ Kozlov calls it an “organic theory”
- ⁵ We will describe this view in later sections of this paper.
- ⁶ Today we have several separate articles and their various editions, which were supposed to become chapters of this book (Флоровский 1930; Florovsky 1951, 1953, 1976a, 1976b).
- ⁷ Here and further AH will stand for Irenaeus’ work *Against the Heresies*. Quotations will be taken from (Irenaeus 1979).
- ⁸ See also Rom. 4:24–25, 1 Thess. 4:14, etc.
- ⁹ Here and further AP will stand for Irenaeus’ work *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Quotations will be taken from (Behr 1998).
- ¹⁰ “Christ died for our sins” (1 Cor. 15:3), “Who was delivered for our offences” (Rom. 4:24–25), etc.
- ¹¹ In this case it is a noun “*awon*”, but it can also be applied to other Hebrew nouns for sin (“*hata*”, “*het*”).
- ¹² There are other ways of describing this conversion in the NT. For example, Paul talks about turning from idols to God (1 Thess. 1:9). But it is always turning to Christ/God as Lord of life (e.g., Acts 9:35, 11:21, 14:15, 15:19, etc.).
- ¹³ “First sin” (of the will) according to St. Maximus the Confessor.
- ¹⁴ “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Cor. 15:17 ESV).
- ¹⁵ According to the famous words of Gregory of Nazianzus: “What has not been assumed has not been healed” (Ep. 101, 32).
- ¹⁶ St. Basil, *Letter CCLXI*.
- ¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.7 (Calvin et al. 2006, pp. 511–12)
- ¹⁸ See, e.g., “this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again” (Lk. 15:24 NAS).
- ¹⁹ Or “sin” meaning “second sin” (mortality and corruption of nature).
- ²⁰ This is very important in order to discern what aspect of salvation each soteriological metaphor belongs to. Many problems in the understanding of atonement are the result of a lack of discernment in this area when we try to fit a certain soteriological metaphor or idea into an atonement scheme, while it is part of another aspect of salvation (i.e., as I tried to show it in relation to salvation from spiritual death, using Calvin as an example).

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