

# A CRITIQUE OF OPEN THEISTS' ATONEMENT VIEWS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MISSION THEOLOGY

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## INTRODUCTION

The close of the 20th century saw the rise of the theological movement called Open Theism.<sup>1</sup> With the publication of *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God*, Open Theists proposed a new doctrine of the nature of God.<sup>2</sup> In the book's preface, the

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<sup>1</sup> Although Erickson does not use the term "Open Theism" in his book, *The Evangelical Left*, he groups leading Open Theism authors under the umbrella of "postconservative evangelicalism". He further states that postconservative evangelicalism is not new: "It is simply a movement that has been developing for some time, but now has become visible, as its advocates begin to speak more plainly." Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1997), p. 20.

<sup>2</sup> See Clark H. Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1994). C. Fred Smith calls *The Openness of God* the "movement's foundational text" ("Does Classical Theism Deny God's Immanence?", in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (2003), p. 23). During the 1980s, individual authors published works espousing Open Theism tenets. For example, see Clark H. Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge", in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty* (David Basinger, and Randall Basinger, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1986), pp. 141-162; William Hasker, *God, Time, and Foreknowledge* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1989); and Richard Rice, *God's Foreknowledge and Man's Free Will* (Minneapolis MN: Bethany House, 1985).

authors acknowledged that this challenge to theism proper “deeply affects our understanding of the incarnation, grace, creation, election, sovereignty, and salvation”.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, theologians published a number of works regarding Open Theism’s doctrine of God, both pro and con; however, no one has published a definitive work regarding Open Theists’ views of the atonement, in light of mission theology. This article does not attempt to be that definitive work, but rather a seminal attempt to evaluate Open Theists’ atonement views, within the context of scriptural mission theology.<sup>4</sup> This article considers works written by authors in support of Open Theism and those against Open Theism.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pinnock, et al, “Preface”, in *Openness of God*, p. 8. No specific author is attributed to the “Preface”.

<sup>4</sup> The term “open theism” is not standard in publications. Sanders uses the term “relational theism” in John E. Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1998), p. 12. Geisler and House use the term “neotheism” in Norman L. Geisler and H. Wayne House, *The Battle for God: Responding to the Challenge of Neotheism* (Grand Rapids MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), p. 9. Pinnock, Rice, Sanders, Hasker, and Basinger use the title *The Openness of God* for their book. Boyd uses the term “open view of the future” in Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 2000), p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the *Openness of God*, publications supporting Open Theism include: Boyd, *God of the Possible*; Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2001); Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 2001); Sanders, *God Who Risks*. Publications against Open Theism include: Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2000); Norman L. Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man* (Minneapolis MN: Bethany House, 1997); Geisler and House, *The Battle for God*; John M. Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2001); John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds, *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2003); Millard J. Erickson, *What Does God Know and When Does He Know It: The Current Controversy Over Divine Foreknowledge* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2003). Representative

## WHY OPEN THEISM IS EMERGING

The people of the world are becoming a more-intimate global society. The distance of separation between peoples, cultures, and religions is less than in prior decades. In one day, people can travel from the United States, a Christian-influenced nation, to Indonesia, an Islamic-influenced nation. Global communication has dramatically increased, as evidenced by the internet. Clark Pinnock refers to this as the “phenomenon of the global village”.<sup>6</sup> This ease of travel, and ease of communication, around the world has led to an increase in relationships in the global community. Consequently, new ideas challenge people like never before.<sup>7</sup> This environment of globalisation is fertile soil for the sprouting of the new ideas and relational emphases of Open Theism. Open Theism, with its fresh emphasis on a relational God, is flourishing in today’s global environment. Therefore, a discussion of Open Theists’ views is relevant in today’s global-society atmosphere.<sup>8</sup>

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publications of both views: James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds, *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2001) and *JETS* 45 (2002).

<sup>6</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1992), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> For an insightful discussion of the challenges of globalisation for Evangelicalism, see George Van Pelt Campbell, “Religion and Culture: Challenges and Prospects in the Next Generation”, in *JETS* 43 (2000), pp. 287-301. Major challenges, he lists, include the problem of pluralisation (p. 289), the growth of tolerance (p. 289), and the crisis of cultural authority (p. 291).

<sup>8</sup> “Preface”, in *The Openness of God*, p. 9. For a more complete analysis of why Open Theism is emerging today, see William C. Davis, “Why Open Theism is Flourishing Now”, in *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and The Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds, Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2003), pp. 114-134. Davis lists five reasons, based on the doctrinal environment of America (he lists other reasons as well). Firstly, Open Theism is notionally, rich since it presents “the future as indeterminate”, “humans as radically free”, and “God as hungry for real love from his creatures” (p. 115). This “theoretical richness” has drawn Evangelicals to Open Theism’s God of relationship. Secondly, Open Theists look to scripture for support of their tenets, thus enhancing the acceptability of Open Theism to Bible-

## **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

Open Theism is challenging people's perception of God. Mission theology arises out of one's view of God. However, one's perception of God relates to one's understanding of the atonement, and God's relationship to His creation. Consequently, a change in one's understanding of God, His relationship to man, and the atonement, causes a change in one's understanding of mission theology. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to evaluate Open Theists' views of the atonement, within the context of scriptural mission theology.

## **LIMITS OF STUDY**

In its broadest sense, Open Theism is a definition of God. However, the definition of God influences all other areas of theology, including the atonement, and mission theology. This study is restricted to areas related to the atonement and mission theology that leading Open Theists have addressed in writing. These Open Theists include Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory Boyd; chosen because they are the leading proponents of Open Theism, and have written about the atonement. One further point of note: the terms "Open Theism" and "Open Theists" represent authors, and their views, presented in this study, since there is no comprehensive Open Theism system, rather, there are perspectives and emphases of authors.

## **MISSION THEOLOGY DEFINED**

A simple definition of theology is the study of God. However, an integral part of studying God includes understanding His relationship with His

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believing evangelicals (p. 115). Thirdly, Open Theists argue that Greek philosophy has played too large a role in the development of theology (p. 116). Fourthly, Open Theists address practical aspects of Christian life, such as the existence of evil, the purpose of prayer, solutions to suffering, and the reasons for worship or work (p. 117). Fifthly, Open Theists claim to focus on truth about God and man's relationship to God (p. 119). Evangelicals are interested in truth, especially about God and man.

creation. Augustus Strong defines theology as “the science of God, and of the relations between God and the universe”.<sup>9</sup> Millard Erickson insists that one cannot understand God without studying the works of God, including “God’s creation, particularly, human beings, and their condition, and God’s redemptive working in relation to humankind”.<sup>10</sup> A mission theology should then include an understanding of God, and His redemptive relationship to man.<sup>11</sup>

Defining “mission”, and, subsequently, “mission theology”, is challenging. George Peters contends that “mission” includes all ministries of the church, while “missions” relates specifically to the church sending persons to non-evangelised peoples to evangelise and establish churches.<sup>12</sup> David Bosch, offering a broader view, relies on the phrase “Missio Dei”, God’s mission, which includes God’s total redemptive work in history, revealed in both the Old and New Testaments.<sup>13</sup> Following Bosch’s thinking, Andreas Kostenberger and Peter O’Brien use the term “mission”, and define it as “God’s saving plan that moves from creation to new creation, and as framing the entire story of scripture”.<sup>14</sup> A. Scott Moreau acknowledges, however, that there is no consensus in terms or definition.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge PA: Judson Press, 1907), p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (2nd edn, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1998), p. 22.

<sup>11</sup> The term “man” and “men” are used generically to represent humankind.

<sup>12</sup> George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1972), p. 11.

<sup>13</sup> David J. Bosch, “Witness to the World”, in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader* (Ralph D. Winter, and Steven C. Hawthorne, eds, 3rd edn; Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1999), p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger, and Peter O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (D. A. Carson, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2001), p. 268. Kostenberger and O’Brien do not seem to use the term “missions”.

<sup>15</sup> A. Scott Moreau, “Mission and Missions”, in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (A. Scott Moreau, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 2000), p. 638.

For the purposes of this article, “mission” describes God’s mandate to the global church to make disciples in every tribe, language, people, and nation. “Mission theology” is the scriptural teaching regarding mission. “Missions” is the local church’s effort to do mission. “Missionary” is one, whom the local church sends to make disciples in every tribe, language, people, and nation.<sup>16</sup>

## **NEED FOR STUDY**

One’s definition of the atonement is foundational to one’s understanding of mission theology. Atonement answers the question, “What was the purpose of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection?” God’s relationship to man is most evident in Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, because Christ was the full expression of God to man (Col 2:9).<sup>17</sup> This article will show that making disciples is the primary task of mission (Matt 28:19-20). However, a prerequisite to making disciples is the proclamation of the gospel: the good news that Christ defeated sin, death, and Satan, through His atoning death-resurrection, and everyone who trusts in Him for salvation receives forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Robert Glover aptly states, the “very name ‘gospel’, which means ‘good news’, spells worldwide missions”.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The definition for “mission” is derived from Matt 28:19, where Christ gave the commandment to the disciples (and, by extension, the global church) to “make disciples of all nations”. The definition for “missions” is also derived from Matt 28:19, from the participle “go”, which, as will be shown later in this article, relates to the commandment to “make disciples”. Hence, many missions (local church effort) are involved in the one mission (global church effort). Missionaries then carry out the missions.

<sup>17</sup> All references to English scripture use the *New International Version* (International Bible Society, 1984), unless otherwise noted.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Hall Glover, *The Bible Basis of Missions* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1968), p. 13. See also Harold Lindsell, *An Evangelical Theology of Missions* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1970), pp. 82-83; Donald McGavran, “What is Mission?”, in *Contemporary Theologies of Mission* (Arthur F. Glasser, and Donald A. McGavran, eds, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1983), pp. 26-29; Gerald D. Wright, “The Purpose of Missions”, in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson, eds, Nashville TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), p. 29.

Likewise, Peters affirms, “Christ, in revelation and mediation, becomes the foundation of Christian mission”.<sup>19</sup> An intricate link exists between the atonement and mission theology. One cannot determine a mission theology without determining why Christ died and rose again. This article will show that the most-biblical view of the atonement is the penal substitution view. However, the atonement should also be viewed, albeit secondarily, as a victory by Christ over evil.

### **OPEN THEISM DEFINED**

The term “Open Theism” derives its name from the belief that God is “open” to the desires of His creatures, and, as a result, the future is largely “open” or undetermined. God seeks “relationships of love with human beings, having bestowed upon them genuine freedom for this purpose”.<sup>20</sup> A loving relationship requires genuine freedom to partake in, and contribute to, the relationship. As a result, God made a world in which He values the input of humans in determining future events.

This view of God affects the way Open Theists understand the atonement. Pinnock and Sanders put forth a two-fold argument. Firstly, since God is love, He desires that man enter into a mutual relationship of love with Him.<sup>21</sup> Secondly, in order to open the way for such a relationship to occur, Christ empathetically suffered to show God’s love for man. God suffered the pain of rejection in hope that it would encourage man to turn to Him in love.<sup>22</sup> Boyd, making a different emphasis, believes that Christ won a

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<sup>19</sup> Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions*, p. 31. See also J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 167. Kane states, “The gospel has many facets but only one theme. . . . ‘Jesus Christ and Him crucified (1 Cor 2:2)’ ”; George H. Mennenga, *All the Families of the Earth: A Study of Christian Missions* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1950), pp. 25-27.

<sup>20</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 3.

<sup>21</sup> See Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 5; Sanders, *God Who Risks*, p. 87.

<sup>22</sup> See Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, pp. 57-58; Sanders, *God Who Risks*, p. 105.

victory over Satan.<sup>23</sup> These views (Pinnock's, Sanders', and Boyd's) will be developed later in this article.

### **OPEN THEISTS ON THE ATONEMENT**

This section explores the writings of three leading Open Theists – Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory Boyd – specifically as they relate to the atonement. These authors each have published significant works on Open Theism, and, in many ways, have defined the Open Theism movement in their writings.

#### **CLARK PINNOCK**

Clark Pinnock is the leading Open Theist, and his book, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness*, is the definitive work on Open Theism. Two relevant concepts arise from an examination of his work.

Firstly, God is love and seeks to enter “freely-chosen relationships of love with His creatures”.<sup>24</sup> As a God of love, He gives His creatures a vast amount of freedom to work for or against Him in His pursuit of His goals for humanity. As a result, God does not have “exhaustive knowledge, implying that every detail of the future is already decided”.<sup>25</sup> Pinnock believes that complete foreknowledge contradicts the possibility of a genuine relationship, because complete foreknowledge makes all things determined, with no option of response and love.<sup>26</sup> God knows part of the future, namely, what He has decided to do; however, God is “less certain about what creatures may freely do”.<sup>27</sup> Essentially, God learns (and enjoys

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<sup>23</sup> See Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1997), p. 240.

<sup>24</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 49. According to Pinnock, God knows the “the possible as possible and the indefinite as indefinite”.

learning) as the future unfolds.<sup>28</sup> Pinnock argues that a close examination of those scripture passages that seem to teach that God controls everything actually teach no such thing.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, Pinnock believes that God suffers – which serves as a basis for His relationship to man. God suffers, because humans, in their freewill, disappoint God.<sup>30</sup> God’s suffering is most evident in the passion of Christ.

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32. According to Pinnock, predictive Bible prophecy falls into four categories. Firstly, some prophecies are of what God will do, or plans to do (Is 46:11; 48:3). Pinnock does not give examples of specific prophecies in this category. Secondly, some prophecies are conditional, where God bases His final decision on His creatures’ future decisions (Jer 18:9-10; Ex 32:14). Thirdly, other prophecies are “imprecise prophetic forecasts, based on present situations”. God’s prediction of the fall of Jerusalem falls into this category. Fourthly, for some prophecies, Pinnock believes their fulfilment is different from their prediction. For example, Ezekiel prophesied of a new temple (Ezek 40-48), a literal earthly building – but the church, as the temple of God, fulfilled the prophecy. Pinnock concludes, “God is free in the manner of fulfilling the prophecy, and is not bound to a script, even His own. The world is a project, and God works on it creatively; He is free to strike out in new directions.” The result is that God is free to act; He is not restricted to predetermined plans. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51. See general response, later in article.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55. Pinnock argues that first, in Rom 9, rather than viewing God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart as an all-controlling decision of God, it is a judicial hardening. Also, in Rom 9, “Jeremiah’s free-will orientation to his pot-making image” influences the passage’s imagery of clay pots. According to Jeremiah’s imagery, “God is free to change His plans and start over again, if He wants to.” When the prophet Amos attributes the cause of a disaster to the Lord (Amos 3:6), it refers to “divine judgment on sins, not to disasters in general”. When Lamentations asserts that good and bad come from God (Lam 3:38), it refers to the exile and “not evils in general”. In addition, passages, such as Prov 16:9, where God determines man’s steps, “should not be over-generalised”. See general response, later in this article.

<sup>30</sup> According to Pinnock, God feels rejected, angry, and confused. In Is 5:4, God, reflecting on Israel’s disobedience, asks what more He could have done for the nation. Then, in Is 54:7-8, God rejected Israel in a moment of anger, but subsequently sought to restore His relationship. Pinnock also notes that God repents (Gen 6:6; 1 Sam 15:35; Jonah 3:10). However, Pinnock states, “Although repentance is a metaphor, which should not be pressed too far, it is revelatory of the way God exercises sovereignty.” *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44. See general response later in this article.

Christ's work on the cross was one of wooing, according to Pinnock. The purpose of the cross was to display Christ's empathy for sinners. Sinners have broken their relationship with God; God is hurt and confused by the broken relationship, desiring to restore it. In order to restore the relationship, God-incarnate suffers – showing His love for those who abandoned Him.<sup>31</sup> God loved man first, and wants man to love Him in return, saying “yes” to His love (1 John 4:19; 2 Cor 1:19).<sup>32</sup> Man's relationship with God has been broken, and He desires its restoration. Restoration is not a fixing of “humanity's damaged condition”, or of God “creating a new state in us”,<sup>33</sup> because sinners are still “persons, even in sin”.<sup>34</sup> Salvation is responding to God's offer to enter into a mutual relationship of love.<sup>35</sup>

### **JOHN SANDERS**

John Sanders echoes Pinnock's concepts of love and suffering. Firstly, Sanders argues that God is love, and He desires a non-coercive, mutual relationship with His creatures, to express that love.<sup>36</sup> God, therefore, gives freedom to His creatures, and allows them to be involved in deciding the future. God knows part of the future – He knows what He will do – but He does not fully know the future, because He does not know what His freewill creatures will decide.<sup>37</sup> Sanders, when talking of God's plan for the future,

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58. Pinnock states, “[God] cannot stand idly by and watch the beloved ruin herself”, and, therefore, “travels the path of vulnerable love”.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164. Pinnock articulates, “God's love for us motivates us to love Him in return, but the offer has to be accepted for the relationship to happen.”

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166. According to Pinnock, “In the open view, God essentially loves; creatures can rely on Him, loving them because He is love.”

<sup>36</sup> Sanders, *God Who Risks*, pp. 87-89.

<sup>37</sup> John Sanders, “The Openness of God and the Assurance of Things to Come”, in *Looking into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology* (David W. Baker, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 2001), pp. 281-282. In characterising God's foreknowledge, Sanders distinguishes between prophecies (general forecasts) and

favours the phrase “divine project” rather than “eternal blueprint”.<sup>38</sup> Since God is working on a project, rather than according to a blueprint, God remains flexible in accomplishing His goal.<sup>39</sup> According to Sanders, God’s overall project is to “create a people, of whom He is proud to be their God”.<sup>40</sup> God will reach His overall goal, because “God is omniscient, resourceful, and wise” in His ability to respond to decisions freely made by His creatures.<sup>41</sup>

Secondly, Christ suffered to show man that God could be trusted in a relationship. Sanders believes that sin is an “alienation, or a broken relationship, rather than a state of being, or guilt”.<sup>42</sup> This broken relationship needs repairing. God, against whom man has sinned, seeks to gain man’s love by suffering agony, and refraining from reprisal to “pursue reconciliation”.<sup>43</sup> Through Christ’s empathetic suffering, God was able to forgive, because He was able to endure the pain caused by rejection. Only by enduring pain, was God able to provide a way for reconciliation. In

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predictions (specific forecasts). Prophecies are general goals that God has; however, God is flexible in the routes that He takes to reach the goals. Sanders, *God Who Risks*, p. 126. Sanders divides the fulfilment of predictions (specific forecasts), as they relate to God’s foreknowledge, into three categories. Firstly, God simply exerts His power, and fulfils the prediction (Is 46:9-11); God foreknows exactly what He will do. Secondly, some predictions are conditional (Jer 18:7-10); hence, God will decide what to do in the future after His creatures make a decision. Thirdly, since God has perfect knowledge of the past and present, God can predict with fair certainty what His creatures will do; hence, God foreknows with fair certainty what He will do. Sanders, *God Who Risks*, pp. 130-132. See general response later in this article.

<sup>38</sup> Sanders, *God Who Risks*, p. 127.

<sup>39</sup> Sanders, “Assurance of Things to Come”, p. 283. Sanders does state that the way God worked in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus may give clues to God’s future actions (p. 289).

<sup>40</sup> Sanders, *God Who Risks*, p. 125.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 234.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

Christ's suffering, Sanders sees reestablishment of trust.<sup>44</sup> Man's broken relationship with God resulted in a lack of trust; man must learn that God can be trusted in a relationship. Christ's obedience unto death showed His trust in the wisdom of God the Father.<sup>45</sup> As a result, man can confidently renew his relationship with God, and trust in Him.

## **GREGORY BOYD**

Whereas Pinnock and Sanders emphasise God's love and suffering, Gregory Boyd emphasises Christ's victory over Satan.<sup>46</sup> "Christ's achievement on the cross is, first and foremost, a cosmic event – it defeats Satan", according to Boyd.<sup>47</sup> In Christ's first coming, He defeated and bound Satan, and "set in motion forces that will eventually overthrow the whole of this already fatally damaged assault upon God's earth, and upon

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Sanders contends that God planned Christ's incarnation from eternity past, but not Christ's death on the cross (because Christ was a freewill creature, who might have chosen to not experience the cross). In support, Sanders argues that Ps 22:16, according to the Hebrew, should read "like a lion at My hands and feet," instead of "they pierced My hands and feet", to discredit it as a foretelling of Christ's death. Likewise, 1 Pet 1:20 shows that God foreknew Christ's incarnation, but not necessarily Christ's death. *God Who Risks*, p. 101. Regarding Rev 13:8, Sanders proposes that God predetermined Christ's incarnation, but He did not decide on the specific reason, until sin entered the world. According to Sanders, "from the foundation of the world" may mean a long time, not at, or before, creation. Sanders, *God Who Risks*, p. 102.

<sup>46</sup> Like Pinnock and Sanders, though, Boyd teaches that God does not fully know the future, that He is "open" to His creatures' decisions. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, pp. 57-58.

<sup>47</sup> Boyd, *God at War*, p. 240. Boyd believes there is a spiritual dualism in the Bible; the kingdom of God warring against the kingdom of Satan. *God at War*, p. 185. See also Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2001).

humanity”.<sup>48</sup> Boyd is confident that God will reach His goals, because God is like an “infinitely-intelligent chess player”.<sup>49</sup>

Boyd uses three arguments to support the victorious-Christ view. Firstly, the NT regularly links the cross-resurrection event with the Messiah’s enthronement and victory in Ps 110:1.<sup>50</sup> “The death and resurrection of Christ was . . . most fundamentally a decisive act of war, initiated by God against everything that opposes Him”, says Boyd.<sup>51</sup> Through Christ’s death and resurrection, Christ dethroned Satan as ruler of this world (John 12:31), He subjugated angels, authorities, and powers (1 Pet 3:21-22), and He put all things under His feet (Eph 1:22).<sup>52</sup>

Secondly, Boyd contends reconciliation is primarily a cosmic event, and, secondarily, an anthropological event. Boyd shows several instances of this pattern.<sup>53</sup> In Colossians, Christ first reconciled all things to Himself (Col 1:20) before reconciling man (Col 1:21). In Ephesians, Christ first subjected all things to Himself (Eph 1:22-23) before seating believers with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:1-7). Boyd defines man’s salvation as “a function of Christ’s exalted lordship”, “to share in the cosmic victory of Christ”, and to acknowledge the kingship of Christ. Believers, therefore,

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<sup>48</sup> Boyd, *God at War*, p. 214. The church’s job is to expand God’s rule, by fighting individual evil (exorcising demons), and systematic evil (social activism against political corruption and racism), until Christ returns to manifest His complete victory over Satan, and His defeat of evil. Boyd, *God at War*, p. 273.

<sup>49</sup> Boyd states, “God’s perfect knowledge would allow Him to anticipate *every* possible move, and *every* possible combination of moves, together with *every* possible response He might make to each of them, for *every* possible agent throughout history” (italics original).” Boyd, *God of the Possible*, p. 127.

<sup>50</sup> Peter, in his speech at Pentecost, quotes Ps 110:1 in relation to the cross (Acts 2:32-36). Paul, in writing to the Corinthians, relates Ps 110:1 to Christ’s resurrection (1 Cor 15:22-25). Boyd, *God at War*, pp. 243-244.

<sup>51</sup> Boyd, *God at War*, p. 244.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 250-251.

must “manifest Christ’s victory over His cosmic foes in all areas of life”.<sup>54</sup> This manifestation includes caring for the earth; helping the poor, oppressed, and needy; and fighting racism.

Thirdly, according to Boyd, Satan played a strategic role in the crucifixion. Boyd argues that in “some mysterious way”, through His death and resurrection, Christ defeated Satan, and freed those captive to Satan.<sup>55</sup> Boyd consents that Christ set man free from sin and guilt; however, “the most fundamental reality we are set free from is the devil”, because “Christ was willing to do whatever it took – to pay whatever ‘price’ was necessary – in order to defeat the tyrant, who had enslaved us, and thereby to set us free”.<sup>56</sup>

## **SUMMARY**

From the above investigation into specific writings of Pinnock, Sanders, and Boyd, several observations can be drawn. Firstly, the atonement is viewed either as an action of empathy (Pinnock and Sanders), or as a strategic warfare move (Boyd). There is a seeming avoidance of viewing the atonement as a payment to God, or as a substitution (Christ paying the penalty for man). Boyd, perhaps, is the closest to the latter view in arguing that Christ, in some nebulous way, paid some sort of price, and in some way freed man.

Secondly, despite the fact that Boyd differs in his view of the atonement from Pinnock and Sanders, each author is an Open Theist, in that each says that God does not know the future in its entirety. Despite the common title of “Open Theism”, there are variations within the movement, especially in relation to the atonement.

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<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 254.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 266. As support, Boyd interprets ἀρχόντων in 1 Cor 2:8 as demonic rulers, implying that Satan and his legions thought they had a victory in Christ’s death.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Thirdly, the cross-resurrection event remains an important event in Open Theists' thinking – viewed as a defining moment in God's relationship to His creatures. Despite differences Open Theists may have in their understanding of the atonement, the cross, nevertheless, plays an essential role in the theology of Open Theism.

Fourthly, Open Theists are reluctant to classify unbelievers as being in a state of guilt. Pinnock believes that unbelievers are not in a tarnished condition, while Sanders thinks that unbelievers are best characterised as out of fellowship with God. Boyd does give some credence to unbelievers being in a state of sin and guilt; however, it is not the focus of his discussion on the atonement.

Fifthly, there is a strong emphasis on God's love, and His desire to have a relationship with man. This emphasis influences how Open Theists view the atonement. Pinnock argues that, in the atonement, God suffered, thus showing His love for man, while Sanders argues that God, in the atonement, showed that He could be trusted in a relationship.

Sixthly, God has goals He wants to accomplish, however He remains flexible on how He will reach those goals. Pinnock believes that God learns as the future unfolds. Sanders sees God as a project manager, while Boyd characterises God as the ultimate chess player. Each of these Open Theists sees liveness in God's tactics as He works towards His goals.

### **SCRIPTURAL MISSION THEOLOGY**

This section presents an overview of mission theology, according to scripture. Included in the overview are scripture's teachings on the nations, and the task of mission, God's foreknowledge, and, finally, atonement and salvation.

## MISSION THEOLOGY IN THE OT

After the fall of man (Gen 3:1-13), God stated, “I will” defeat evil through the “offspring” of the “woman” (Gen 3:14-15).<sup>57</sup> Even so, sin continued to increase: “Cain attacked his brother Abel, and killed him” (Gen 4:8), “man’s wickedness on the earth” was great (Gen 6:5), and the inhabitants of the earth built a tower to “make a name” for themselves (Gen 11:4), resulting in God’s judgment at the tower of Babel (Gen 11:7-8).

Humanity was in a deplorable state by the end of the Babel judgment. Firstly, man, in general, had stopped worshipping God. Scripture states that the “whole world” conspired to build the tower (Gen 11:1-4). Secondly, whereas one language existed before (Gen 11:1), now multiple languages were spoken (Gen 11:7). Thirdly, the people were no longer together; they were scattered over the face of the earth (Gen 11:9).

God set out to reach the scattered people of the world, through a covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3).<sup>58</sup> Of the several promises God made to Abraham in the covenant, the most important to this study is that God would bless “all peoples” (כָּל מְשֻׁפָּחֹת) through Abraham (Gen 12:3). The Hebrew word מְשֻׁפָּחֹת “most often refers to a circle of relatives, with strong

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<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of the nuanced meaning of “offspring” in Gen 3:15, see John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (F. Gaebelein, ed., 12 vols, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1990), pp. 2:55-56. Sailhamer notes that the enmity is not just between the snake and the woman, but also between the offspring of the snake and that of the woman. See also Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1990), p. 200. Kidner argues that the seed of Abraham is both collective (Rom 16:20) and an individual (Gal 3:16) in enmity with Satan (Rom 16:20; Rev 12:9, 20:2). Derek Kidner, *Genesis, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1967), p. 71.

<sup>58</sup> In Gen 12:1-3, Abraham was still called Abram. However, for the sake of consistency in this study, Abraham is used throughout.

blood ties”,<sup>59</sup> as possibly indicated by its use in Gen 10:5, 20, 31, where it is distinguished from “languages” (from לְשׁוֹן), “territories” (from אֲרָצוֹת), and “nations” (גּוֹיִם) (NIV accordingly translates מְשפּוּחֹת as “clans”). However, God also promised to bless all nations through Abraham (Gen 18:18; see also 22:18; 26:4).<sup>60</sup> It is difficult to define with precision the groupings of people that God promised to bless through Abraham. Nevertheless, it seems apparent that God’s blessing will affect all groupings of people, as characterised by “peoples” (מְשפּוּחֹת) and “nations” (גּוֹיִם).

An examination of the Hebrew grammar in Gen 12:1-3 shows that God will fulfil His promise to Abraham to bless all nations. In Gen 12:1, the verb “leave” (לָךְ) is an imperative while the remaining “I will” verbs in Gen 12:2-3, beginning with “and I will make you” (וַאֲנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה), are a series of cohortative imperfects in a *waw* construction. There are two ways to understand this type of verb construction: conditional or unconditional. Chisolm argues for a conditional interpretation: God will fulfil His promises, if Abraham obeys the command to leave.<sup>61</sup> On the contrary, Cleon L. Rogers Jr argues that God’s actions, the “I will” verbs, are not dependent upon Abraham obeying the imperative, “leave”, rather, the construction shows God’s “summons” to Abraham “to receive the promise”.<sup>62</sup> Kaiser also argues for an unconditional interpretation – that

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<sup>59</sup> Hermann J. Austel, “מְשפּוּחֹת”, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris, et al, eds, 2 vols, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1980), p. 2:947.

<sup>60</sup> Gerard Van Groningen, “גּוֹיִם,” *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (R. Laird Harris, et al, eds, 2 vols, Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1980), pp. 1:152-153. Van Groningen suggests that גּוֹיִם represents a large group of people, although he acknowledges that context is important in defining גּוֹיִם.

<sup>61</sup> “See Robert B. Chisholm Jr, “Evidence from Genesis”, in *A Case for Premillennialism: A New Consensus* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1992), p. 37, footnote 6.

<sup>62</sup> Cleon L. Rogers Jr “The Covenant with Abraham and its Historical Setting”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127 (1970), p. 252. Rogers acknowledges that a conditional interpretation is possible.

God has a “divine intention to bless” in mind – and supports his conclusion with several other passages that use similar constructions (Gen 27:3, 30:28, 45:18; 1 Sam 14:12, 28:22; 2 Sam 14:7).<sup>63</sup>

Many centuries later, Peter referred to God’s promise to Abraham, and preached Christ as the vessel through which “all peoples on the earth will be blessed” (Acts 3:25). Peter’s use of the Abrahamic covenant confirms the predictive nature of the covenant. The promised blessing is salvation – justification by faith in Christ (Gal 3:7-8). Consequently, individuals (“those who believe” in Gal 3:7) from “all” (כָּל) “peoples” (מִשְׁפָּחֹת) and “nations” (גוֹיִם) (Gen 12:3; 18:8) will experience salvation, in fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham. Not that every individual, in every people and nation, will decide to believe in Christ, but the promise seems to indicate there will be individuals, who will experience salvation in every people and nation.

Abraham’s physical descendants, through Isaac, and then Jacob, became the nation of Israel, which had a role in reaching the nations for God. Israel was to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex 19:6a). The nation was to serve as “a light for the Gentiles” (Is 49:6b).<sup>64</sup> Israel was to “proclaim His salvation day after day” (Ps 96:2b).<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1978), p. 93.

<sup>64</sup> Some scholars argue that Israel was to go to the nations (centrifugal), while others argue that Israel was to attract the nations (centripetal). For centripetal: David Filbeck, *Yes, God of the Gentiles, Too* (Wheaton IL: Billy Graham Center, 1994), pp. 64-66; Kostenberger, and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, pp. 34-36. For centrifugal: Philip M. Steyne, *In Step with the God of All Nations* (Houston TX: Touch Publications, 1991), pp. 208-210; Ferris L. McDaniel, “Mission in the Old Testament”, in *Mission in the New Testament: An Evangelical Approach* (William J. Larkin, and Joel F. Williams, eds, Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books), p. 20.

<sup>65</sup> Delitzsch believes that Ps 96:1-3 is a summons to Israel “to sing praise to God and to evangelise the heathen”. Delitzsch, *Psalms*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament,

## **MISSION THEOLOGY IN THE NT**

In the NT, God continues to show His concern for the nations of the world, and discloses His task for the church to make disciples in all nations.

### *All Nations*

God's mandate to the church, as seen in the Great Commission passages (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:46-48; Acts 1:8), continues to show God's concern for the nations of the world.<sup>66</sup> The gospels of Matthew and Luke use the plural "all nations" (τὰ ἔθνη), Mark uses "to all creation" (πάσῃ τῇ κτίσει), while the book of Acts uses the phrase "ends of the earth" (ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς).

Moreover, the book of Revelation develops these global concepts further. Rev 5:9 uses "nation" in a list of people group designations: "every tribe (φυλῆς), and language (γλώσσης), and people (λαοῦ), and nation (ἔθνους)". Rev 5:9 occurs as part of a heavenly scene, in which a choir

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by C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch (reprint edn, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1996), p. 623. Whereas Delitzsch sees salvation specifically as evangelisation of the unevangelised, VanGemeren sees salvation contextually as "all acts in redemptive history: creation and redemption". Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary (Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., 12 vols, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1991), p. 5:621. Wilcock sees an emphasis on God's eternal reign, "the good news of God's kingdom". Michael Wilcox, *The Message of Psalms 73-150*, The Bible Speaks Today (J. A. Moyter, ed., Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2001), p. 98.

<sup>66</sup> Mark 16:15 falls within the disputed ending of Mark 16:9-20. However, there is sufficient textual evidence to include Mark 16:9-20. Important codices including it are: Alexandrinus, Ephraemi Syri Rescriptus, Bezae Cantabrigienis, Freerianus, Coridethianus, and the Majority text. See Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 212. Important codices omitting it are: Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. See Kurt Aland, and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Erroll F. Rhodes, tran., Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), p. 293; Heinrich A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospels of Mark and Luke* (Winona Lake IN: Alpha, 1980), p. 201.

sings to the slain Lamb.<sup>67</sup> The 24 elders (or possibly the saints) make up the choir and sing, because the Lamb “redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation” (NKJV).<sup>68</sup> The book of Revelation repeats the list (tribe, language, people, and nation), but in different orders.<sup>69</sup> R. C. H. Lenski defines the four words, but does not list

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<sup>67</sup> The 24 elders probably represent the church, and not a special class of angels. For commentators supporting the angels view, see Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1992), p. 348; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), p. 135; Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Frank E. Gaebelin, ed., 12 vols, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 12:462. For commentators supporting the church view, see Herman A. Hoyt, *Studies in Revelation* (Winona Lake IN: BMH Books, 1985), p. 43; John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1966), p. 118. Walvoord concedes that most NT scholars today favour interpreting the elders as angels.

<sup>68</sup> In Rev 5:9, some MSS do not include ἡμᾶς (“us”), such as Codex Alexandrinus and the Ethiopian versions. MSS including it are the Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Basilianus, and the Coptic, Latin, and Armenian versions, and the Majority text. See Kurt and Barbara Aland, et al, *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th edn, Stuttgart Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), p. 642. Mounce argues against including ἡμᾶς in *Revelation*, p. 148, footnote 25. Those arguing for inclusion include R. Ludwigson, *A Survey of Bible Prophecy* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1973), p. 143; and Bruce T. Murray, “The Identification of the 24 Elders in the Revelation” (Th.M. thesis, Capital Bible Seminary, 1979), p. 50. Additionally, evidence is weak (Gigas liber, Clementine Vulgate, and Sahidic Syriac) for using ἡμῶν in the first stanza of Rev 5:10 (“You have made us”). The evidence, therefore, is not conclusive as to whether the 24 elders are singing of themselves or of others. If the 24 elders are singing of themselves, then the choir does not include the four living creatures (angelic creatures have no need of redemption), contra Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Moisés Silva, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 2002), p. 259.

<sup>69</sup> The order in Rev 7:9 is ἔθλους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν. Rev 11:9 is λαῶν καὶ φυλῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν καὶ ἔθνων. Rev 13:7 is φυλὴν καὶ λαὸν καὶ γλώσσαν καὶ ἔθνος. Rev 14:6 is ἔθνος καὶ φυλὴν καὶ γλώσσαν καὶ λαόν. Rev 17:15 uses a slightly different list of λαοὶ καὶ ὄχλοι εἰσὶν καὶ ἔθνη καὶ γλώσσαι. There is no dispute among the MSS regarding each of these phrases except for Rev 13:7, where a few manuscripts, namely P<sup>47</sup> and the Majority text (Andreas of Caesarea text tradition), omit καὶ λαόν. See Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, p. 63.

scriptural support for his definitions.<sup>70</sup> Other scholars argue that the four words are an all-encompassing idiom for the universal nature of the church.<sup>71</sup> However, since John uses the list of four words repeatedly in the book of Revelation, it seems likely that he had specific definitions in mind for each of the group designations.

### ***Mission Task: Preach the Gospel***

The Great Commission passages define the mission task. Luke 24:46-48 stresses the preaching (κηρυσθῆναι) “of repentance and forgiveness of sins”, while Mark 16:15 emphasises the preaching (κηρύξατε) of the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον). The forms of κηρύσσω, as used in these contexts, is a “public proclamation of the gospel, and matters pertaining to it”.<sup>72</sup> In the NT, εὐαγγέλιον is primarily about the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that Kostenberger and O’Brien show that Paul often uses the word group εὐαγγέλιον “to cover the whole range of evangelistic and teaching ministry – from the initial

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<sup>70</sup> R. C. H. Lenski, *Commentary on the New Testament: The Interpretation of St John’s Revelation* (reprint edn, Peabody MA: Hendrickson, 1998), p. 208.

<sup>71</sup> See Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 148; Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 260; Simon Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary on Revelation* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 2001), p. 211.

<sup>72</sup> See Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 846. Friedrich argues that in the NT, κηρύσσω is primarily a “summons to repentance” (Matt 4:17). Gerhard Friedrich, “κήρυξ”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 3 (1965), pp. 683-718.

<sup>73</sup> Friedrich notes, “the death and passion of Jesus are undoubtedly the content of the gospel” (Mark 14:9). Gerhard Friedrich, “εὐαγγέλιον” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2 (1964), pp. 707-737. Furthermore, Paul’s use of εὐαγγέλιον in Rom 1:1-4 and 1 Cor 15:1-5 shows that the heart of the gospel is the “story of Jesus and His suffering, death and resurrection”, and “Everything connected with this may be preaching of the gospel.” Friedrich, p. 730.

proclamation of the gospel to the building up of believers, and grounding them firmly in faith” (Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 4:15; Col 1:5-6).<sup>74</sup>

Acts 1:8 shows that the task is to be witnesses (μάρτυρες) – the apostles were to testify to what they heard from Christ, and saw Him do. However, upon closer analysis, one sees a strong relationship between being a witness and preaching the gospel. In Luke 24:48, Christ tells the disciples they were witnesses of His death and resurrection, therefore, they should preach repentance to all nations (Luke 24:46-47).<sup>75</sup>

### ***Mission Task: Make Disciples***

Matt 28:19-20 emphasises that the mission task is to “make disciples”. “Make disciples” (μαθητεύσατε) is an imperative and controls the sentence. In contrast, “go(ing)” (πορευθέντες), “baptising” (βαπτίζοντες), and “teaching” (διδάσκοντες) are participles, and describe the command μαθητεύσατε (from μαθητεύω). Hence, the task of mission is μαθητεύσατε, characterised by the three participles πορευθέντες, βαπτίζοντες, and διδάσκοντες.<sup>76</sup> Although the three

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<sup>74</sup> Kostenberger, and O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, p. 183. It is important to note that in Col 1:6, Paul states the gospel is bearing fruit “all over the world”. The phrase is a hyperbole, suggesting there were some Christians everywhere. See J. B. Lightfoot, *St Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (reprint edn, Lynn MA: Hendrickson, 1981), pp. 134-135; Fredrick B. Westcott, *Colossians: a Letter to Asia* (reprint edn, Minneapolis MN: Klock & Klock, 1914), p. 35.

<sup>75</sup> Strathmann defines μάρτυρες in its use in Luke 24:47-48 and Acts 1:8, as a combination of witness to facts and witness in the sense of evangelical confession. H. Strathmann, “μάρτυρες”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 4 (1967), pp. 474-514.

<sup>76</sup> See D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary (Frank E. Gaebelein, ed., 12 vols, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1984), p. 8:597; R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), p. 414; Robert Garrett, “The Gospels and Acts: Jesus the Missionary and His Missionary Followers”, in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson, eds, Nashville TN:

participles do not define the meaning of the imperative, the participles do provide the breadth of task for **μαθητεύσατε**.<sup>77</sup> Lexically, the definition of **μαθητεύω** shows that instructing is a primary component of making disciples.<sup>78</sup>

First, **πορευθέντες** shows that the task of mission involves going to “all nations”. Contextually, the implied object of **πορευθέντες** is “all nations” as seen in the object of **μαθητεύσατε** (which is **πάντα τὰ ἔθνη**), the object of **βαπτίζοντες** (which is **αὐτούς**, referring back to **πάντα τὰ ἔθνη**), and the object of **διδάσκοντες** (which is also **αὐτούς**, again referring back to **πάντα τὰ ἔθνη**).<sup>79</sup>

**Πορευθέντες**, an aorist participle, is straightforwardly translated as “having gone,” a descriptive phrase. However, Cleon L. Rogers Jr makes a case that **πορευθέντες** should be understood as an imperative, “go!” He argues that since **πορευθῆντες** is in the aorist tense (rather than a present participle, like **βαπτίζοντες** or **διδάσκοντες**), then **πορευθέντες** should carry the weight of **μαθητεύσατε** (the imperatival verb, which follows

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Broadman & Holman, 1988), pp. 72-73; D. Edmond Hiebert, “An Exposition Study of Matthew 28:16-20”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992), p. 348; Kane, *Christian Missions*, p. 48; A. Boyd Luter, “Women Disciples and the Great Commission”, in *Trinity Journal* 16 (1995), p. 174.

<sup>77</sup> Contra Warns, who sees “make disciples” as part of a linear progression: go, make disciples, baptise, and teach. He argues, “a present participle, following a principal verb, indicates an action following upon that principal verb, not preceding or accompanying it” (Matt 8:2, 27; Eph 6:17-18). For Warns, since a disciple is won through the proclamation of the gospel (Mark 16:15-16), “evangelise” is the main concept represented by “make disciples”. Johannes Warns, *Baptism* (G. H. Lang, tran., Minneapolis MN: Klock & Klock, 1957), pp. 38-42.

<sup>78</sup> Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 386; K. H. Rengstorf, “**μαθητεύω**”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 4 (1967), pp. 388-461.

<sup>79</sup> Robertson notes the relationship of **αὐτούς** to **ἔθνη**. See A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville TN: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 684.

πορευθέντες).<sup>80</sup> One could also argue that this construction shows order or consequence (not a temporal “after” indicating a time interval): “having gone, make disciples”. The two participles would then coordinate with the main aorist verb. Regardless of one’s interpretation, whether viewed with imperatival force, “go”, or as an aorist participle, “having gone”, the context is “all nations”, therefore “go(ing)” implies cross-nation movement.

Second, βαπτίζοντες refers to water baptism.<sup>81</sup> Matthew uses various forms of the verb βαπτίζω six other times, of which five indicate water baptism: Matt 3:6; 11; 13; 14, 16.<sup>82</sup> The occurrences in Matt 3 relate to the water baptism of Jesus; therefore, Jesus’ instructions about baptising in Matt 28:19 arguably reflect the main use of βαπτίζω in Matthew, namely water baptism.<sup>83</sup> Some argue that water baptism is regenerative (a person receives salvation through the act of water baptism), based on passages such as “He saved us through the washing (λουτροῦ) of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5b).<sup>84</sup> In commenting on Titus 3:5,

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<sup>80</sup> Rogers cites similar constructions in Matt 2:8, 13, 20; 5:24; 6:6; 11:4; 21:2; 17:27; and 28:7. Cleon L. Rogers Jr “The Great Commission”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 130 (1973), p. 258. Likewise, Blue argues that πορευθέντες is a “participle of attendant circumstance, and, therefore, carries the force of the main verb”. J. Ronald Blue, “Go, Missions”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (1984), p. 343.

<sup>81</sup> Lexically, βαπτίζω means “to immerse”. See Hans Windisch, “βαπτίζω”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 1 (1964), pp. 529-553. See also Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester UK: IVP, 1994), p. 970; William Hendrickson, *Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 1000; Michael J. Wilkins, “A View from the Matthean Account of The Great Commission”, in *Teaching Them Obedience in All Things: Equipping for the 21st Century* (Edgar J. Elliston, ed., Pasadena CA: William Carey Library, 1999), p. 56.

<sup>82</sup> Matt 3:11 uses βαπτίζω a second time, but relates it to the Holy Spirit.

<sup>83</sup> Matt 3:6 refers generically to John the Baptist baptising, but, since Matt 3:2 refers to John the Baptist as preparing the way for the Lord, the focus of the chapter is on Christ’s baptism.

<sup>84</sup> See Oscar Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament* (J. K. S. Reid, tran., London UK: SCM Press, 1950), pp. 48-49; Donald Bridge, and David Phipers, *The Water that*

Donald Guthrie states, “Most commentators take this washing to refer to baptism”, but offers “the whole passage is designed to exhibit the grandeur of the grace of God and many details, such as faith-appropriation, are omitted to serve that end”.<sup>85</sup> John Stott also interprets λουτροῦ as water baptism, but argues that baptismal regeneration is not in view, since the Holy Spirit is the one who regenerates (making water baptism an outward sign of an inward act).<sup>86</sup> Ronald Ward contends that “washing” refers back to “purify” in Titus 2:14 and sees a reference to spiritual cleansing through the blood of Christ.<sup>87</sup> George Wieland, also arguing for spiritual cleansing, states that, in Titus 3:6, “the image of outpouring (ἐξέχεσθαι) is appropriate to both washing and the Holy Spirit, echoing the OT promise of cleansing and renewal, through God’s Spirit (Ezek 36:25-27)”.<sup>88</sup> Based on the contextual evidence, it is best to take “washing” in Titus 3:5 as a metaphor for spiritual cleansing, whether by Christ’s blood, or the Holy Spirit, rather than baptismal regeneration.

Water baptism is not regenerative, because Paul taught that salvation is through faith alone: “you are saved through faith” and “not of works” (Eph 2:8-9). One must put faith in the person and work of Christ to receive

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*Divides: The Baptism Debate* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1977), pp. 23-24. However, it is relevant to note that the noun λουτρόν (a genitive in Titus 3:5) is also used in Eph 5:26 (as a dative): “by the washing with water through the word”.

<sup>85</sup> Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1957), p. 205. See D. Edmond Hiebert, *Titus and Philemon* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1957), pp. 70-71.

<sup>86</sup> John Stott, *Guard the Truth* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1996), pp. 204-205. See also G. Michael Cocoris, “Is Water Baptism Necessary for Salvation?”, in *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 3 (1997), pp. 8-11.

<sup>87</sup> Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus* (Waco TX: Word Books, 1974), p. 270. For support, Ward refers to the cleansing blood of Christ in Heb 9:13, 22, 26 (Ward, *Titus*, pp. 262-263).

<sup>88</sup> George M. Wieland, *The Significance of Salvation: A Study of Salvation Language in the Pastoral Epistles* (Eugene OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006), p. 229. See Gordon D. Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, A Good News Commentary (W. Ward Gasque, ed., San Francisco CA: Harper & Row, 1984), pp. 157-158.

salvation.<sup>89</sup> Paul emphasises Christ as the object of one's faith: "That if you confess (ὁμολογήσης) with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:9-10). Kenneth Wuest notes that ὁμολογήσης carries the idea "to speak the same thing", contending that ὁμολογήσης, in this context, means to "be in agreement with all that scripture says about Him", as represented by the title "Jesus is Lord".<sup>90</sup> However, since Rom 10:13 emphasises calling "on the name of the Lord" for salvation, then "confess" in Rom 10:9 suggests acknowledging to Christ that that He is Lord (deity).<sup>91</sup> Leon Morris notes that the phrase "believe in your heart" has an object of belief: "It means that faith has content: Paul is not advocating a fideism, in which all that matters is to believe. . . . Here he speaks of believing *that God raised Him from the dead*" (italics original).<sup>92</sup> Therefore, true faith needs an object to trust in. One receives salvation by putting trust in the deity (Lord) and work (death-resurrection) of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>89</sup> See also Alexander Carson, *Baptism, Its Mode and Subjects* (Evansville IN: The National Foundation for Christian Education, 1969), p. 169; Cocoris, "Is Water Baptism Necessary for Salvation?", p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> Kenneth Wuest, *Romans in The Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1955), pp. 177-178; see also Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), pp. 657-658. Contra those who see that ὁμολογέω means a "public verbal confession": William R. Newell, *Romans: Verse by Verse* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1938), p. 398; William G. T. Shedd, *Commentary on Romans* (reprint ed.; Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 318-319.

<sup>91</sup> The title "Lord" refers to Christ's deity. Morris comments, "Paul uses the title Lord 275 times (out of 718 in the New Testament). This term could be no more than a polite form of address like our 'Sir'. But it could also be used of the deity one worships. The really significant background, though, is its use in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to render the divine name 'Yahweh'. Where the Hebrew has this name of God the LXX frequently translates with 'Lord'." Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), p. 47.

<sup>92</sup> Morris, *Romans*, pp. 385-386; see Moo, *Romans*, p. 658; Shedd, *Romans*, p. 319; Wuest, *Romans*, p. 178.

In Rom 6:3-4, Paul offers insight into the meaning of water baptism. After teaching in the first five chapters of Romans that salvation is by faith in Christ, Paul starts discussing sanctification in Rom 6.<sup>93</sup> One aspect of sanctification is water baptism – when believers demonstrate they are “buried with” Christ “in order that” they may “live a new life” (Rom 6:4). Believers “died to sin” at salvation (Rom 6:2), and, at water baptism, the “burial is carried out” (Rom 6:3-4).<sup>94</sup> More evidence for this sanctification view is presented later in this article. First, though, a look at another view is in order.<sup>95</sup>

Some theologians argue that Paul is speaking of Spirit baptism rather than water baptism in Rom 6:3-4 for the following reasons.<sup>96</sup> Firstly, ἐβαπτίσθημεν (Rom 6:3) is in the aorist tense and the passive voice, which point to the Spirit as the agent of uniting an unbeliever with Christ (see 1 Cor 12:13). Secondly, εἰς, in the phrase “into (εἰς) Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:3), should carry its normal sense of “into”, which implies union with Christ. Thirdly, διὰ, in the phrase “buried with him through (διὰ) baptism” (Rom 6:4), is a genitive of means, which implies “that believers were buried with Christ, through the means or agency of [Spirit] baptism”.<sup>97</sup> However, since there is no mention of the Spirit in Rom 6:3-4, it is questionable whether Spirit baptism is the correct view.

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<sup>93</sup> See Morris, *Romans*, p. 33; James Edwards, *Romans*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1992), p. 156.

<sup>94</sup> Morris, *Romans*, pp. 247-248. See also Newell, *Romans*, pp. 204-205; Shedd, *Romans*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>95</sup> Lenski argues εἰς denotes sphere, “in connection with”, and argues that baptism is not a picture; rather salvation is by faith, plus baptism. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis MN: Augsburg Publishing, 1961), p. 393. Although more difficult to categorise, see also Edwards, *Romans*, p. 160.

<sup>96</sup> Ralph Zimmerman, “Paul’s Use of Baptism in Rom 6:1-4” (Th.M. thesis, Capital Bible Seminary, 1992), p. 54. See also George L. Rogers, *Studies in Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (publication information unreadable, 1936), p. 286.

<sup>97</sup> Zimmerman, “Paul’s Use of Baptism”, p. 54.

There are arguments for a sanctification view of baptism in Rom 6:3-4. In 1 Cor 10:2, Paul states that the Israelites were “baptised into (εἰς) Moses”, which suggests they “were baptised with respect to Moses, for his sake, for his allegiance”.<sup>98</sup> Therefore, the phrase “baptised into Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:3), likewise, means to show one’s allegiance to Christ. The concept of allegiance is also seen in 1 Pet 3:21, where water baptism is the “pledge of a good conscience toward God”.<sup>99</sup>

Douglas Moo characterises water baptism as the conclusion of the conversion-initiation experience, categorising water baptism under the “initiation” nomenclature. As support, Moo interprets διὰ, in “buried with him through (διὰ) baptism” (Rom 6:4), as instrumental. He argues that water baptism “is not the place, or time, at which we are buried with Christ, but the instrument (*dia*), through which we are buried with Him” (italics original).<sup>100</sup> According to Moo, believers, by faith, participated with Christ in His death-burial-resurrection, with baptism standing “for the whole conversion-initiation experience, presupposing faith and the gift of the Spirit”.<sup>101</sup> Moo notes that genuine faith is sufficient for salvation, even if “it has not been ‘sealed’ in baptism”.<sup>102</sup> Since Moo distinguishes between salvation and baptism, then it is legitimate to include his “initiation” interpretation of water baptism as further support that water baptism is part of the post-salvation sanctification process.

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<sup>98</sup> G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 128-129.

<sup>99</sup> In commenting on the verse, Beasley-Murray says that water baptism “embraces the confessed intention of yielding obedience to the Lord Christ, in conduct as well as worship”. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, p. 144. See also Thomas Robinson, *Studies in Romans* (Grand Rapids MI: Kregel Publications, 1982), pp. 321-322; Louis T. Talbot, *Addresses on Romans* (Wheaton IL: Van Kampen Press, 1936), p. 95.

<sup>100</sup> Moo, *Romans*, p. 364.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

Further support for a sanctification view is found when viewing Rom 6:3-4 within the context of Rom 6:1-11. At the beginning of the Rom 6:1-11 passage, Paul states that believers should not go on sinning because “we died to sin” (Rom 6:1-2). While, at the end of the passage, Paul encourages believers to “count yourselves dead to sin” (Rom 6:11). Since, in the midst of these bookend statements, is Paul’s discussion of baptism (Rom 6:3-4), Paul is teaching that, in the act of water baptism, the believer “renounces the ‘oldness’ of his earlier life and commits himself to the ‘newness of life’, opened up for him through the resurrection life of Christ”.<sup>103</sup>

In summary, then, water baptism does not regenerate; rather it is a symbolic identification with Christ’s death-burial-resurrection, and a public commitment to live for Christ. Since salvation is by faith, the task of baptising in Matt 28:19-20 implies the prior task of evangelising.

Thirdly, διδάσκοντες refers to instruction.<sup>104</sup> The context of “teaching” is “everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20a). Since Jesus taught on many things – including the two greatest commandments of loving God and loving others (Matt 22:35-40) – teaching implies instructing believers towards spiritual maturity. Baptism is a single event, teaching is an endless process (Acts 2:42).<sup>105</sup> Paul felt that he had “fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ” from “Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum” (Rom 15:19), despite not having evangelised every person in the region.<sup>106</sup> In Paul’s

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid. See also Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Philadelphia PA: William S. & Alfred Martien, 1864), p. 140; James M. Stifler, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1960), p. 108.

<sup>104</sup> διδάσκοντες, from διδάσκω, means “to hold discourse with others, in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses” (Matt 4:23; 21:23). Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 144. For further elaboration, see Karl H. Rengstorf, “διδάσκω”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 2 (1964), pp. 135-165.

<sup>105</sup> Kane, *Christian Missions*, p. 48.

<sup>106</sup> Steve Strauss, “Mission Theology in Romans 15:14-33”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160 (2003), p. 462. Regarding the phrase “fully proclaimed the gospel”, Morris believes it shows that Paul fulfilled his Apostolic commission, because he “preached in strategic

model, he apparently expected the local churches, which he established, to complete the evangelisation effort. This expectation did not preclude him from revisiting the churches, and continue teaching, as part of his missionary efforts. Steve Strauss summarises from Rom 15:14-33 that the “ultimate goal of missions must be Christian maturity”.<sup>107</sup>

## **FOREKNOWLEDGE ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE**

The validity of mission theology, arguably, rests in the extensiveness of God’s foreknowledge. If God knows all future events, He will undoubtedly accomplish His goals; His foreknowledge legitimises His strategy. On the other hand, if God does not know all future events, then doubt enters into the equation; perhaps God will not reach His goals.

However, God does know the future in its entirety. He must have exhaustive knowledge of the future, in order to affirm, “I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come” (Is 46:10a).<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, scripture presents incidents that God foreknew as contingencies that He did not choose to actualise. Firstly, God foreknew that David would be betrayed by the town of Keilah if David remained in

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centres throughout the area named, and established churches”. Morris, *Romans*, p. 514. See also Bruce, *Romans*, p. 261; Hodge, *Romans*, p. 337.

<sup>107</sup> Strauss, “Mission Theology”, p. 471.

<sup>108</sup> It is beyond the scope of this article to explore fully the relationship between God’s foreknowledge and God’s predetermination. Acts 2:23 assumes both are true: they are distinct, but without separation. Nevertheless, non-Open Theists do differ in their understanding of the subject. For example, Feinberg sees God’s predetermination as prior to His foreknowledge. John S. Feinberg, “God Ordains All Things”, in *Predestination and Freewill* (David Basinger, and Randall Basinger, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1986), p. 23. Geisler sees God’s predetermination and foreknowledge working simultaneously. Norman Geisler, “God Knows All Things”, in *Predestination and Freewill* (David Basinger, and Randall Basinger, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1986), p. 70. Picirilli sees God’s foreknowledge as prior to God’s predetermination. Robert Picirilli, “Foreknowledge, Freedom, and the Future”, in *JETS* 43 (2000), p. 260. See also Bjorn Hasseler, “Election and the *Ordo Salutis*” (Th.M. thesis, Capital Bible Seminary, 2000), pp. 76-77.

the town. As a result, David decided to leave Keilah (1 Sam 23:11-13). Secondly, if the miracles that Jesus did in Bethsaida and Chorazin had been done in Tyre and Sidon, God knew Tyre and Sidon would have repented (Matt 11:21).

God's specific knowledge of the future is evident in the OT. God declares "new things" before they occur (Is 42:9). God knows our future speech: "Before a word is on my tongue, you know it completely, O Lord" (Ps 139:4). God foreknew the name of Cyrus, and that he would rebuild the temple (Is 44:28). God knows future actions of the nations: "all the families of the nations will bow down before Him" (Ps 22:27). In fact, God's foreknowledge distinguishes Him from false gods: "there is none like Me" (Is 46:10).

God's specific knowledge of the future is evident in the NT. Christ predicted events concerning His own betrayal. He prophesied that His disciple Judas would betray Him (Matt 26:21-25) on the feast of the Passover (Matt 26:2), that His other disciples would desert Him (Matt 26:31), and that Peter would deny Him three times before morning (Matt 26:34). Perhaps, even more telling, is that Christ was "handed over" to the Jews, according to God's "foreknowledge" (Acts 2:23).<sup>109</sup> In fact, prior to the creation of the world, God had foreknowledge of Christ's crucifixion. For example, speaking of the future Tribulation period, John states that "All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast – all whose names have not been written (γέγραπται) in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain (ἔσφαγμένου) from the creation of the world (ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου)" (Rev 13:8). The phrase ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου can modify either ἔσφαγμένου or γέγραπται. If taken with γέγραπται, the passage does not focus on Christ, rather, it focuses on individuals. Even if

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<sup>109</sup> Acts 2:23 uses the noun πρόγνώσει, "foreknowledge" (also 1 Pet 1:2). Bauer, Arndt, Danker, and Gingrich define it as "God's omniscient wisdom and intention". BAGD, p. 703. Thayer argues for prior knowledge without intention. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 538. Either way, God foreknew the act of Christ being handed to the Jews.

this is the case, the fact that God foreknew the names of those in the “book of life” from the foundation of the world shows God’s foreknowledge. Nevertheless, it is best to take the phrase with ἔσθλαγμένου, because of the immediate proximity of the words in Greek, thus showing the cross-event is in view.<sup>110</sup>

The sin of Adam and Eve is a revealing example of God’s foreknowledge. Since God is holy, “I am holy” (1 Pet 1:16b), and hates sin, “You love righteousness, and hate wickedness” (Ps 45:7a), it is unthinkable to think that God caused Adam and Eve to sin in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, Adam and Eve freely decided to succumb to Satan’s tempting (Gen 3:1-5) and sin: “she took some and ate it”, and “he ate it” (Gen 3:6).<sup>111</sup> It is

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<sup>110</sup> In support, see Mounce, *Revelation*, p. 256; Leon Morris, *Revelation*, Tyndale New Testament Commentary (revd edn, Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), p. 165; Lenski, *Revelation*, p. 400. Contra Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1995), p. 166; George E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St John* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1972), p. 181; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), p. 702. Part of the argument hinges on the relationship of Rev 13:8 with Rev 17:8. Rev 17:8 refers to names not “written in the book of life from the creation of the world”. Osborne rightfully sees God’s foreknowledge of individuals in Rev 17:8 in contrast to God’s foreknowledge of “the Lamb slain” in Rev 13:8. Osborne, *Revelation*, p. 616. Rev 13:8 and Rev 17:8 also offer evidence for the atonement concept of substitution (discussed later in this article). From the “creation of the world”, both the Lamb was slain (Rev 13:8), and names were written in the book of life (Rev 17:8).

<sup>111</sup> Theologians differ on the best way to characterise man’s freewill. Pinnock uses the term “libertarian freedom”, defining it as “the freedom to perform an action, or refrain from it”. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 41. Calvin argues for a limited sense of freedom: the only freedom fallen man has is the freedom to sin, because of his depraved nature. See Eamon Duffy, “Depravity, Total”, in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1983), p. 153. Fisk offers the best definition: man’s will “operates with very definite limits that is bounded by the overall controlling plan and purpose of God”. Samuel Fisk, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (Neptune NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1973), p. 25. God has freewill, in the sense that He can freely act in accordance with His nature.

important to note that God had to foreknow (and planned to permit) Adam and Eve's sin, since He had also determined, before the creation of the world, to send His Son to die on the cross (Rev 13:8). If God had not foreknown and planned to permit the sin of Adam and Eve, there would have been no reason for God to plan to sacrifice His Son.

### **ATONEMENT AND SALVATION ACCORDING TO SCRIPTURE**

The atonement, which includes the purpose of Christ's death on the cross, is foundational to any study involving mission theology. Open Theists' view of God dictates their view of God's relationship to man. God's relationship to man is most evident in Christ's death on the cross, because Christ was the full expression of God to man: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col 2:9). Through His atoning death on the cross, Christ provides eternal life to "everyone who believes in Him" (John 3:15). As will be shown, the atonement was, foremost, a penal substitution, and, secondly, a victory over evil.

#### ***Unrighteousness***

Adam's sin affected all of mankind; his disobedience brought sin and death into the world. Sin entered the world, as evidenced by God's statement to Adam that he broke God's commandment: "you listened to your wife, and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it'" (Gen 3:17a). Death entered the world, as evidenced by God's punishment of Adam's sin by death: "for dust you are, and to dust you will return" (Gen 3:19). Paul then reveals that all people were affected, when sin and death entered the world with Adam: "death came to all men, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12).<sup>112</sup> Paul further states: "the many died by the trespass of the one man" (Rom 5:15), and, through "the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man" (Rom 5:17). Therefore, God considers all people

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<sup>112</sup> John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1959), p. 72. See also Stifler, *Romans*, pp. 95-96; Talbot, *Romans*, pp. 84-85; Robinson, *Romans*, p. 295.

sinners, and subject to the penalty of death, due to Adam's sin: "For all have sinned" (Rom 3:23a), and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23a).

When Adam sinned, he received an unrighteous nature, which every human now inherits. Paul describes this unrighteous nature by the expression "were, by nature, children of wrath" (Eph 2:3, NASB). Paul also uses the terms "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1), and "dead in trespasses" (Eph 2:5).<sup>113</sup>

Theologians, arguing from a Wesleyan-Arminian perspective, believe that man inherits a nature that has the propensity to sin, but God does not condemn man until he intentionally sins (1 John 3:4). The argument is that the unrighteous nature does not "belong to the essential constitution of man", but rather "is an *inherited* impulse to sin" (italics original).<sup>114</sup>

However, other theologians argue that, since the sin nature is inherent in man, man's sin nature immediately condemns him before God, at conception. John Murray states, "Pravity is thus, itself, a constituent element of identification with Adam in his trespass, and we can no more be exempted from the pravity, which Adam's trespass involved, than we can be

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<sup>113</sup> This sinful nature does not imply that man can do only evil, but it does imply a predisposition to sin. Man, in his corrupt nature, can do good (Matt 22:10), but those actions are not redeeming in God's sight (Titus 3:5). Charles C. Ryrie, "Depravity, Total", in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Walter A. Elwell, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1984), p. 312. See also R. J. Hughes III, "Depravity", in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, p. 1:924.

<sup>114</sup> W. T. Purkiser, Richard S. Taylor, and Willard S. Taylor, *God, Man, and Salvation* (Kansas City MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1977), p. 299. See also Charles W. Carter, "Harmartiology: Evil, The Merrer of God's Creative Purpose and Work", in *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology* (Charles W. Carter, ed., 3 vols, Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1983), p. 1:269. According to Slatte, God does not hold man responsible for sin until man commits an actual sin. Howard A. Slatte, *The Arminian Arm of Theology* (Washington DC: University Press of America, 1979), p. 57. Actual sin is sin, which man commits from "the time he knows how to use reason". Slatte, *The Arminian Arm*, p. 38.

relieved of the forensic judgment, which passed upon it”.<sup>115</sup> If, however, one understands scripture to teach that man is sinful from conception (Ps 51:5), this would challenge the Wesleyan-Arminian view.

### ***Penal Substitution View***

God’s holiness dictates His attitude toward sinners – He cannot simply overlook sin; He must maintain His justice (Rom 6:23). God, alone, can make sinners righteous, acceptable to Himself: “I, even I, am the Lord, and apart from Me there is no Saviour” (Is 43:11). To serve as Saviour, God sacrificed His sinless Son on the cross, as a payment for man’s sin, a penal substitution: “Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people” (Heb 9:28).<sup>116</sup> “Penal” emphasises the judicial aspect of the cross-resurrection event, while “substitution” emphasises the sacrificial aspect (Christ paid the penalty due sinful man).<sup>117</sup> Roger Nicole characterises the

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<sup>115</sup> Murray argues, from Rom 5:19, that man is a “constituted sinner” (NIV states, “many were made sinners”) due to Adam’s sin. Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, p. 90. See also Alan P. F. Sell, *The Great Debate: Calvinism, Arminianism, and Salvation* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 1982), pp. 16-17; Duffy, “Depravity”, p. 153; Charles M. Horne, *Salvation* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1971), pp. 13-14.

<sup>116</sup> A thorough discussion of limited versus unlimited atonement is beyond the scope of this article. It is sufficient to say that there are arguments for both views. For example, Boettner argues from Acts 20:28 for limited atonement, because “it was intended for, and is applied to, particular persons; namely for those who are actually saved”. Loraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1941), p. 151. Lightner argues from passages such as John 1:29, Acts 2:21, and 1 Tim 2:6 for an unlimited atonement, but acknowledges that God has “chosen” people for salvation in eternity past. Robert P. Lightner, *The Death Christ Died: A Case for Unlimited Atonement* (Schaumburg IL: 1967), p. 100. There is also the corporate view: Christ did not die specifically for individuals, rather, He died for the corporate body of Christ (to which individuals may join through faith). See William Klein, *The New Chosen People: A Corporate View of Election* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1990), p. 32; Robert Shank, *Elect in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Election* (Minneapolis MN: Bethany House, 1989), p. 48.

<sup>117</sup> See J. E. Conant, *No Salvation without Substitution* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1941), pp. 112-131; Bruce Demarest, *The Cross and Salvation* (Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 1997), p. 26; Horne, *Salvation*, p. 24; Leon Morris, *The Cross of Jesus*

essence of penal substitution, “a substitute is needed, at the spiritual level, if the sinner is to escape” the penalty due him for sinning against a holy and righteous God.<sup>118</sup> Man may then appropriate, through faith, Christ’s righteousness, and be considered righteous.<sup>119</sup>

The atonement was a penal substitution, as seen in four concepts in scripture: sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption. Firstly, Christ’s death was a sacrifice, modelled after the OT sacrifices: “The blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean, sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, offered Himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” (Heb 9:13-14). The OT sacrifices, specifically the sin offering (Lev 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30), symbolically paid for sin, “because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4). Ronald Wallace comments on the meaning of the OT sacrifices, specifically the act of the worshipper laying hands on the sacrificial victim (see Lev 4:4, 15, 24, 33),

When we seek to understand the meaning of these rites, we enter the realm of conjecture. The Old Testament gives us no explanation why the offerer should lay his hand on the head of his animal. Some scholars see in this rite simply the dedication of the offering. Those

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(Grand Rapids IL: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 8-18; Murray, *The Imputation of Adam’s Sin*, pp. 94-95; Purkiser, Taylor, and Taylor, *God, Man and Salvation*, p. 381; Ronald Wallace, *The Atoning Death of Christ* (Westchester IL: Crossway Books, 1981), pp. 112-118.

<sup>118</sup> Roger Nicole, “Postscript on Penal Substitution”, in *The Glory of the Atonement* (Charles E. Hill, and Frank James III, eds, Downers Grove IL: IVP, 2004), pp. 449-450.

<sup>119</sup> “However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God, who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited (λογίζομαι) as righteousness” (Rom 4:5). In commenting on the meaning of λογίζομαι, Heidland states, “If God counts faith as righteousness, man is wholly righteous in God’s eyes”. Heidland, “λογίζομαι”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New testament* 4 (1967), p. 292.

who believe that the details of the Old Testament rites must contain foreshadowings of the way in which Christ, Himself, in His sacrifice bore our sins, see the rite as full of deeper significance: by laying his hand on the head of the animal with confession of sin, the worshipper [identifies] himself with the victim, in an action that symbolises the transfer of sin to the offering.<sup>120</sup>

The OT sacrifices symbolically atoned for sins until Christ sacrificially paid the price for all sins forever: “H entered the Most Holy Place, once for all, by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption” (Heb 9:12).

Secondly, Christ’s work on the cross was propitiatory: “He Himself is the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 2:2, NKJV). God’s wrath toward sin stands behind the concept of propitiation: “On the wicked He will rain fiery coals and burning sulfur; a scorching wind will be their lot” (Ps 11:6).<sup>121</sup> Propitiation does not contradict the love of God, it does not turn God’s wrath into love, and it does not detract from the love of God; rather, love works in accordance with God’s holiness, and to God’s glory.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Wallace, *Atoning Death of Christ*, p. 4. See also Robert H. Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1966), p. 26; George A. F. Knight, *Leviticus* (Philadelphia PA: Westminster Press, 1981), pp. 93-94; Morris, *The Cross of Jesus*, pp. 7-8; J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1962), p. 525.

<sup>121</sup> Horne defines propitiation as “the removal of the divine displeasure which sin evokes”. Horne, *Salvation*, p. 36. Grudem states, “Apart from this central truth, the death of Christ really cannot be adequately understood.” Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 575. Rom 3:25 uses ἱλαστήριος, Heb 2:17 uses ἰλάσκομαι and 1 John 2:2 and 4:10 use ἱλασμός to express the concept of propitiation. The words carry the basic meaning of “appeasing”. See Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 301. Büchsel refers to it as the vicarious bearing of divine judgment. Friedrich Büchsel, “ἱλαστήριον”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 3 (1965), pp. 318-323.

<sup>122</sup> John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1955), p. 31; Horne, *Salvation*, p. 36.

Thirdly, Christ's work on the cross was reconciling. Those who trust in Christ for salvation are reconciled to God: "we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son" (Rom 5:10).<sup>123</sup> There is a strong judicial sense in reconciliation, because the phrase "Since we have now been justified by His blood" in Rom 5:9 is parallel to the phrase "we were reconciled to Him, through the death of His Son" in Rom 5:10. Consequently, "reconciled to Him", in Rom 5:9, must be given, as Murray states, a "similarly juridical force [as justified], and can only mean that which came to pass in the objective sphere of the divine action and judgment".<sup>124</sup>

Fourthly, Christ's work on the cross was redeeming (Rom 3:25-26). Christ, as a substitute on the cross, paid the price for man's sins, thereby redeeming man: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). Redemption carries the idea of paying a ransom, the payment of a price to release someone from captivity.<sup>125</sup> God demanded payment for sin, and Christ made the payment: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us" (Gal 3:13).<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> καταλλάσσω, "reconciled," is to "change from enmity to friendship". LSJ, p. 899. Büchsel defines it as "renewal of the state between God and man". Friedrich Büchsel, "καταλλάσσω", in *Theological Dictionary of the New testament* 1 (1965), pp. 251-259.

<sup>124</sup> Murray, *Redemption*, p. 39.

<sup>125</sup> The primary words for redemption in the NT are the related nouns λύτρον (Mark 10:45) and ἀπολυτρώσεως (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14; Heb 9:15), and the verb λυτρώσθαι (Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18). λύτρον emphasises "the price paid", ἀπολυτρώσεως emphasises "liberation by ransom", and λυτρώσθαι means "to free by ransom". Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, pp. 65 and 384; Friedrich Büchsel, "λύω", in *Theological Dictionary of the New testament* 4 (1967), pp. 335-356.

<sup>126</sup> Horne, *Salvation*, p. 40. Murray also stresses "deliverance from the enslaving defilement and power of sin" (Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 1:18). Redemption from the power of sin is "the triumphal aspect of redemption", and is an aspect of redemption that is "frequently overlooked". Murray, *Redemption*, pp. 46-48.

In summary, the concepts of sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption show the atonement was a penal substitution – exhausting the penalty man owed God for sin. The use of the preposition ἄντι in the phrase “to give His life as a ransom for [ἄντι] many” (Mark 10:45b) is most revealing, since ἄντι denotes substitution (see Matt 2:22; 5:38; Rom 12:17).<sup>127</sup> On the cross, Christ bore every sin of every individual: “The LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Is 53:6), and “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24).<sup>128</sup> However, this focus on every person does not mean that every individual is redeemed (universal salvation). Unbelievers must, by faith, appropriate the substitution (“through faith” in Rom 3:25), thus becoming righteous in God’s sight (“his faith is credited as righteousness” in Rom 4:5).

### ***Some Older Non-penal Substitution Views***

A number of views that disregard the penal substitution aspect of the atonement have been present during church history. In the 2nd century, Origen taught the “ransom theory” of the atonement; he taught that Christ made a payment to Satan to purchase the freedom of unbelievers.<sup>129</sup> In the

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<sup>127</sup> See Lightner, *The Death Christ Died*, p. 23. Some atonement passages use the preposition ὑπέρ, which often means “in behalf of” (John 13:37), but can mean “in the place of” (1 Tim 2:6; Heb 2:9, 1 Pet 3:18), thus also showing substitution. See Harald Riesenfeld, “ὑπέρ”, in *Theological Dictionary of the New testament* 8 (1967), pp. 507-516; and Friedrich Büchsel, “ἄντι” *Theological Dictionary of the New testament* 1 (1967), pp. 372-373. See also Lightner, *The Death Christ Died*, p. 24.

<sup>128</sup> Contra, Douty, who argues for limited atonement, believing that one cannot say “Christ suffered so much for this man’s sin, and so much for that man’s sin”, but, rather, “When He suffered for any particular sin, He suffered for a sin of which millions have been guilty”. Norman F. Douty, *The Death of Christ* (Swengel PA: Reiner Publications, 1972), p. 29.

<sup>129</sup> See Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement*, pp. 75-76. Culpepper, in footnote 8 on page 75 of his work, refers to Origen’s writings in the “Commentary on Matthew”, XVI, p. 8; cited from *The Early Christian Fathers* (Henry Bettenson, ed./tran., London UK: Oxford University Press, 1956), no pages cited. See also Horne, *Salvation*, p. 25; John

12th century, Abelard taught the “moral influence theory” of atonement – that God demanded no payment for sin, because God’s love overrode God’s justice.<sup>130</sup> In Abelard’s view, Christ’s death was redeeming, in the sense that it was an expression of love to emulate. In the 16th century, Grotius taught the “governmental theory” of the atonement, which, in John MacArthur’s words, held that “Christ’s death was a public display of God’s justice, but not an actual payment on behalf of sinners”.<sup>131</sup> Through Christ’s death, God was showing man an example of the payment required for sinning. However, since God can simply forgive sin without such a payment, Christ’s death (as a payment) was not required. Also, in the 16th century, the Socinians taught that God’s primary attribute is love, to which all His other attributes succumb. God, in His love, freely forgives sin, without a payment. In fact, if God did demand a payment for sin, then God’s act would not be true forgiveness, because grace is not in a legal transaction, it is found in love. The Socinians considered God a kind, merciful, forgiving father, rather than a God of justice.<sup>132</sup>

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MacArthur, “Open Theism’s Attack on the Atonement”, in *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 12 (2001), p. 10.

<sup>130</sup> Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement*, pp. 87-91. Culpepper refers the reader to Abelard’s *Epitome of Christian Theology I*, and his *Commentary on Romans*. See also MacArthur, “Attack on the Atonement”, p. 25; Horne, *Salvation*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>131</sup> MacArthur, “Attack on the Atonement”, p. 11. See Horne, *Salvation*, pp. 28-29; Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement*, pp. 105-108. Culpepper refers the reader to Hugo Grotius’ *Defence of the Catholic Faith on the Satisfaction of Christ against Faustus Socinus*.

<sup>132</sup> Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Edinburgh UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1937), pp. 57-58; Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement*, pp. 103-105 (Culpepper refers the reader to Faustus Socinus’ *De Jesu Christo Servatore*, published in 1594); John D. Hannah, *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine* (Colorado Springs CO: NavPress, 2001), p. 94; Horne, *Salvation*, p. 27; MacArthur, “Attack on the Atonement”, p. 7.

These four historical views (ransom to Satan, moral influence, governmental, and Socinians) are unbiblical. Each view does not support scripture's teaching that the atonement was a penal substitution.

### *Anselm's Satisfaction View*

Another historical view, Anselm's "Satisfaction view" is more biblical. Anselm articulated this view in his work *Cur Deus Homo? (Why Did God become Man?)*.<sup>133</sup> Positively, in Robert Culpepper's words, "Anselm attempts to show how the death of Christ is paid to God for the sins of man".<sup>134</sup> Negatively though, Anselm may have presented God too much as a "feudal lord", who was more concerned about His "outraged honour", rather than His love in the atonement.<sup>135</sup>

### *Wesleyan-Arminian Views*

John Wesley, the 18th-century theologian, understood the atonement "as providing 'satisfaction' to the justice of God", and "the death of Christ was a substitute for the sinners' just deserts", according to Woodrow Whidden.<sup>136</sup> However, Wesley seems to argue for a "satisfaction-pardon model", where "forgiveness for sins (both nature and acts) is constantly

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<sup>133</sup> See Anselm, *Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo* (Sidney Norton Deane, tran., Chicago IL: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1939).

<sup>134</sup> Culpepper, *Interpreting the Atonement*, p. 84. See also Vincent Brümmer, *Atonement, Christology, and the Trinity: Making Sense of Christian Doctrine* (Burlington VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), pp. 74-75; MacArthur, "Attack on the Atonement", p. 10.

<sup>135</sup> Horne, *Salvation*, p. 26. See also John D. Hannah, "Anselm on the Doctrine of the Atonement", in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 135 (1978), p. 333. Furthermore, according to Schmiechen, in Anselm's view "there is a satisfaction required, but not the kind involved in legal theories of atonement". Peter Schmiechen, *Saving Power: Theories of Atonement and Forms of the Church* (Grand Rapids MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), p. 197.

<sup>136</sup> Woodrow W. Whidden, "Wesley on Imputation: A Truly Reckoned Reality or Antinomian Polemic Wreckage?", in *The Asbury Theological Journal* 52 (1997), p. 66. Whidden does state that his conclusions seem to be generally agreed upon by Wesleyan interpreters.

available, but must somehow be constantly applied for by penitent ones experiencing salvation”.<sup>137</sup> Steve Harper, in commenting on Wesley’s understanding of the atonement, states, “Christ’s death has become the means of our salvation; Christ’s life has become the pattern. . . . The atonement is, by nature, a call to morality and service”.<sup>138</sup> As a result, one cannot decisively say that Wesley taught the atonement exhausted (paid in full) man’s debt to God for sin. What Wesley was unsure of was the full transfer of Christ’s righteousness to the new believer.<sup>139</sup>

Richard Watson, an early 19th-century theologian, argued for a governmental view, in which he included the concepts of penalty and substitution. Larry Shelton summarises,

Richard Watson developed a modified governmental theory, which emphasised that God’s government is based on His ethical character, not just on abstract concepts of moral rectitude. He emphasised the penal character of Christ’s death, because he understood the sacrificial system to be a context, in which the penalty of law-breaking could be executed. He understood the execution of a penalty to be the only means by which expiation for sin could be attained.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Steve Harper, “Cross-Purposes: Wesley’s View of the Atonement”, in *Basic United Methodist Beliefs: An Evangelical View* (James V. Heidinger II, ed., Wilmore KY: Good News Books, 1986), pp. 42-43.

<sup>139</sup> See Whidden, “Wesley on Imputation”, p. 66. R. Larry Shelton – focusing on Wesley’s belief in a believer’s response of faith, life of sanctification, and the universality of Christ’s work – argues that Wesley’s view is “greatly dissimilar from any consistent form of a penal substitution view”. R. Larry Shelton, “A Covenant Concept of Atonement”, in *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 19 (1984), p. 102.

<sup>140</sup> Shelton, “A Covenant Concept of Atonement”, p. 102.

For Watson, however, the atonement was a “substitute for a penalty”, a departure from the concept in penal substitution, that Christ took the entire punishment due sinful man.<sup>141</sup>

William Burt Pope, a 19th-century theologian, taught the governmental view, but “tended to relate Christ’s vicarious work to the concept of penalty”.<sup>142</sup> Pope saw “Christ’s death as a sacrifice, which takes the place of a penalty”.<sup>143</sup> Pope places his emphasis on a concept of substitution, rather than the penal concept, in his view of the atonement, however his concept of substitution focuses on Christ’s sacrifice taking the place of a penalty (but not a complete replacement), rather than Christ’s sacrifice paying the penalty completely.

Another 19th-century theologian, John Miley, argued that God, as the moral governor of the universe, had to punish sin to uphold the principles of government.<sup>144</sup> Miley denied that Christ’s death was a substitution, involving the actual transfer of sin and righteousness, rather, God’s actual forgiveness “does not rest on Christ, as the substitute for penalty, but on faith in God, as the proper context for moral government”.<sup>145</sup> John Walvoord rightfully highlights that Miley incorrectly separates God’s

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<sup>141</sup> G. M. Steele, “Arminian Theories of the Atonement”, in *Methodist Review* 70 (1888), pp. 174-175.

<sup>142</sup> Shelton, “A Covenant Concept of Atonement”, p. 103.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. According to Purkiser, Miley’s theory included the “the vindication of public justice”, and “the real remission of the penalties for sin”. W. T. Purkiser, *Exploring our Christian Faith* (Kansas City MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1971), p. 258.

<sup>145</sup> Shelton, “A Covenant Concept of Atonement”, p. 103. Chafer states, “Dr Miley objects (1) to the doctrine of substitution, as generally held. It is his contention that neither the sin of man is imputable to Christ, nor the righteousness of God is imputable to man.” Lewis Sperry Chafer, “Soteriology”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 104 (1947), p. 268.

governmental role from His nature.<sup>146</sup> Any division between God's nature and role is not acceptable.

G. M. Steele, writing at the end of the 19th century, summarised four theories of the atonement held by Wesleyan-Arminians.<sup>147</sup> Firstly, is the "*judicial*" theory (italics original) – essentially an unlimited atonement penal substitution view. Secondly, is the "*purely governmental*" theory – essentially a Grotius governmental theory view. Thirdly, is the "*modified governmental*" theory – Christ's sacrifice satisfied the moral nature of God (not just the moral laws of God, as espoused by Grotius) to sustain the legitimacy of His government, and to forgive the sins of the remorseful. Essentially, it is the view held by Watson. Fourthly, is the "*moral influence*" theory – essentially Abelard's example view.

Wesleyan-Arminian theologians, in the 20th-century, favour an integration of various views on the atonement, with an emphasis on the governmental view. H. Orton Wiley and Paul Culbertson believe that the atonement includes the ideas of satisfaction, government, and love.<sup>148</sup> They acknowledge a substitutionary nature of the atonement, touting that Christ died for man – connecting "His death with the punishment due" man.<sup>149</sup> In commenting on substitution, Wiley and Culbertson say, of the penal substitution theory,

[It] is frequently claimed by its advocates, as the only theory, which admits of substitution, but the government theory of Grotius, and the

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<sup>146</sup> John F. Walvoord, "The Person and Work of Christ – Part VIII: Christ in His Suffering and Death", in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 118 (1961), p. 303.

<sup>147</sup> Steele, "Arminian Theories of the Atonement", pp. 175-176.

<sup>148</sup> H. Orton Wiley, and Paul T. Culbertson, *Introduction to Christian Theology* (Kansas City MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1969), p. 225.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 221-222.

modified propitiatory theory of Arminius and Wesley, holds this fact as fully, and more properly, than does the penal satisfaction theory.<sup>150</sup>

Shelton argues that Wiley “warns against stating the idea of Christ’s substitution as a penalty for sin in such a way as to make Christ a sinner, or to make the atonement merely a commercial transaction”; in other words, Christ’s sacrifice was “only a substitute for penalty”.<sup>151</sup>

Another Wesleyan-Arminian theologian, W. T. Purkiser, also holds to a governmental theory, but emphasises the importance of divine love, as the basis for the atonement. Purkiser states that this emphasis “upholds the full principles of moral government, and harmoniously relates the biblical facts of propitiation, expiation, reconciliation, and redemption, already discussed, to the entire character and claims of the divine majesty”.<sup>152</sup>

In summary, there are three common elements to Wesleyan-Arminian teachings on the atonement. Firstly, the governmental theory is the primary view among Wesleyan-Arminian theologians – articulated best by Miley and Purkiser. Michael Stallard states, the “Wesleyan or Arminian view of the atonement sees the satisfaction of only public justice (governmental view), rather than a satisfaction of the wrath of God upon an individual (individual retributive view)”.<sup>153</sup> Secondly, Wesleyan-Arminian theologians hold that Christ’s atoning work on the cross was a substitute for a penalty – articulated best by Watson and Wiley. Thirdly, Wesleyan-Arminian theologians do not necessarily see the atonement as fully exhausting man’s payment to God for sin – articulated best by Wesley and Pope. Wesleyan-Arminian theologians, however, do bring a broader perspective to the

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>151</sup> Shelton, “A Covenant Concept of Atonement”, p. 104.

<sup>152</sup> Purkiser, *Exploring our Christian Faith*, p. 257.

<sup>153</sup> Michael Stallard, “Justification by Faith, or Justification by Faith Alone?”, in *Conservative Theological Journal* 3 (1999), p. 71, footnote 46. Shelton argues though, “the penal substitution and governmental models, in particular, have been very influential in Wesleyan theology”. Shelton, “A Covenant Concept of Atonement”, p. 105.

discussion of the atonement than is found in a strict penal substitution view. Nevertheless, Wesleyan-Arminian theologians do not do justice to scripture's teachings on the atonement, namely, a penal substitution.

### *Victor View*

Not only was the atonement a penal substitution, it also affected Satan. Alluding to His own upcoming death and resurrection, Christ states, "now the prince of this world will be driven out" (John 12:31). Elsewhere, also in the context of Christ's death, Paul argues that Christ "disarmed the powers and authorities" (Col 2:15). Finally, the author of Hebrews, speaking of the cross, submits of Christ "by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14-15).<sup>154</sup> Through His death and resurrection, Christ was the victor.

Gustaf Aulén, an early 20th-century theologian, first presented to the post-reformation church a coherent discussion of Christ as the victor. In his work, *Christus Victor*, Aulén argues for a view of the atonement that emphasises Christ's victory over sin, death, and Satan. Aulén believes that "The atonement is set forth as the divine victory over the powers that hold men in bondage."<sup>155</sup> Any study of atonement should consider Aulén's two-fold argument of dualism and victory.

Firstly, Aulén sees a cosmic war occurring between God and evil. Evil includes Satan, sin, and death, although Satan is the mastermind behind all evil.<sup>156</sup> Sin is a power that holds men in bondage, and death is "the last enemy to be destroyed" (1 Cor 15:26).<sup>157</sup> Other powers rule in "this present

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<sup>154</sup> Says Murray, "And it is impossible to speak in terms of redemption from the power of sin, except there comes within the range of this redemptive accomplishment the destruction of the power of darkness". Murray, *Redemption*, p. 50.

<sup>155</sup> Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (A. G. Hebert, tran., New York NY: Macmillan, 1969), p. 153.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

evil age” (Gal 1:4): principalities, powers, thrones, and dominions. However, God’s battle is really with Satan: “We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).<sup>158</sup> This dualism was evident during Christ’s life. In Mark 3, the Scribes ascribe Jesus’ power over demons to Satan. Jesus replies, “If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3:25), and elaborates, “In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house” (Mark 3:27). Aulén sees Satan as the strong man, and the world as his house, thus emphasising the cosmic struggle between God and Satan.<sup>159</sup>

Secondly, Christ came to destroy Satan: “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8).<sup>160</sup> In His death, Christ was victorious over evil: “And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross” (Col 2:15; see also 1 Cor 15:24; Phil 2:10; and Rom 8:35). Even though Christ triumphed over the “hostile powers”, He has not removed them from influencing man – that is left to “the end”, at the “advent of the new age” (1 Cor 15:24).<sup>161</sup> Aulén concludes, “Yet the decisive victory has been won already; Christ has assumed His power, and reigns until His enemies are subject to Him.”<sup>162</sup>

Aulén sees no penal substitution, or even penal satisfaction, in the atonement. He writes that, in the atonement, “there is no satisfaction of God’s justice”, because “the relation of man to God is viewed in the light, not of merit and justice, but of grace”.<sup>163</sup> Even though Aulén does not espouse penal substitution – holding, rather, the victory of Christ, thanks to

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

God's grace – one should not overlook the concept of Christ as victor; Christ's victory is His penal sacrifice and resurrection.

### **SUMMARY**

A biblical mission theology includes the fall of man (Gen 3), the creation of nations at the tower of Babel (Gen 11), God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham's descendant, Jesus Christ (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8), and the making of disciples in all nations, through the church's evangelising and teaching (Matt 28:19-20). Rev 5 emphasises that there will be redeemed from every "tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9), while Is 46 shows that each facet is within the purview of God's foreknowledge (Is 46:9-10).

A biblical mission theology includes the penal substitution view of the atonement. Because of Adam's sin, all men are sinners, and in need of salvation (Rom 3:23; 5:12). Christ's death on the cross was both a substitution (2 Cor 5:21), and a complete penal satisfaction (1 John 4:10). Christ sacrificially took on the sins of mankind (Heb 9:28; 1 John 2:2). Man then appropriates Christ's righteousness, by trusting in Christ's atoning work (John 3:15).

When speaking of the atonement, Wesleyan-Arminian theologians tend to see Christ's sacrifice as a satisfaction of public justice (the governmental view), as a substitute for a penalty, but not as a complete payment of man's sin. However, it is more appropriate to see Christ's sacrifice as a penal substitution – Christ taking upon Himself the complete penalty due every human. Additionally, an emphasis on Christ as a victor should be included in how one views the atonement (1 John 3:8).

### **CRITIQUE OF OPEN THEISTS' ATONEMENT VIEWS**

This article has presented (1) Open Theism's teachings on the atonement, and (2) scripture's teachings on mission theology and the atonement. Now

the Open Theists' atonement views will be critiqued, within the context of mission theology.

## **LOVE OF GOD**

Open Theists strongly emphasise God's love, as an attribute of God. Pinnock sees God as wanting a relationship of love with man.<sup>164</sup> Sanders expresses that God is love, and wants a relationship to express that love.<sup>165</sup> Richard Rice gives perhaps the most concise statement for Open Theism: "From a Christian perspective, *love* is the first and last word in the biblical portrait of God" (italics original).<sup>166</sup> Open Theists rightfully stress that God is love. However, Open Theists seem to place preeminence on God's love, over His other attributes. But, one cannot emphasise one attribute of God over His other attributes. God displays His love in "perfect harmony with His will – and with His holiness, His purpose in redemption, His infinitely wise plans, and so forth".<sup>167</sup>

In mission theology, the concept of God's love is vital. The fact that God is love often distinguishes Him from other gods unbelievers may worship (see Is 40:11, within the context of Is 40). Kent Mundhenk gives an example of such an unloving tribal god.

A core credence among most animistic people is the belief in one god, who is more powerful than the others. Quite often, he is seen as the creator-god, even to the point of creating the other gods. He is also typically seen as transcendent, having created the world, and then leaving it in the control of lesser gods, not really any of which are

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<sup>164</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 30.

<sup>165</sup> Sanders, *God Who Risks*, pp. 87-88.

<sup>166</sup> Richard Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective", in *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove IL: IVP, 1994), p. 18.

<sup>167</sup> D. A. Carson, "God's Love and God's Sovereignty", in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (1999), pp. 269-270.

entirely reliable or good. Therefore, this god is generally unpopular, and goes largely unworshipped. This god is often seen more as a first among equals, but quite unknowable. In the Ningerum tribe of Papua New Guinea there is such a god. His name is *Ahwaaman*, but little is known of him, except that he is the creator, and that he does have at least one “offspring”.<sup>168</sup>

In Hinduism, the “Supreme Being is the Impersonal Nirguna Brahman”, which, being impersonal, cannot be characterised as having love.<sup>169</sup> Likewise, in Confucianism, “God” is devoid of love, because He is not personal.<sup>170</sup>

Love, as an attribute of God, often attracts unbelievers to enter into a relationship with Him: “God so loved the world” (John 3:16), “God is love” (1 John 4:16), and God “first loved us” (1 John 4:19). Therefore, an emphasis on God’s love is a sound one; however, a lack of equal emphasis on the other attributes of God leads to an understatement of God. By focusing on God’s love, unbelievers may overlook the impact of God’s judgment of sin as it relates to God’s righteousness. After one sweeps aside sin and judgment, then an inferior concept of salvation arises. If missionaries follow the Open Theism model, not only may God be misunderstood, but there may also be real doubt as to whether unbelievers experience true salvation.

## **ATONEMENT**

Pinnock argues that God suffered on the cross to show His love for those who have rejected Him, wooing unbelievers into restoring their relationship

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<sup>168</sup> Kent Mundhenk, “Common Threads of Animism”, in *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 22-1 (2006), pp. 7-8.

<sup>169</sup> James P. Eckman, *The Truth About Worldviews: A Biblical Understanding of Worldview Alternatives* (Wheaton IL: Evangelical Training Association, 2006), p. 25.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

with Him.<sup>171</sup> Sanders sees God proving to man that He can be trusted in a relationship – just as Christ was able to endure the pain caused by rejection.<sup>172</sup> Boyd sees two truths in the atonement. Firstly, Christ defeated Satan and his powers on the cross. Secondly, Christ reconciled the cosmos to Himself.<sup>173</sup>

As a whole, one should reject Pinnock's and Sanders' views, because they deny the substitutionary nature of Christ's death.<sup>174</sup> Christ's death was not only an expression of love, it was also a legal transaction – a penal substitution. Scriptural support for penal substitution is extensive – as presented earlier in this study.

However, the atonement views held by Wesleyan-Arminian theologians, since they do not stress penal substitution, are more sympathetic toward Pinnock's and Sanders' view. The most likely link surfaces, in that both Open Theists and Wesleyan-Arminian theologians see a responsibility by man, beyond what Christ accomplished, to ensure salvation. In Open Theism, man has a role to play in salvation – one of restoring a relationship to God. Likewise, in Wesleyan-Arminian theology, man has a role to play – one of living a life worthy of the atonement. Hence, a missionary in the Wesleyan-Arminian tradition – without feeling they are doing a great disservice to the atonement – could espouse the atonement views of the Open Theists in their teaching, and feel biblically justified in doing so. Nevertheless, the atonement views of Pinnock and Sanders would jeopardise an unbeliever's correct understanding of biblical atonement.

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<sup>171</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 58.

<sup>172</sup> Sanders, *God Who Risks*, p. 105.

<sup>173</sup> Boyd, *God at War*, p. 240.

<sup>174</sup> Pinnock's and Sanders' views of the atonement echo those of Abelard (atonement as an example) and the Socinians (God, in His love, freely forgives sin without a payment), which were rejected as unbiblical earlier in this article. See also MacArthur, "Open Theism's Attack", p. 10.

Aulén's emphasis on Christ as victor, a view echoed by Boyd, brings an important aspect into the discussion – namely, that Christ defeated Satan on the cross.<sup>175</sup> Since God is the all-powerful one, a mission theology must include the victorious power of God. Missionaries must be able to teach, without reservation, the unmatched power of God, when compared to the deities of other religions. For example, Shintoism has a plethora of *kami*, or “gods” – a trio of which were involved in the creation of heaven and earth, the first Japanese emperor, and the Japanese islands. In Shintoism, the *kami*, as represented by a multiplicity of spiritual personages, play an important role in daily life, with each *kami* having certain influence and power. The establishment of God, as victorious over all powers (including Jesus' defeat of Satan on the cross), is foundational to sharing the gospel message in such an environment.<sup>176</sup>

## **SALVATION**

Pinnock argues that salvation is not a repairing of man's sinful nature, rather it is a renewing of man's relationship with God.<sup>177</sup> Salvation means saying yes to God's love, accepting God's offer of love, and loving God in return. Sanders echoes Pinnock. According to Sanders, sin is a broken relationship, rather than a sinful state that needs to be renewed.<sup>178</sup> Man can renew his relationship with God, because God suffered for man. For Boyd, salvation includes being free from sin and guilt, but, more importantly, it is acknowledging the kingship of Christ, and being set free from Satan.<sup>179</sup>

For missionaries, the salvation message, under the Open Theism model, may not distinguish itself, when compared to “salvation” models of other

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<sup>175</sup> However, the victory view, as espoused by Aulén, and echoed by Boyd, must be rejected, because it excludes penal satisfaction. Nevertheless, the general emphasis of Christ as victor is valid.

<sup>176</sup> Eckman, *Truth About Worldviews*, p. 52.

<sup>177</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>178</sup> Sanders, *God Who Risks*, p. 105.

<sup>179</sup> Boyd, *God at War*, p. 266.

religions. For example, James Eckman notes that Confucianism teaches that humans are born “predisposed to goodness”.<sup>180</sup> Likewise, Pinnock and Sanders teach that man is not born with a sin nature; rather, man is simply out of fellowship with God. Boyd’s understanding of salvation is more in accordance with scripture, but he places emphasis in the wrong place. Boyd emphasises salvation as primarily being set free from Satan, and only secondarily being set free from sin. It should be the other way around: salvation is foremost a complete removal of the sinner’s sin by Christ’s atoning work.

Pinnock’s and Sanders’ (and, to a much lesser extent, Boyd’s) view of salvation would have a negative effect on the practice of mission. Missionaries would be sharing the wrong salvation message. Sinners would not receive salvation; there would be no making of disciples. Missionaries would see little fruit for their labor on the mission field. There would be no change in the lives of professing unbelievers, because they would have no true salvation in Christ. Mission, as presented in scripture, would not exist.

### **CONFIDENCE IN GOD**

The ultimate success of the atonement – to produce believers in every tribe, language, people, and nation – relates to God’s exhaustive foreknowledge. The fact that God knows the future, completely, gives one confidence that God will reach His goal.

Open Theists, though, teach that God: (1) will strive to reach His goals, despite the ability of humans to thwart God’s plans; (2) knows everything that can be known (past and present); (3) is infinitely intelligent, and makes wise decisions to ensure His goals are accomplished; (4) and is not overly concerned with the details, just the big picture.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Eckman, *Truth About Worldviews*, p. 45.

<sup>181</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, pp. 50-51; Sanders, *God Who Risks*, p. 234; Boyd, *God of the Possible*, p. 12.

However, Stallard rightly argues that one fault of Open Theism is that “it ignores . . . the comprehensiveness of the biblical covenant, with respect to prophecies” resulting in the “disconnection between promise and fulfilment” in God’s “historical plot line of divine redemption”.<sup>182</sup> Consequently, Open Theists’ high level of eschatological confidence “cannot be coherently sustained” within the Open Theism model.<sup>183</sup> If God’s previous anticipation of the future has proved to be wrong at times, then one cannot truly have confidence in God’s expectations in the future. If man was able to thwart God’s plan in the past, to such an extent that God was grieved and destroyed man with the flood (Gen 6-9), then, perhaps, man will be able to stymie God’s plan again, on a similarly wide scale.

Nevertheless, Open Theists unanimously agree that God has limited foreknowledge.<sup>184</sup> According to scripture, though, God foreknows the future entirely, as evidenced by the fact that He has chosen the course of events to occur that will accomplish His purpose.<sup>185</sup> Therefore, all prophecies in scripture will come true, as predicted. This truth, that God does what He promises, is an important motivator for missionaries. Missionaries can confidently proceed, knowing that, prophetically, all tribes, nations, tongues, and languages will have believers (Gen 12:3; with

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<sup>182</sup> Michael D. Stallard, “A Dispensational Critique of Open Theism’s View of Prophecy”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (2004), p. 36.

<sup>183</sup> Steven D. Roy, “God as Omnipotent Responder?”, in *Looking into the Future: Evangelical Studies in Eschatology* (David W. Baker, ed., Grand Rapids MI: Baker Book House, 2001), pp. 271-274. Sanders acknowledges that God might make mistakes. As evidence, Sanders offers, “For instance, in Exodus, God thought that the elders would believe Moses, but God acknowledges that Moses is correct in suggesting the possibility that they may not believe him (Ex 3:16-4:9).” Sanders, *God Who Risks*, p. 132.

<sup>184</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 32; Sanders, “God Who Risks”, pp. 130-132; Boyd, “God of the Possible”, pp. 57-58. See arguments presented earlier in this article.

<sup>185</sup> God knows what would have occurred if He had chosen different circumstances. For example, “If the miracles that were performed in you [Chorazin and Bethsaida] had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matt 11:21). However, God’s plan is sure to happen: “My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please” (Is 46:10b).

Rev 5:9).<sup>186</sup> Missionaries, in the Open Theism model, may lack the assurance that their endeavours are valuable. Ware concurs,

*Open Theism's denial of exhaustive divine foreknowledge calls into question the church's ultimate eschatological hope that God will surely accomplish all His plans and purposes, exactly as He has told us in scripture that He will, and openness assurances that He will succeed ring hollow, in that not even God knows (that is, can know) what unexpected turns lie ahead that will thwart His purposes, or cause Him to change His plans* (italics original).<sup>187</sup>

Uncertainty may enter the thinking of missionaries, leading to a lack of resolve on the mission field.

There is another issue, related to God's foreknowledge. God's knowledge of the future distinguishes Him from false gods (Is 46:10). In the Open Theism model, unbelievers may not fully distinguish the God of the Bible from false gods they worship. And missionaries, following the Open Theism model, may not always be able to confidently claim or adequately communicate that the God of the Bible is superior to other gods the unbelievers may be worshipping. For example, many African tribes have a belief in a supreme being (such as *Chukwa*, *Leza*, *Kwoth*, *Nysai*, or *Oldoumaro*), who is described as transcendent and all-powerful, but no mention is made of omniscience.<sup>188</sup> For the Quechua people of Peru, the

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<sup>186</sup> Ware states, "*Open Theism's denial of exhaustive divine foreknowledge renders unsure God's own covenant promise to bring blessing and salvation to the nations through the seed of Abraham*" (italics original). Bruce A. Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?", in *JETS* 45 (2002), p. 205.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>188</sup> See Robert Cameron, *African Primal Religions* (Niles IL: Argus Communications, 1977), p. 24.

Supreme Being, *Taita Dios*, is “neither eternal nor omniscient”.<sup>189</sup> Many factors distinguish the true God from false gods, but removing foreknowledge from the comparison means one less truth presented in attempts by missionaries to make disciples of all nations.

Open Theists also argue that God learns; He does not know the future – He is “open” to man’s decisions.<sup>190</sup> Hence, God changes in His thoughts and emotions as He learns of man’s decisions.<sup>191</sup> However, one must remember that when God communicates to man through His Word, it must be in a way that man understands. Since God must express Himself in human language, a “change” in God’s thoughts or emotions is not necessarily identical to a change in man’s thoughts or emotions.<sup>192</sup> Otherwise, God’s “changeability” becomes limited by human understanding: “Who has understood the mind of the LORD, or instructed Him as His counsellor?” (Is 40:13). Though God discloses Himself in human terms, humans must never be “the ultimate reference point” in understanding God.<sup>193</sup> One should, instead, discuss God’s “changeability” in terms of God’s attributes. For example, based on His righteousness, God has to judge sin: “God is a righteous judge, a God who expresses His wrath every day” (Ps 7:11). It is not that God changes His mind; it is that His attributes cause His response to humans. One must acknowledge, though, that defining “change” in God is a challenging problem, one without a consensus solution among non-Open Theists. Robert Pyne and Stephen Spencer, after surveying the approaches of several

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<sup>189</sup> James F. Lewis, and William G. Travis, *Religious Traditions of the World* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1991), p. 89.

<sup>190</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 8; Sanders, “Assurance of Things to Come”, pp. 281-282.

<sup>191</sup> Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, p. 32; Sanders, “Assurance of Things to Come”, p. 283.

<sup>192</sup> A. B. Caneday, “Veiled Glory: God’s Self-Revelation in Human Likeness – A Biblical Theology of God’s Anthropomorphic Self-Disclosure”, in *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* (John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth, eds, Wheaton IL: Crossway Books, 2003), pp. 160-161.

<sup>193</sup> Caneday, “Veiled Glory”, in *Beyond the Bounds*, p. 163.

non-Open Theists, conclude that they “do not speak with one voice on the issue of God’s impassibility”.<sup>194</sup>

However, if missionaries present God as One who changes His mind, as humans do, then God may not be as distinguishable from the other gods unbelievers worship. For example, the Quechua people of Peru acknowledge the supreme god, *Taita Dios*, who “is capricious, and subject to whim”.<sup>195</sup> However, to be fair to Open Theists, they would not classify God as “capricious” or “subject to whim”. Nevertheless, because of the inherent challenge of cross-cultural communication on the mission field, unbelievers may not fully understand the difference between Open Theism’s God, who changes His mind (based on wisdom), and their tribal gods that change their mind (based on whim). As a result, there is potential for the God of the Bible to not stand out as vastly superior to the other gods: “To whom, then, will you compare God?” (Is 40:18a).

## **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the teachings of Open Theists, regarding the atonement, in light of scriptural mission theology. This section summarises the evaluation, and draws conclusions.

### **SUMMARY**

This article began with an introduction that gave background information to the study, followed by a presentation of Open Theists on the atonement. After that, was a presentation of scriptural mission theology. Finally, critiques of Open Theists’ teachings, regarding the atonement, in light of scriptural mission theology, were presented.

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<sup>194</sup> “Change” is variously characterised as a change in God’s orientation, relationship, or emotion. Robert A. Pyne, and Stephen R. Spencer, “A Critique of Free-Will Theism: Part One”, in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (2001), p. 277.

<sup>195</sup> Lewis and Travis, *Religious Traditions of the World*, p. 88.

### ***Introduction Summary***

The introductory section showed that Open Theism emerged in the late 20th century, and is flourishing in today's relationship-rich global environment. Three Open Theists were selected for evaluation – Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory Boyd – because they had written on the atonement. Definitions of mission, mission theology, missions, missionary, atonement, and Open Theism were given to provide a basis for critique.

### ***Open Theism Summary***

The second section focused on the atonement teachings of the three Open Theists. Pinnock argued that God does not have exhaustive foreknowledge; He only knows what can be known. God does not know the future in its entirety, because He has given considerable freedom to man to help shape the future. Since love is the primary attribute of God, God has a desire to enter into a loving relationship with man. Towards such, God had His Son suffer on the cross to show His immense love and empathy for estranged man. Now, through the cross-event, God woos men into entering a relationship with Him.

Sanders reiterated Pinnock's teachings. God is love, and desires a true relationship of love with man. God shows His love, by giving man freedom in determining the future. For Sanders, in the cross, man saw that he could trust God in a relationship, because God showed His love for man through the sufferings of Christ.

Boyd, also an Open Theist (in that he agreed that the future, to God, is "open") took a different approach to the atonement. He argued that Christ was a victor – that He defeated Satan during the cross-resurrection event. Boyd saw God as participating in an ongoing battle with the forces of evil. Christ's death on the cross set the stage for the ultimate victory, one that believers need to fight for today.

### ***Scriptural Mission Theology Summary***

In the next section, a comprehensive mission theology was presented. After creation, man was separated from God, when Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. Man exhibited sin in ever-increasing ways, as seen in the accounts of Cain and Abel, Noah and the flood, and the Tower of Babel. Then, after dispersing man in judgment, God made a promise to Abraham that He would bless “all peoples” through him. The promise pointed to Abraham’s descendant, Christ, who would bless, with salvation, those that believe in Him. God tasked Israel to be a light to the nations; however, it was to the church that God gave specific instructions to preach the gospel, and make disciples of all nations. The command to “make disciples” encapsulates the church’s task. “Make disciples” is characterised by go(ing), baptising, and teaching. The destination of go(ing) is “all nations”. Baptising implies water baptism, which is a public identification with Christ, and a commitment to follow Him. Baptism is not regenerative, rather it follows salvation. Salvation occurs when an individual puts his or her trust in the person and work of Christ. Therefore, the Great Commission task to make disciples includes the act of baptising, which assumes the prior act of evangelising. Teaching includes all that Christ commanded.

It was shown that the exhaustiveness of God’s foreknowledge relates to the assuredness that God will successfully fulfil His promise to Abraham. For example, God showed that there would be people from every tribe, language, people, and nation around the throne in heaven, worshipping Him, in the future. If God has exhaustive foreknowledge, then He knows and purposes that the time will assuredly occur, thus fulfilling His promise to Abraham. Evidence from both the OT and NT was presented to show God’s exhaustive knowledge of the future.

It was shown that God foreknew and planned Christ’s death on the cross. God also foreknew and permitted Adam’s sin. Because of Adam’s sin, all men were made sinners, and are subject to death. Christ’s death and resurrection satisfied God’s justice, paying the full price to God that man

owed. Christ became man's penal substitute, as evidenced by the concepts of sacrifice, propitiation, reconciliation, and redemption. Non-penal historical views of the atonement were discussed and rejected, namely the ransom, moral influence, governmental, and Socinian views. Another historical view, Anselm's satisfaction view was seen to be more biblical. Next, the atonement views of a number of Wesleyan-Arminian theologians were presented. The conclusion was that they favoured understanding the atonement as a satisfaction of public justice (governmental view), as a substitute for a penalty (rather than by penal substitutionary satisfaction), and not as an exhaustive payment (man still had a role to play in ensuring his salvation). Finally, the victor view of the atonement was discussed, with the conclusion that its emphasis on the victory of Christ has merit, as an augment to the penal substitution view.

### ***Critique Summary***

When the atonement views of Pinnock, Sanders, and Boyd were critiqued, in light of scripture's teachings on the atonement and mission theology, a number of observations were made. There was a weakness in Pinnock's and Sanders' teaching that the atonement should be viewed solely in terms of a relationship, built on love and trust, rather than viewed as a penal substitution. Those of the Wesleyan-Arminian persuasion, however, could be more tolerant of Pinnock's and Sanders' view, since they also saw a role for man to play in ensuring his salvation. Boyd's view that the atonement was a victory over evil proved more acceptable, in light of scripture. Additionally, Christ, as victor, underlined the victorious power that God has over false gods.

Another weakness was Pinnock's and Sanders' teaching on salvation. Neither saw man as having a sin nature. Both saw man's separation from God as a broken relationship that needed repairing. And, because God is love, He seeks to enter into a reciprocal relationship of love to repair His relationship with man. However, with such a stress on love, the other attributes of God, such as His righteousness and holiness, are

deemphasised. The question, then, was whether true salvation would occur in Pinnock's and Sanders' view of salvation, since sin and judgment are deemphasised. On a positive note, God's love (an emphasis of Open Theists) was an attribute that set Him apart from false gods.

A final weakness was related to Pinnock's, Sanders', and Boyd's teaching that God does not know the future completely. That fact raised the question as to whether God would be able to accomplish His goal, including blessing "all peoples", as promised to Abraham (and provided for through the atoning work of Christ), since the future is largely undetermined.

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

Several concluding thoughts arise out of this study. These thoughts are a result of analysing leading Open Theists' views of the atonement against scripture, within the purview of mission theology.

Firstly, there is doubt as to whether missionaries, espousing the teachings of Pinnock and Sanders, would be able to fulfil the Great Commission. The Great Commission requires the preaching of the gospel, and the making of disciples. The atonement views promoted by Pinnock and Sanders raise concerns as to whether unbelievers would experience salvation, as defined in scripture.

Secondly, since God, as described by Pinnock, Sanders, and Boyd, has limited foreknowledge, He is less distinguishable from false gods. God's exhaustive foreknowledge is one characteristic that sets Him apart from false gods. With Open Theism, that distinguishing factor becomes negligible.

Thirdly, since God has limited foreknowledge, in the Open Theism model, there is no assurance that He is able to fulfil His promise to Abraham, as outlined in scripture. This lack of eschatological confidence may cause missionaries to doubt the necessity of their work, resulting in a less-resilient

missionary work force. The scriptural promise that representatives from every tribe, language, people, and nation will worship God in heaven is normally reassuring for missionaries. Open Theist missionaries may not sense that assurance.

On a final note, this article has concentrated on the writings of Pinnock, Sanders, and Boyd. When these authors, and other Open Theists, publish more on the atonement, or on mission theology, or when other Open Theists take up the pen to write about these subjects, a more in-depth study can be undertaken.

Until that time, one's prayer should be for God to grant all missionaries the biblical confidence that their efforts are not in vain, as they seek to make disciples in all nations. Open Theism's inherent lack of biblical confidence in the triumph of mission by the church (and its missionaries) is Open Theism's greatest obstacle to sustained mission endeavours. A missionary force, which is not convinced of God's ability, is a missionary force that is open to Satan's schemes, including discouragement.

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