

Bible Words

I am reminded often of how many times visitors to our assemblies, if they do not have a grounding in the scriptures, hear words that are foreign to them. If we do not explain them, it leaves full understanding of the gospel out of reach to far too many people. The following are several words that we may need to spend extra time explaining. Keep in mind that several of them have the same derivation, and therefore the same essential meaning:

- “Atonement” — This word occurs 81 times in the KJV Old Testament, but only once in the New Testament (Romans 5:11). In classical Greek, the word usually meant the coming together of two persons after a time of hostility; it was rarely used in a religious sense. This probably derives from the fact that in pagan religions, the human/divine relationship lacked personal involvement and instead required placating the gods. In the New Testament, however, this word is “reconciliation.” It occurs eight times in the Bible and three times in the New Testament (2 Corinthians 5:18-19; Hebrews 2:17). The New Testament word is a religious term describing the removal of enmity between humans and God. In biblical thought, God reconciles humans to Himself through the death of His Son by atoning for their sins (Romans 5:10).
- “Propitiation” — This word occurs three times in the New Testament (Romans 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). The basic meaning is to win or regain the favor of (a god, spirit, or person) by doing something that pleases them. Specific to the New Testament, the idea is to placate the wrath of God. Therefore, in the New Testament passages, Jesus propitiates with respect to our sins. The word in the Greek also occurs in Hebrews 9:5 as “mercy seat,” or the lid of the ark of the covenant. This has the idea of Christ being the place where God’s wrath is turned away from the sinner. This complements “reconciliation” by virtue of the fact that the Greek verb is used in Hebrews 2:17 for “make reconciliation”.
- “Redeem” — This word occurs 56 times in the Bible but only twice in the New Testament; “redemption” occurs 20 times in the Bible with 11 of those times in the New Testament. The historical background of redemption from slavery in the Exodus and from political subjugation in the return from Babylonian exile stands out in Luke 24:21, where the two on the road to Emmaus express the hope that Jesus would have redeemed Israel from political subjugation to Rome. While that did not happen, a far more important redemption, spiritual redemption, did occur through Jesus’ crucifixion. This has the added idea of a payment that is made to release one from the bondage of sin. We have been redeemed with the precious blood of the Lamb of God (1 Peter 1:18-19), who (like the lamb in the Passover) was without blemish or defect (cp. Isaiah 53:7).
- “Sanctify” — This word occurs 70 times in the Bible, with six of these times in the New Testament. The noun “sanctification” occurs five times in the New Testament. The verb expresses the action of including a person or a thing in the sphere of what is holy in either a ceremonial or moral sense. The adjective form describes God’s people who are holy or sacred in they way they live.

Christians spread the knowledge of Christ to all they meet. This includes basic concepts that might be mysterious to people who are brand new to the Bible. Learn these biblical ideas and be able to explain them as you have the chance.

Kyle Campbell