

THEOLOGICAL DICTIONARY

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by Debbie Dodd
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* An asterisk following a word tells you that this word is explained further under the word marked with the asterisk in another part of the dictionary.

Abbreviations used: *v.* for verse; *ff.* for following; *c.* for about (Latin: *circa*); *A.D.* for In the year of our Lord – years since the birth of Christ (Latin: *anno domini*); *B.C.* for the years before the birth of Christ; *i.e.* for that is (Latin: *id est*)

A

ABBA. (Aramaic word: *abba*, father.) A name for God in the New Testament that meant “father.” It is a name children used for their fathers which shows close family relationship and respect (Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15-16; Galatians 4:6). (See also Adoption.)

ABORTION. (1) Involuntary loss of an unborn fetus or child. (2) Voluntary killing of a fetus or unborn child, contrary to God’s will.

ABSOLUTION. (From Latin: *absolvo*, to set free.) To announce that sins* are forgiven.* In Roman Catholic* practice, a person must first be sorry for his or her sins (contrition), confess* them to a priest* and do penance* (actions to pay for sins done). Then the priest announces that a person's sins are forgiven (absolution). In the Protestant* liturgy the minister simply announces forgiveness to repentant* sinners on the basis of the finished work of Jesus. (See also Confess, Confession; Forgiveness; Penance.)

ABSOLUTISM. A system of ethics* (rules for right and wrong) that says there are absolute rules or laws* or truths* that should never be broken. Those laws are always true in every place and time. (See also Ethics; Law; Truth.)

ACCOMMODATION. Adapting a message to fit the hearers. In theology, accommodation is the principle (truth, fact) that God communicated his Word* in a way we as humans could understand. There are two views regarding accommodation. (1) Some use it rightly to interpret anthropomorphisms* (descriptions of God using human terms). (2) Others use it wrongly to interpret the words of Jesus in whatever way they wish. They claim Jesus said things which were not true just to agree with the beliefs of his day. (See also Anthropomorphism; Contextualization.)

ADAMIC SIN. (SEE ORIGINAL SIN.)

ADONAI. (Hebrew word: *adonai*, my lord.) Name for God meaning lord or master, ruler over everything. It is used by a servant for either a human or divine master. (See also Lord; Sovereignty; Yahveh.)

ADOPTION. The Bible teaches God makes the sinner his child, through faith in Jesus, his Son. That person now has the rights and responsibilities of being part of God's family. Only Paul uses the term (Romans 8:15, 23; 9:4; Galatians 4:5; Ephesians 1:5). (See also Abba; Heir; Inheritance.)

ADOPTIONISM. The view that Jesus was just a good man before becoming God. During his life (usually seen to be at his baptism), God "adopted" him to be his son. The belief that man became God, not that, in Christ, God became man. This is basically the teaching of the Mormon or Latter Day Saints denomination. This view is not accepted by orthodox* Christians today. (See also Christology; Hypostatic Union; Mormon Church.)

ADULTERY. (From Latin: *adulterium*, adultery.) Sexual intercourse with someone other than the person to whom one is married. This is against the commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14). Sometimes adultery is distinguished from fornication, which refers to intercourse between people who are not married. Sexual intimacy, impure thoughts or the desire for intercourse with someone you are not married to, are also adultery before God (Matthew 5:17-28). (See also Divorce; Marriage.)

ADVENT. (From Latin: *adventus*, coming.) The coming of Jesus. (1) His first advent took place when he was born of a virgin* in the town of Bethlehem. (2) His second advent is the second coming,* when he returns in glory at the end of the age.* (3) It is also a season of the church year,* the four Sundays before Christmas when believers prepare to celebrate Christ's first and second coming. (See also Church Year; Incarnation; Second Coming.)

ADVENTISM. (1) The belief that Jesus will return at any time, and set up his 1000 year rule on earth (millennium*). (2) It is most often used for the Seventh Day Adventist denomination. (See also Imminent; Millennium.)

ADVERSARY. Someone who is against you or who is your enemy. In the Bible it describes Satan.* He is the enemy of God and of God's people. (See also Satan.)

ADVOCATE. (SEE PARACLETE.)

AFTERLIFE. Life after death. It is the place or condition of a person after physical death. It may refer to heaven* or hell,* the resurrection of the body* and eternal life. The person's soul enters the afterlife upon physical death. The person's body will be joined to the soul on the day when Jesus comes at the end of the age.* (See also Eschatology; Everlasting Life.)

AGE, AGES. A long period of time, specified by the context.* In the New Testament there are two ages: "this age" and "the age to come." "This age" is the present time, here on earth. Satan* is its ruler (2 Corinthians 4:4; Galatians 1:4). "The age to come" is the time of peace and righteousness* promised in the Old Testament and fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah.* It will be fulfilled completely in the eternal kingdom after Jesus returns (Mark 10:30). (See also Eschatology; Inaugurated Eschatology.)

AGNOSTICISM. (From Greek: *agnosis*, unknown.) The belief that we cannot know God.* An agnostic believes two things. (1) We cannot know if there is a God or not. (2) If there is a God, we cannot know him. (See also Atheism; God; Revelation; Theism.)

ALIENATION. Being separated from God. Sin* has destroyed the relationship of people with God. All humans are born alienated or cut off from God because of original sin. This means we are born as a part of Satan's family. (See also Original Sin.)

ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION, ALLEGORIZING. (From Greek: *allegoria*, describing one thing in the image of another.) A way of interpreting the Bible. It looks for a hidden, symbolic* meaning that is not indicated by the plain, ordinary sense that the words and context* require. It then says the hidden meaning is the true meaning and gives authority to it. Allegorical interpretation was especially used in the Middle Ages. It is rejected by most Bible interpreters today. This is different from the allegorical* form of speech found occasionally in the Bible. This form of speech is specifically stated (Galatians 4:21ff) or clear from the context* (Ezekiel 16). (See also Allegory; Hermeneutics; Literalism.)

ALLEGORY. (From Greek: *allegoria*, describing something in the image of another.) A form of speech which uses a picture to express an abstract truth. It is longer and has more detail than a metaphor. It is used as an illustration, as in Galatians chapter 4. This is specifically stated (Galatians 4:21ff.) or clear from the context.* It is different from the allegorical* method of interpreting the Bible. (See also Allegorical Interpretation, Allegorizing; Analogy.)

ALPHA AND OMEGA. The names of the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. It is used as a title for God and Christ (Revelation 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). The phrase means "the beginning and the end." It shows God's eternity.* He began everything and will bring it all to an end. (See also Eternity.)

ALTAR. In Old Testament times the altar was a high place where sacrifices to propitiate* the gods were made. Since Christ has made the only sacrifice that was needed for our sins, no such altar for sacrifice (Hebrews 7:23-28) is needed in the New Testament church. In Lutheran churches the altar is the central table on which the elements for the Lord's Supper are placed to remember Christ's sacrifice, and at which worship and prayer are conducted. (See also Sacrifice.)

AMEN. (Hebrew word: *amen*, it is sure.) It is a word of affirmation, to say that what has gone before is true and certain. In the liturgy* the congregation may respond with the word "Amen," to show that it fully agrees with the prayer or words previously spoken or sung.

AMILLENNIALISM. (From Latin: *a-*, not, *mille*, thousand, and *annus*, year.) The belief that the rule of Christ is happening now, rather than in a future 1000 year kingdom here on earth (Luke 1:32-33; 17:20-21; Ephesians 1:17-23). The 1000 years in Revelation 20:4-6 is correctly understood as the period of time between the cross and the end of the age.* (See also Millennium; Premillennialism; Postmillennialism.)

ANALOGY. (From Greek: *analogia*, proportion, correspondence.) A way of describing an object or idea that is unknown by the use of something known that is similar. The two are like each other in some ways, but different in other ways. A created thing may be used as an analogy to describe God. For example, when Psalm 18:2 says "My God is my Rock" it does not mean that

God literally is a stone. It is an analogy to show that he is a place of safety and protection. (See also Anthropomorphism; Hermeneutics.)

ANALOGY OF FAITH, ANALOGIA FIDEI. The belief that the Bible* is a unified whole in what it teaches. It does not contradict itself, so what the Bible teaches in one place must agree with what it teaches in other places. Therefore, we can use the rest of the Bible and theology* to evaluate a theological statement. This is based on a high view of the authority* and inspiration* of the Bible. Out of this belief comes the principle that the Bible must interpret itself. It says that the clearer parts of the Bible guide our interpretation of the less clear parts. Sometimes a distinction is made between "Analogy of Faith" (creedal* statements) and "Analogy of Scripture*" (theological* statements). (See also Bible; Creed; Hermeneutics; Synoptic Problem.)

ANALOGY OF SCRIPTURE. (SEE ANALOGY OF FAITH.)

ANGEL. (From Greek: *angelos*, messenger.) A spirit,* a heavenly personal being created by God. The holy angels do the work of God, worship* and serve him. They also minister* to believers (Hebrews 1:12). At times they appeared as men (Genesis 18:1-19:1). Cherubim and seraphim are names for different types of holy angels. Evil angels are called demons.* (See also Angelology; Demons, Demon Possession.)

ANGELOLOGY. (From Greek: *angelos*, messenger, and *logos*, word.) The part of theology that deals with spiritual beings. It is the teaching about angels,* demons* and Satan.* It includes both who they are and what they do. (See also Angel; Demons, Demon Possession; Satan.)

ANIMISM. (From Latin: *animus*, breath, soul.) One of the major religions of the world. It is the belief that physical objects (such as stones, trees, animals, etc.) have living spirits in them. Therefore they are to be worshipped, since they have power to influence the life of humans, for good or for evil.* It is a primitive part of many non-Christian religions, such as Hinduism and Native American religion. (See also Polytheism; Spiritism.)

ANNIHILATIONISM. (From Latin: *nihil*, nothing.) The belief that some people will stop existing after death. It usually means that hell* will only be for a short time or not at all. It comes from the view that being able to live forever is a gift that God only gives to certain people (conditional

immortality*). Annihilationism is taught by Jehovah's Witnesses and by Seventh Day Adventists, but it is not taught in the Bible. (See also Conditional Immortality; Hell; Immortality.)

ANOINT. The act of putting oil on a person or thing. This sets apart that person or thing for the service of God. It is done to give a special job, blessing or power. Kings, prophets and priests were anointed in Bible days. Messiah,* or Christ,* one of the titles for Jesus, literally means "The Anointed One." The Roman Catholic* Church also has a sacrament* of anointing called "extreme unction" practiced at the end of a believer's life. (See also Consecrate.)

ANTHROPOCENTRIC. (From Greek: *anthropos*, human, and *kentrikos*, center.) The belief that humans are the center of everything, not God. Humans and their needs and values are most important. (See also Theocentric.)

ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS. (From Greek: *anthropos*, human and *logos*, word.) The attempt to prove there is a God based on what humans are like. A common form of this is the moral argument.* (See also Theistic Proofs; Moral Argument.)

ANTHROPOLOGY. (From Greek: *anthropos*, human, and *logos*, word.) (1) In theology, it is the part of the theological system of teaching that deals with humans. It describes their origins, nature and destiny. (2) It is also the academic study of people and their ways. The subject is the physical nature of people and their ways of living. (See also Man.)

ANTHROPOMORPHISM. (From Greek: *anthropos*, human, and *morphe*, form.) Describing God in human ways. It describes him as having human qualities, actions or feelings. It is looking at God from a human viewpoint. For example, the arm of God in Jeremiah 32:17 does not mean a physical arm, but is used to show his power. (See also Accommodation.)

ANTISEMITISM. The hatred of Jewish people.

ANTICHRIST. (From Greek: *anti*, against, and *Christos*, Christ.) (1) The person who is the great enemy of Christ. He is already at work in the world, but in the last days he will be revealed* as one who falsely claims he is Christ. Only 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3 speaks of him by this name, but

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 gives us clear clues as to who he is (i.e., the papacy) and what he will do. (2) The New Testament speaks of many enemies of Christ, some of whom are called antichrists. (See also Eschatology.)

ANTILEGOMENA. (From Greek: *anti*, against, and *legein*, to say; literally: to disagree.) A term used for the New Testament books which at first were not universally accepted as part of the Bible. They included James, Hebrews, 2 Peter, 2 & 3 John, Jude and Revelation. These were the books that not everyone agreed should be in the Bible. When they became better known, after many years of careful study, the church was led by the Holy Spirit to accept them as the inspired Word of God. (See also Canon; Homologoumena.)

ANTINOMIANISM. (From Greek: *anti*, against, and *nomos*, law.) The false teaching that the believer does not need to be taught the moral law* because we are saved by grace.* It says that Christians already know the law and want to keep it, and therefore they do not need the law to guide them (third use of the law), or for discipline.* It is true that Christians already know the law and want to keep it, according to their new nature* or new man.* But because the old man,* the old sinful nature,* is still strong within them, Christians still need to be taught the law.* They need the law as a mirror, to show them their sins, as a curb for the sinful nature (“Old man*”), to keep people from serious sins, and as a guide, to show believers what works they should do to show their love for Christ. The law as a guide also keeps people from inventing “good works” that are actually contrary to God’s Word. (Example: “God told me to kill this person.”) (Romans 7:7-8:4; 10:2-10:12 and 13; Galatians 5:1-15; Colossians 2:18-23). (See also Discipline; Grace; Law; Legalism; Man, Old and New; Nature, Old and New.)

ANTITYPE. (SEE TYPE.)

APOCALYPTIC, APOCALYPSE. (Greek word: *apokalypsis*, to remove a covering from.) (1) A type of writing that reveals or shows us something about spiritual mysteries or the future.* It includes visions of prophecy* and many symbols,* that speak of judgment* and the end of the age.* Daniel and Revelation contain much apocalyptic writing. It is also found in other books, such as Isaiah chapters 65-66. (2) It is also used to describe the coming of the Day of the Lord,* that will come suddenly and destroy all evil. (3) The book of Revelation is called The Apocalypse. (See also Eschatology.)

APOCRYPHA. (From Greek: *apokrypha*, the hidden things.) A group of books that were rightly not included in Protestant* Bibles because they were not inspired* by God. The books of the Old Testament Apocrypha were written in the time between the Old Testament and New Testament. These books are included in the Roman Catholic* Bible and in some Orthodox Bibles. The books of the New Testament Apocrypha were written after the first century after Christ. They are not included in any Bible. (See also Canon; Inspiration, Bible.)

APOLLINARIANISM. A view of Christ started by Apollinarius (c. 361-390), Bishop of the city of Laodicea. It teaches that the divine* nature in Christ or Logos* replaced the soul* of his human nature,* so that he was not fully human. This view was rejected at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) and is not accepted by orthodox* Christians today. Christ has both a human body and soul. (See also Christology; Deity of Christ; Hypostatic Union; Soul.)

APOLOGETICS. (From Greek: *apologia*, to defend, give an answer.) The defense of the Christian faith. It answers questions about the truthfulness of the gospel.* Its tasks are to (1) defend the gospel against attacks or errors and (2) give reasons for its truth (1 Peter 3:15). (See also Systematic Theology.)

APOSTASY. (From Greek: *apo*, away, and *stasis*, standing.) Turning away from Christ and his Word, after believing* in him. Judas Iscariot is a New Testament example of an apostate. It is different from heresy* because apostates no longer call themselves Christians. (See also Weak Brother; Heresy.)

APOSTLE. (From Greek: *apo*, from, and *stellein*, to send.) A person called and sent out on a specific mission, with the authority of the one who sent him. (1) In the New Testament, it is most often used for the twelve men Jesus chose as his special disciples,* after he sent them out as missionaries (John 20:21; Acts 2:42). (2) Also, Paul and a few other people are called apostles. (3) Jesus is also called "the Apostle" of our faith (Hebrews 3:1). (See also Disciple.)

APOSTOLIC SUCCESSION. The belief that the authority* to lead the church has been passed on from the apostles* to church leaders today. These leaders then pass it on to others whom they choose. It is taught in Roman

Catholic*, Orthodox* and some other churches with an episcopal* form of church government.* They say that ministers who have not been ordained* by someone of the apostolic succession are not legitimate ministers. (See also Church Government.)

ARIANISM. A view of Christ taught by Arius (c. 250-336), a presbyter or church leader in the city of Alexandria in Egypt. Arianism teaches that Jesus is not fully God, because there can only be one God. Arius said that Christ or the Logos was created by God out of nothing and is the highest creature. He is like God, (“homoiousion” - Greek) but he is not of the same essence as God (“homoousion”). Today, Jehovah's Witnesses and others teach this view. This view is not accepted by orthodox* churches today. (See also Christology; Deity of Christ; Hypostatic Union.)

ARK OF THE COVENANT. The wooden box that was placed inside the Holy of Holies* in the temple. It was about 4 x 2 1/3 x 2 1/3 feet and covered with gold. The lid had two golden angels on it and is called the atonement cover* in the New International Version of the Bible (“mercy seat” in the King James Version of the Bible). Inside were the two tablets of the Ten Commandments, a pot of manna and Aaron's rod (Exodus 25:10-22). It was the place where God met with his people through the blood of the sacrifice brought by the high priest (Leviticus chapter 16). It is also called the Ark of Testimony. (See also Atonement Cover; Day of Atonement; Decalogue; Holy of Holies; Shekinah; Tabernacle; Temple.)

ARMAGEDDON. It originally was a Hebrew word meaning “the hill of Megiddo,” an important city on a hill near the plain of Jezreel in Israel (Esdraelon in New Testament times). Armageddon is spoken of symbolically in Revelation 16:16 as the place where the armies of God and Satan* will fight the final battle at the end of the New Testament age. (See also Eschatology.)

ARMINIANISM. The system of theology* started by Jacob Arminius (1560-1609), a Dutch theologian. His teaching was a reaction to Calvinistic* theology. It emphasizes free will, or man's freedom* to choose. It has five main points. (1) God saves those sinners whom he knows ahead of time will believe. (2) Christ died for all people, not just the elect.* (3) A person needs God's grace* to believe. (4) People are not completely dead in sin, but have some spiritual power by which they can freely respond to or resist God's grace. (5) Christians can lose their salvation* if they stop believing. (See

also Atonement, Unlimited; Calvinism; Foreknowledge; Freedom, Free Will, Freedom of the Will; Semi-Pelagianism; Wesleyan.)

ASCENSION, THE. (From Latin: *ascendere*, to go up.) The day when Jesus went up visibly and bodily from earth into heaven.* It happened forty days after his resurrection* (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9). (See also Exaltation; Resurrection of Christ.)

ASCETICISM. (From Greek: *askein*, to work, train the body, exercise.) The method of trying to be holy* by self-discipline and giving up the things of the world.* It was especially practiced by monks. The three marks of the asceticism of the monks were poverty, chastity* and obedience* to God and church superiors. (See also Chastity; Holy; Holiness.)

ASSURANCE (OF SALVATION). The sure knowledge that God gives to believers that they are saved. They know they are children of God, that their sins* are forgiven* and that they have eternal life,* because of what Jesus did for them. This sure knowledge is based on passages like John 3:16; 1 John 5:11-13 and Romans 8:28-39. (See also Election; Eternal Security; Grace; Perseverance; Salvation.)

ATHEISM. (From Greek: *a-*, without, and *theos*, God.) The belief that there is no God. Practical atheism means living life without God. The Bible says that only fools are atheists (Psalm 14:1). (See also Agnosticism; Theism; Secularism.)

ATONEMENT. Making a sacrifice* or payment to take away God's anger against sin and to bring God and sinners back into a good relationship ("at-one-ment"). Sin* broke the relationship with God. In the Old Testament, atonement was made by performing the blood sacrifices (Leviticus 4:27-31). In the New Testament, Christ's shedding his blood on the cross* is the sacrifice that paid the debt and took away the guilt and punishment of man's sin. Now there is a good relationship between God and man again (Romans 3:25-26; 1 Corinthians 5:7; 1 John 2:2). (See also Expiation; Justification, Justify; Propitiation; Reconciliation; Redemption.)

ATONEMENT COVER. ("Mercy seat" in the King James Version of the Bible.) The gold cover of the Ark of the Covenant.* It was in the Holy of Holies,* the inner room and focal point of the tabernacle* or temple.* It was the place where God's people could find forgiveness* of sins and

reconciliation* with him. That was because on the Day of Atonement* the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled on it. (See also Ark of the Covenant; Day of Atonement; Forgiveness.)

ATONEMENT, GOVERNMENTAL THEORY. This view was started by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) who lived in the country of Holland. It says the purpose of Christ's death was to satisfy God's justice.* It says God is like a ruler and has to uphold his moral law.* When we sin* we break the law. He said that Christ died to show us how bad sin is and how important it is to follow God's law.* This false theory is often a part of Wesleyan* theology. (See also Just, Justice.)

ATONEMENT, LIMITED. The belief that Christ died for only the elect,* those chosen by God. It is sometimes called definite atonement. It is part of Calvinism* and is the "L" in TULIP.* Lutherans believe in unlimited atonement, that Christ died for, redeemed and saved all sinners (2 Corinthians 5:19; 1 John 2:2). (See also Atonement, Unlimited; TULIP.)

ATONEMENT, MORAL INFLUENCE THEORY. The false view that the purpose of Christ's death was only to show us how much God loves us and to lead us to love others. Abelard (1079-1142) from the land of Brittany in France started this view. (See also Socinianism.)

ATONEMENT, PENAL SUBSTITUTION THEORY. The view that Christ died as the substitute of all sinners, to pay the penalty for our sin. The punishment for sin is death (Romans 6:23). Christ paid this penalty for us by dying on the cross for our sins (Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:12). (Note: This is not just a "theory," it is the Bible's teaching!) (See also Atonement, Vicarious; Substitute.)

ATONEMENT, RANSOM THEORY. The belief that Christ's death was a payment to Satan,* because sinful humans by nature belong to Satan. This is contrary to Scripture which says the payment was made to God, the only one who had the right to demand that sin against his holy law be paid for in some way. In this way he could justify and save sinners (Romans 3:23-26; Isaiah 53:4-11). (See also Atonement; Ransom.)

ATONEMENT, UNIVERSAL. (SEE ATONEMENT, UNLIMITED.)

ATONEMENT, UNLIMITED. The belief that Christ died for all people, not just the elect.* This does not mean that all sinners will automatically be saved.* People receive the benefit of Christ's atonement and are saved only by faith* in him (Romans 3:23-26). (See also Atonement; Atonement, Limited; Justification.)

ATONEMENT, VICARIOUS. (From Latin: *vicarius*, substitute.) The view that Christ's death was substitutionary,* on behalf of sinners. (See also Atonement; Atonement, Penal Substitution Theory.)

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD. The qualities or characteristics of God. They describe God.* They are a part of who God is, not just added to him. Without them he would not be God. Examples are love,* mercy,* justice,* almighty power and eternity.* (See also Essence; Eternity; Omnipotence; Omnipresence; Omniscience; Theology Proper.)

AUGUSTINIANISM. The system of theology* and philosophy* of Augustine (354-430), a bishop* living in the city of Hippo in North Africa. A main point is that humans are not able to do anything to save* themselves. Therefore God, by grace,* chose certain people to be saved before the world began (predestination*). Another main point is that faith* is more important than reason.* In his early days his theology was a combination of the philosophy of Plato and Christian theology. (See also Total Inability; Predestination.)

AUTHORITY. The right to perform action or to command action.* (1) It is used in many ways in the Bible: the right to forgive* sin (Luke 5:24); to make demons* leave a person (Mark 6:7); for government leaders to rule (Romans 13:1), etc. God is the highest authority. (2) In theology, it is used of both the Bible* and the church.* (See also Bible; Church; Tradition.)

B

BAPTISM. (From Greek: *baptizo*, to wash or dip.) A sacrament* in which water that is connected with God's Word* is applied to a person (Ephesians 5:26). It creates faith in infants, who are born spiritually dead in sin, and makes them children of God (Galatians 3:26-27; Ephesians 2:1-5; John 3:5-6). It offers, gives and seals the forgiveness of sins and eternal life to all believers (Acts 2:38-39; 22:16). It signifies that believers have died with