

The Doctrine of `Âshâm

Introduction: There are at least two reasons why I want to examine this word in more detail. First of all, this word seems to be used both for the *guilt* and for the *guilt offering*; where what one does wrong is identified with the offering for what he has done wrong. This may help us to understand *Christ was made sin for us*. I want to confirm that these are both legitimate understandings of this word. Secondly, it appears as though the singular and the plural meanings may be slightly different. I may want to pursue that.

I have only examined a handful of words in this sort of detail; however, even though this may appear to be quite dry, sometimes I come across places where almost every translator *cheats* or *fudges on* a translation (this occurs in at least two instances with this word); and sometimes, as we will have occur with this word, we will come across passages whose meaning is enriched considerably by better knowing the meaning of the word in question.

I tend to be quite methodical and hyper-logical at times, making it clear that the passage could mean *this*, but it could not mean *that*. This may not be the best way to present this to a congregation. What I have put together below took me several days (this doctrine is 7 pages long and I still have a little work to complete). However, a pastor can take this and distill it to a few sentences, a few points, or, where necessary, a 20 minute study. My intention is to gather the information from a variety of sources, categorize and organize it, and thoroughly examine it. My expectation is, a small handful of pastors, theologians or Bible students will be able to use what I have put together here. The *layman* (admittedly, a poor term for me to use) may or may not get much out of this.

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Pronunciation and Spelling	Meanings	An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences
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	A Summary of the Doctrine of `Âshâm	
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A Comparative Examination Various Translations	An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences	A Side-by Side Comparison
	A Summary of the Doctrine of `Âshâm	

1. **Pronunciation and spelling:** `âshâm (אֲשָׁם) [pronounced aw-SHAWM]
2. **Meanings** already attributed to :
 - a. KJV renderings: *trespass, sin, guiltiness, offering, trespasses*.
 - b. Strong's renderings: properly *guilt*; by implication *a fault*; also *a sin offering*: - *guiltiness, (offering for) sin, trespass (offering)*. Strong's #817.
 - c. BDB translations: 1) *guilt, offense, guiltiness*; 1a) *offense, trespass, fault*; 1b) *guilt, guiltiness*; 1c) *compensation (for offense)*; 1d) *trespass offering, guilt offering*. BDB #79.
 - d. Gesenius translations: *fault, guilt, blame; that by which anyone contracts guilt; a sacrifice for transgression [trespass, sin]*.
 - e. Zodhiates: *guilt* (Psalm 68:21 Prov. 14:9); *fault, trespass, offense; trespass or guilt offering* (Lev. 6:17 Ezek. 40:39); *a restitution for a wrong* (Num. 5:6). Most of its uses have to do with the actual offering which is made as a restitution or compensation for a wrong. it can be made either to God or man,

depending on the offense. In Isa. 53:10 the Lord's servant becomes the compensation for the sin of the people.¹

3. **Cognates:** `âshâm comes from the verb `âsham (אָשָׁם) [pronounced *aw-SHAHM*], which means *to be guilty, to offend, to be offensive, to be ceremonially unclean*.
4. **Passages:** Gen. 26:10 Lev. 5:6–7, 15–16, 18–19 6:6, 17 7:1–2, 5, 7, 37 14:12–14, 14:17, 21, 24–25, 28 19:21–22 Num. 5:7–8 6:12 18:9 1Sam. 6:3–4, 8, 17 2Kings 12:16 Psalm 68:21 Ezek. 40:39 42:13 44:29 46:20 Isa. 53:9–10 Jer. 51:5

Sometimes it becomes obvious as to how much of a problem we have when view good translations of passages containing the word in question.

A Comparative Examination of Various Translations

Translation	Commentary
A soul that trespasses a trespass, and has sinned in ignorance from the holy things of Jehovah, then he has brought in his guilt-offering to Jehovah, a ram, a perfect one, from the flock, at your ² valuation—a silver of shekels by [or, <i>in</i>] the shekel of the sanctuary—for a guilt-offering . And that which he has sinned from the holy thing he repays [or, <i>recompenses</i>], and its fifth is adding to it, and has given it to the priest, and the priest makes atonement for him [lit., <i>makes a cover over him</i>] with the ram of the guilt-offering , and it has been forgiven him (Lev. 5:15–19; Young's Translation, updated and revised as per Owen ³).	<p>What we first need is a fairly literal rendering of the passage, so that we can compare and contrast with what follows.</p> <p>Key here is the common word <i>to bring</i>, which is followed by the sign of the direct object and `âshâm. This indicates that the one who has sinned is <i>not</i> bringing in his <i>guilt</i> or his <i>responsibility for committing a sin</i>, but he brings in the offering itself (here, <i>a ram</i>), meaning that `âshâm <i>must</i> be rendered <i>guilt-offering</i> or <i>trespass-offering</i>.</p>
If a soul commits a trespass, and sins unintentionally in regard to the holy things of Jehovah, then he shall bring unto Jehovah for his trespass a ram that is whole from the flocks, with your valuation in shekels of silver according to the shekel of the sanctuary, as a trespass offering . And he shall make good for his sin with regard to the holy thing, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering , and it shall be forgiven him (Lev. 5:15–16; A Voice in the Wilderness).	<p>Here, `âshâm is used both for the sin committed (a <i>trespass</i>) and for the offering itself. This is the approach of almost all translations.</p> <p>It appears as though we are looking at both an unintentional sin and a restitution offering.</p> <p>What I have noticed in several translations is the phrase <i>for his</i> `âshâm; in my Hebrew version, there is no <i>for</i> but we have the direct object instead. However, this occurs so often as to make me think there must be a manuscript with this approach in it. The article of the Greek is in the genitive, which allows for this to mean <i>for the</i> `âshâm.</p> <p>The phrase <i>commits a trespass</i> has nothing to do with `âshâm.</p>

¹ *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*; Dr. S. Zodhiates; ©1994 AMG Publishers; p. 2303.

² God is speaking to Moses, so Moses is determining the value here. I would assume that this valuation is passed along as a duty to the Levites.

³ This is *not* a translation which you can find. I have a macro which I apply to Young's Translation to update it (to get rid of the *tree's*, the *thou's*, the *gettith's* and the *doth's*. Then I go to Owen's Analytical translation of the Old Testament and make Young's Updated Literal Translation even more literal.

A Comparative Examination of Various Translations

Translation	Commentary
"If any of you fail to do your duty by unintentionally doing something wrong with any of the LORD'S holy things, bring a guilt offering to the LORD. It must be a ram that has no defects or its value in silver weighed according to the official standards of the holy place. Pay for whatever holy things you used plus one-fifth more. Give it to the priest. So the priest will use the ram sacrificed for the guilt offering to make peace with the LORD for what you did wrong, and you will be forgiven (Lev. 5:15–16; God's Word™).	Some translations eliminate the double-meaning of ʿāshâm by simply eliminating its first occurrence from v. 15 (see also ESV).
"If someone offends by sinning unintentionally in regard to any of the LORD's holy things, he must bring his restitution offering to the LORD: an unblemished ram from the flock by your valuation in silver shekels, according to the sanctuary shekel, as a restitution offering . He must make restitution for his sin regarding any holy thing, adding a fifth of its value to it, and give it to the priest. Then the priest will make atonement on his behalf with the ram of the restitution offering , and he will be forgiven (Lev. 5:15–16; HCSB).	The HCSB is consistent throughout; and they are, from what I can see, the most accurate with respect to the use of ʿāshâm here.

These are representative enough of the more literal renderings of this passage.

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An Examination of All Scriptural Occurrences of the Word

Passage	Morphology and Additional Comments
Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death." (Gen. 26:10–11).	<p>This incident begins with Abraham misrepresenting his wife as his sister. Abimelech became interested in Sarai, and, had he taken things further, Abraham would have <i>brought guilt upon</i> Abimelech, and, therefore, upon his people.</p> <p>I personally consider the first use of a word to be among the most important. Abraham would have caused Abimelech to be <i>guilty of wrongdoing</i>; Abraham would have caused Abimelech to do wrong.</p> <p>I believe that an early distinction that we can make (given the verb which is used in this passage) is, ʿāshâm refers to the <i>guilt</i> or to the <i>blame</i> or <i>the responsibility</i> one appropriates to himself by committing an act of sin, or by doing that which is wrong. A criminal might rob a bank, but this word is used for his <i>guilt</i>, rather than for the actual <i>act</i> of robbing the bank.</p>

Passage	Morphology and Additional Comments
<p>And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned; and he shall bring his trespass offering unto Jehovah for his sin which he has sinned, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering. Thus the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin. If he cannot afford a lamb, then he shall bring unto Jehovah, for his guilt which he has sinned, two turtledoves or two young pigeons: one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering (Lev. 5:5–7).</p>	<p>The second time that we find <i>ʾâshâm</i> used is very instructive. The first 7 chapters of Leviticus deal with offerings which are to be brought before God and how these offerings relate to the various aspects of sin. There is more going on in these 7 chapters than, <i>you've sinned; here's what you do</i>. We see sin and its various aspects here. In this passage, we have the verb <i>to be guilty, to be responsible, to be blamed</i>. Again, we are not speaking of the actual sin, but of our <i>responsibility, guilt</i> or <i>blame</i> for committing that sin. The <i>sin</i> is spoken of in this passage, but <i>ʾâshâm</i> is used for the <i>guilt</i> or <i>responsibility</i> for the act of sin.</p> <p>However, equally important is, the person confesses his sin and then he <i>brings his guilt</i> to Jehovah (the same verb and noun that we had in Gen. 26:10 above), and what he brings to Jehovah is clearly identified as an animal offering.</p> <p>Okay, <i>why the distinction? What's the big deal?</i> Jesus Christ did not commit any sins; however, He took upon Himself <i>the blame, the guilt, the responsibility</i> for those sins, and He became our <i>sin-offering</i>, where the <i>guilt</i> for the sin becomes <i>the offering for the sin</i>, as it stands written: He bore our sins in His body on the cross (1Peter 2:24a). He Who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2Cor. 5:21).</p>
<p>"If a person sins and violates any of the LORD's commandments which must not be violated (although he did not know it at the time, but later realizes he is guilty), then he will bear his punishment for iniquity and must bring a flawless ram from the flock, convertible into silver shekels, for a guilt offering to the priest. So the priest will make atonement on his behalf for his error which he committed (although he himself had not known it) and he will be forgiven. It is a guilt offering; he was surely guilty before the LORD." (Lev. 5:17–19; the NET Bible®).</p>	<p>I think that this passage is key in understanding the use of the word <i>ʾâshâm</i>. In vv. 15–19, we are speaking of sins committed unwittingly; that is, a person has sinned, but, at the time that he committed the sin, was essentially unaware that it was a sin. Since we find <i>ʾâshâm</i> used prominently in these passages, we may reasonably conclude that it is used, not so much for the sin itself, but for the <i>guilt</i> or for the <i>responsibility</i> of the sin.</p> <p>We stand condemned before God for a number of different reasons. One excuse which he does not allow us is <i>ignorance</i> (just as <i>ignorance of the law</i> is not allowed in court as a valid excuse for breaking a law). When we sin against God, it does not matter that we are aware that we have sinned nor does it matter if we are aware that this sin is against God. Being guilty before God is based upon our nature, the imputation of Adam's sin, and the sins we commit, whether knowingly or unknowingly. We may speed through a school zone at 50 mph; we are guilty and subject to a fine, even if we go to the judge and swear on a stack of Bibles that we did not know that we are supposed to reduce our speed in a school zone (is it 20 or 25 mph?). Similarly, we are guilty before God, whether we commit a sin knowingly or unknowingly; and all the sins that we commit must be atoned for.</p>
<p>We find a very similar usage in Lev. 6:6 (the sin is fraud or fraud by deception against a neighbor).</p>	
<p>In Lev. 7, some specifics are given with respect to the <i>guilt-offering</i>; and, again, it is clear that we are dealing here with the actual <i>guilt-offering</i> rather than with the <i>guilt</i>, even though the same word is used (this is already made clear in Lev. 5).</p>	
<p>Lev. 14 deals with some regulations regarding the various offerings, and <i>ʾâshâm</i> is found through this chapter. no new information is available in Lev. 19 either.</p>	

Passage	Morphology and Additional Comments
<p>In Num. 5:6–8, we have an intermingling of the cognate verb and our noun, but nothing additional is learned from the passage: Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; Then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall make restitution for his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he has trespassed. But if the man has no kinsman to make restitution for the trespass unto, let the restitution for the trespass be unto the LORD, even to the priest; besides the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him.. The cognate verb and 3 nouns are highlighted.</p>	
<p>Nothing new is learned from Num. 6 or 18.</p>	
<p>The ark of the LORD was in the country of the Philistines seven months. And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, "What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us with what we shall send it to its place." They said, "If you send away the ark of the God of Israel, do not send it empty, but by all means return him a guilt offering. Then you will be healed, and it will be known to you why his hand does not turn away from you." And they said, "What is the guilt offering that we shall return to him?" They answered, "Five golden tumors and five golden mice, according to the number of the lords of the Philistines, for the same plague was on all of you and on your lords (1Sam. 6:1–6).</p>	<p>This passage is fascinating because we are dealing with the determination of heathen who snatched up the Ark of God. They know that they are guilty; they know that they have transgressed against the God of Israel; they know that there are consequences (there was widespread death wherever the Ark was taken in Philistia).</p> <p>Here, even though the heathen priests and diviners have a rather imperfect way of dealing with the guilt of the Philistines; they recognize that they have sinned against God. They use this word to describe some sort of <i>sacrificial compensation</i> which is returned with the Ark of God to Israel.</p> <p>It might be important to point out that, even though this word is being used for a <i>guilt-offering</i> here, the passage is quoting Philistines and not Jews. They are obviously making up some sign of repentance which has nothing to do with the Law; so, this indicates that they could be misusing `âshâm here.</p>
<p>The money from the guilt offerings and the money from the sin offerings was not brought into the house of the LORD; it belonged to the priests (2Kings 12:16).</p>	<p>It is possible that this verse could read: The trespass money and sin money was not brought into the house of the LORD; it belonged to the priests. However, virtually every translation other than the KJV rendered this <i>guilt-offering</i> (or, in the case of the NET Bible®, <i>restitution offering</i>).</p>
<p>And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief: when You shall make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His offspring, He shall prolong his days, and the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand (Isa. 53:9–10).</p>	<p>This leads us to one of the most important passages in the Old Testament: You will make His soul a sin-offering. Here, we may reasonably understand that our Lord's soul is made <i>guilty</i>; it is made <i>responsible</i>; similarly, we can say, <i>His soul was made a guilt-offering</i>.</p> <p>Let me point out something which is often ignored in theology: if we understand `âshâm here to refer to a <i>guilt-offering</i>, then it is plain that our Lord's physical death did not absolve us of our sins; Jesus Christ died physically because His work was over; it is His soul which was judged for our sins and His soul paid the price for our sins.</p>

Passage	Morphology and Additional Comments
For neither Israel nor Judah has been forsaken by his God, Jehovah of Hosts, for their land was filled with guilt from the Holy One of Israel. Flee out of the middle of Babylon, and each man deliver his soul. Do not be cut off in her iniquity, for this is the time of Jehovah's vengeance; He will make good her recompense (Jer. 51:5–6).	I'm not sure that I can properly interpret this verse, which is almost universally mistranslated <i>their land was filled with sin against the Holy One of Israel</i> . If you look at your own Bible, you will see this. The land was filled with <i>guilt/blame/responsibility for wrongdoing</i> ; and this was not <i>against</i> the Holy One of Israel but <i>from the Holy One of Israel</i> . My first response to this verse is, God did not abandon Israel, but God did hold Israel accountable for her sins, and assigned guilt to Israel for her sins; and, therefore, uprooted the people of Israel and sent them to Babylon.
There was a chamber with its door in the vestibule of the gate, where the burnt offering was to be washed. And in the vestibule of the gate were two tables on either side, on which the burnt offering and the sin offering and the guilt offering were to be slaughtered (Ezek. 40:38–39).	Here, we have unequivocal evidence that <i>ʾâshâm</i> is used not just for the <i>guilt</i> but for the <i>guilt-offering</i> . The verb found with these offerings is <i>to slaughter, to kill, to sacrifice</i> . This passage, by the way, I believe deals with the Millennial Temple (as will those which follow).
Then he said to me, "The north chambers and the south chambers opposite the yard are the holy chambers, where the priests who approach the LORD shall eat the most holy things. There they shall put the most holy things—the grain offering, the sin offering, and the guilt offering —for the place is holy (Ezek. 42:13).	Again, the context dictates that we are dealing with the <i>guilt-offering</i> and not with the guilt itself.
The final two passages, Ezek. 44:29 46:20 both clearly refer to <i>guilt-offerings</i> , as we have seen above.	

A Side-by Side Comparison						
	ACV	Complete Apostles' Bible	ESV	God's Word™	WEB	Young's Translation
And Abimelech says, "What is this you have done to us? As a little thing one of the people had lain with your wife, and you have brought upon us <i>ʾâshâm</i> " (Gen. 26:10).	<i>guilt</i>	<i>a sin of ignorance</i>	<i>guilt</i>	<i>guilty of sin</i>	<i>guilt</i>	<i>guilt</i>
And has brought in his <i>ʾâshâm</i> to Jehovah for his sin which he has sinned (Lev. 5:6a).	<i>trespass-offering</i>	<i>transgressions</i>	<i>compensation for sin</i>	<i>guilt offering</i>	<i>guilt offering</i>	<i>guilt-offering</i>

A Side-by Side Comparison						
	ACV	Complete Apostles' Bible	ESV	God's Word™	WEB	Young's Translation
And they say, "If you are sending away the ark of the God of Israel, you do not send it away empty; for you do certainly send back to Him an `āshâm (1Sam. 6:3a).	<i>trespass-offering</i>	<i>an offering for the plague</i>	<i>guilt-offering</i>	<i>guilt offering</i>	<i>guilt offering</i>	<i>guilt-offering</i>
The money of a `āshâm, and the money of sin-offerings is not brought in to the house of Jehovah--for the priests it is (2Kings 12:16).	<i>trespass-offerings</i>	<i>trespass offering</i>	<i>guilt offerings</i>	<i>guilt offerings</i>	<i>guilt offerings</i>	<i>trespass-offering</i>
Only—God strikes the head of His enemies, The hairy crown of a habitual walker in his `āshâm (Psalm 68:21).	<i>guiltiness</i>	<i>trespasses</i>	<i>guilty ways</i>	<i>those who continue to be guilty</i>	<i>guiltiness</i>	<i>guilt</i>
And Jehovah has delighted to bruise him, He has made him sick, If his soul does make an `āshâm, He sees seed—he prolongs days, And the pleasure of Jehovah in his hand does prosper (Isa. 53:10).	<i>offering for sin</i>	<i>offering for sin</i>	<i>offering for guilt</i>	<i>sacrifice for our wrongdoings</i>	<i>offering for sin</i>	<i>offering for guilt</i>
For, not forsaken is Israel and Judah, By its God—by Jehovah of Hosts, For their land has been full of `āshâm, Against the Holy One of Israel (Jer. 51:5).	<i>guilt</i>	<i>iniquity</i>	<i>guilt</i>	<i>is guilty</i>	<i>guilt</i>	<i>guilt</i>

5. Conclusion:

- What we have discovered can be summed up rather neatly: `āshâm (אָשָׁם) [pronounced *aw-SHAWM*], means *guilt, fault, blame, responsibility [for sinful actions]; a guilt-offering*; possibly this word can apply to the *actions* for which one is guilty (*trespass, offense*). I cannot point to any particular passage which requires us to use this word in the sense of a *trespass, an offense*, however. Strong's #817 BDB #79.
- `Āshâm appears to be used for *guilt, blame or responsibility for sin*, rather than for the sin or the transgression itself (see Gen. 26:10). Bearing this in mind is the key to understanding this word. This is particularly important in Isa. 53:10, where our Lord takes our *guilt* on Himself. He does not take the actual sin upon Himself, but the guilt for the sins. *Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand* (Isa. 53:10).
- `Āshâm is undoubtedly used to mean *guilt offering* in Ezek. 40:39 42:13 44:29 46:20.
- Jesus Christ did not commit any sins; however, He took upon Himself *the blame, the guilt, the responsibility* for those sins, and He became our *sin-offering*, where the *guilt* for the sin becomes *the offering for the sin*, as it stands written: *He bore our sins in His body on the cross* (1Peter 2:24a). **He**

Who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2Cor. 5:21). And, as just pointed out, `âshâm is prophetically applied to our Lord in Isa. 53:10.

- e. Even the ancient heathen understood that some sort of guilt offering was necessary when dealing with a holy God. 1Sam. 6:1–6. This is important, as it tells us that God evangelized outside of Israel. Whether they got the ceremony right or not is another thing; but key is, they believed in Jehovah Elohim, the God of Israel; that determined their salvation. Whatever other goofy things that they did had no bearing on the issue.
- f.

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As occurs when I examine a word, I go into much greater detail than most would want; however, a summary of these points is found below.

A Summary of the Doctrine of `Âshâm

1. What we have discovered can be summed up rather neatly: `âshâm (אָשָׁם) [pronounced aw-SHAWM], means *guilt, fault, blame, responsibility [for sinful actions]; a guilt-offering*; possibly this word can apply to the *actions* for which one is guilty (*trespass, offense*). I cannot point to any particular passage which requires us to use this word in the sense of *a trespass, an offense*, however. Strong's #817 BDB #79.
2. `Âshâm appears to be used for *guilt, blame or responsibility for sin*, rather than for the sin or the
3. `Âshâm is undoubtedly used to mean *guilt offering* in Ezek. 40:39 42:13 44:29 46:20. transgression itself (see Gen. 26:10). Bearing this in mind is the key to understanding this word. This is particularly important in Isa. 53:10, where our Lord takes our *guilt* on Himself. He does not take the actual sin upon Himself, but the guilt for the sins (i.e., when `âshâm is used). **Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand** (Isa. 53:10). The fact that the same word is used for both the *guilt* and the *guilt-offering* is remarkable, and theologically significant. Our Lord took our guilt for our wrongdoing upon Himself and then He became *an offering for guilt*. The significance is, this is the same word and it is applied to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ did not commit any sins; however, He took upon Himself *the blame, the guilt, the responsibility* for those sins, and He became our *sin-offering*, where the *guilt* for the sin becomes *the offering for the sin*, as it stands written: **He bore our sins in His body on the cross** (1Peter 2:24a). **He Who knew no sin was made sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him** (2Cor. 5:21).
4. Even the ancient heathen understood that some sort of guilt offering was necessary when dealing with a holy God. 1Sam. 6:1–6. This is important, as it tells us that God evangelized outside of Israel. Whether they got the ceremony right or not is another thing; but key is, they believed in Jehovah Elohim, the God of Israel; that determined their salvation. Whatever other goofy things that they did had no bearing on the issue.

What I must admit amazed me was just how theologically accurate this term is and how closely it interests with Christian doctrine.

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