

## Response to the Flaws of Substitution Theories: Moral Government

Alan, I thank you for your response, and will not go through all of what you have said, but just to touch on some basic points. As I search the Scriptures and try to gain understanding, I can only answer to how I see what I believe the holy Spirit is teaching me through the Scriptures. At one point you stated,

*Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the message is clear that man's problem is not that he is loving by keeping the law and that he just needs more information, an example, to take it to a greater degree of perfection. Rather, man's problem is that he is wholly unwilling to do what he knows to be right; more definitions of righteous behavior, even in the form of an example, will not affect this one bit. (Underline is my emphasis.)*

All through Scripture it is true where we see man is unwilling to repent of his evil deeds; however, let's not forget those who have repented and *did* what was right. Making a blanket statement that mankind is *wholly unwilling* to do what he knows to be right is not really accurate as I see it. Why would God tell man to repent knowing they are simply unwilling and therefore, won't? God has always given mankind the opportunity to repent, and there are righteous people mentioned throughout the Bible. If man is wholly unwilling to do what he knows to be right, how does one explain Cornelius, for example, (Acts 10 & 11) who was a devout God fearing man, who gave alms and always praying before he received the baptism of the holy Spirit? If man is wholly unwilling to do what he knows to be right, how could Peter say,

“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation WHOEVER fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him...” (Acts 10:34-35)?

You quote Gordon Olson who says,

“The sufferings of Christ were not a substituted penalty, but a substitute for a penalty.” (Historical Opinions as to the Nature of Christ's Atoning Death,” 3, in The Truth Shall Make You Free, Olson, page following T-VII-10).



To me this means Christ is still considered a substitute. Nowhere in Scripture do I see where it says Jesus is a **substitute for a penalty**. I would have to say that I don't see anything in Scripture that says or implies that Jesus is a *substitute*, period. I just don't see it. This cannot be drawn out from Scripture but is rather read into it. If God still has to punish sin, then I was not freely forgiven when I repented. Jesus is still viewed in the position of having to be **punished** for the sins of others (including those who have repented), who had to be the *substitute for a penalty*. The word itself (*penalty*) means, *a punishment imposed or incurred for a violation of law or rule*. The word *substitute* means, *“a person or thing acting or serving in place of another; to take the place of; replace.”* Nowhere is Jesus ever mentioned as having to take the place of another and have to endure punishment imposed upon him for the crime of another.

The Bible repeatedly tells us that Christ SUFFERED – The Son of man must **suffer**, Before I **suffer**, That Christ should **suffer**, **suffered** without the gate, because Jesus also suffered for us, **suffered** in the flesh, the **sufferings** of Christ. (Mark 8:31; Luke 22:15; 24:46; 17:25; Acts 3:18; 26:23; Hebrews 13:12; 1 Peter 1:11; 2:21; 2:23; 3:18; 4:1; 5:1; 2nd Corinthians 1:5), Jesus didn't have to pay anything, nor was he punished or had to fulfill any penalty. The man who suffers for the benefit of others is a martyr, not a convict.

For the first thousand years it was always the **Ransom** model that was taught (Mat\_20:28; Mar\_10:45; 1Ti\_2:6). “Who [Jesus] gave himself a **ransom** for all, to be testified in due time.”

The Scripture repeatedly teaches that a person is responsible for their own sin, and that a person cannot morally be punished for the sins of others.

You also stated,

*“This is my view of the atonement. Scripture presents Christ’s death as influencing our repentance”*

and then continued by offering the following Scriptures to try and support your statement:

*I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness. (Jeremiah 31:3)*

*I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. (Jeremiah 31:33)*

*‘And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.’” (John 12:32)*

*By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. (1 John 4:9)*

*We love because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19)*

*And who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (1 John 5:5)*

None of these Scriptures you quoted presents Christ’s **death** as influencing our repentance. The Scripture clearly says,

**“For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”**

Genuine repentance is initiated by God through a crisis of conviction leading to a season of godly sorrow for sin. (Jn. 16:8; Acts 2:37; 4:8-10; 5:31; 11:18; 2 Co. 7:10). The process of repentance is to *sweep, scrape, scrub* and *cast out of doors all defilement of the heart* **in order** to make it clean for the reception of the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 12:43-45; Lk. 11:24-26; Acts 5:32).

Repentance is a change of mind, inclinations and desires, which **translates into a total change in character and conduct.** (Mt. 3:8; Mk. 4:12; Lk. 8:15; Jn. 8:34; 8:36; Lk. 19:1-10; Acts 26:20; 2 Co. 6:1; 5:17; 1 Thess. 1:9; 2 Tim. 2:19; Titus. 2:11-12). The design of Bible repentance from Genesis to Revelation is clearly, “forsake” your wickedness, “purge” your heart of evil and SEEK the mercy of God. (Isa. 55:7; Jer. 26:13; Pro. 28:13; Jon. 3:8-10; Matt. 12:41; Lk. 15:11-32; Acts 3:19; 2 Co. 7:10-11; 2 Tim. 2:19; Jas. 3:7-10; 1 Pe. 4:1; Rev. 2:5; 2:16; 2:20-22; 3:3; 3:19).

If we read through the New Testament, the apostles do not narrowly focus on the death of Christ as if it had more importance than anything else. The Gospels focus on what Jesus taught and what he did. “They present his death as part of a larger story which also involved his birth, baptism, ministry and resurrection. Other New Testament writings emphasize his resurrection to a similar extent as his death, and sometimes even more so. A narrow focus on the death of Jesus has little support from the Gospels or from the other New Testament writings. Jesus’ martyrdom gained its significance for the early Christians from the content of his teachings, his movement and his resurrection. Separating his death from his teachings and his movement therefore strips his death of its original significance. It would be comparable to commemorating Martin Luther King Jr. by meditating solely upon his assassination and the weapon that killed him, without remembering the cause for which he lived.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus sent his disciple out to preach to the masses about the Kingdom of God. What was missing? The gospel they preached did not involve any kind of substitution, nor did they teach the people that they had to “*trust in,*” “*believe in,*” or have “*faith in*” the death of Christ in order to have forgiveness of sins. The “good news” they preached did not have anything to do with penal substitution or paying the penalty for sin or to satisfy public justice, etc.. Christ was not a substitute by any means, he was a spotless sin offering; He came to **ransom** mankind from the bondage of sinful living.

“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a **ransom** for many” (Mark 10:45 see also Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:6).

The Greek word translated as “ransom” (*lutron*), means *liberation from bondage*, not as a payment for sin. Jesus gave his whole life – his whole ministry was to set the captives free and he showed us how we could be free – by obeying him and following his example.

Christians viewed Jesus as a martyr. He was not just *a* martyr, but was *the* martyr. Paul viewed Jesus’ life as a martyr though the word was not invented yet. However, many years later when John penned the Book of Revelation we see,

“And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful **witness**, [μάρτυς - martus, - **martyr**] and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,” Rev. 1:5

In the *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* it states,

“The dreadful martyrdoms we shall now describe arose from the persecution of the Christians by pagan fury in the primitive ages of the church, during three hundred years, until the time of Constantine the Great.

The **first martyr** to our holy religion was its blessed Founder Himself, who was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, condemned under Pontius Pilate, and crucified on Calvary.”<sup>2</sup>

When Paul talks about Jesus’ death on the cross, he emphasized his obedience, “*He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on the cross.*” Paul always talks about Christ’s obedience and faithfulness and how we should be faithful as well. To me, to speak of the *blood* and *death* of Christ is to summarize Jesus’ whole life and work. Note how Paul, when writing of Jesus’ death, often draws attention to the faithful obedience Jesus demonstrated rather than to the physical death itself. “Paul referred to Jesus’ death as if it represented and encapsulated Jesus’ entire life and cause. For example, he wrote, ‘We proclaim Christ crucified.’ We could interpret these passages to imply that Paul was fixated on the crucifixion, yet that interpretation does not seem most appropriate. Paul instructed his converts in details of Jesus’ life and did not focus solely on the crucifixion. Thus, these short statements seem to be better understood as references to Christ’s martyrdom, which represented his entire life and cause.”<sup>3</sup>

Post-Reformation and Western thinking has led us far from the simplicity of the Gospel. The interpretation of Scriptures keep evolving, it changes gradually over a long period of time until we have lost its original meaning. For instance, a lot of Christians today put emphasis on Jesus’ *blood* as though it has some kind of mystical qualities that supposedly transforms a person’s life. The same with the *death* of Christ. Post-reformation tradition teaches that Christ’s death *itself* causes some kind of supernatural effect. It would seem that if Christ’s death has supernatural effects that we would have a clear teaching of this from Scripture, but we don’t. “No Gospel writer mentioned the idea that the world’s sin centered on Christ when he died on the cross, nor did they state that Christ suffered the punishment for all of humanity. Despite describing the whole course of Jesus’ death at length, they failed to completely to mention any concept of *effective death*. This omission by the Gospel writers thus challenges strongly the idea that they believe Jesus’ death had an important and supernatural effect.”<sup>4</sup>

Christ had human blood. People seem to just concentrate on the blood and death of Christ as though the rest of his life had very little meaning.

Those who believe in the efficacy of blood sacrifice look to Leviticus 17:11 for justification:

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life. (Leviticus 17:11)

The context clearly refers to abstaining from eating or drinking the blood of a sacrifice, and nothing more. You will find that the pagans ate the blood of their sacrifices as a means of incorporating their gods into their bodies and into their lives. (Does this remind you of Catholicism???)

The entire quotation reads:

Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, 'None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood. Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth, because the life of every creature is its blood.' That is why I have said to the Israelites, 'You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off.'

Blood was not required all the time in sacrifices. If a person was very poor, God allowed the use of flour for a sin offering (Lev. 5:11-13). Flour has no blood.

The Scriptures do mention plenty of times the 'blood of Christ' (Col. 1:20). God "hath set forth [Christ] to be a propitiation through faith in his blood" (Rom. 3:25). Believers are "justified by his blood" (Rom. 5:9); we have "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Eph. 1:7; cf. Col 1:14; I Pet. 1:17-18); Gentile believers "who sometimes were afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13); the blood of Christ "purges the conscience" of the child of God (Heb. 9:14); we "have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus" (Heb. 10:19); we were "sanctified with the blood of the covenant" (Heb. 10:29); we are "sprinkled" (I Pet. 1:2), "cleansed" (I John 1:7) and "washed" (Rev. 1:5) by that same blood. When I reflect on the blood and death of Christ, I see it as representing his entire life and cause, which includes his resurrection. However, some have taken the nature of Christ's blood and have come to heretical views by adopting that his blood as having some mystical power in itself.

Jesus was a man (1 Tim. 2:5) who had human blood flowing through his veins that is comprised of plasma, erythrocytes, leucocytes, thrombocytes (platelets that facilitate clotting) and the hemoglobin which contains iron in the red blood cells. People will say that Jesus did not have human blood, but had "God's blood," which to them is "divine blood." God does not have blood comprised of erythrocytes, leucocytes, thrombocytes and hemoglobin. They will quote Acts 20:28 as proof text. However, God is a Spirit and not comprised of "flesh and blood." When comparing Scripture with Scripture, we know Paul, in the book of Acts, speaks of Jesus (Rev. 5:9).

No New Testament writer ever focused on Jesus' blood the way it is done today. No where do we find them pleading the blood of Jesus. We have come to a point in time where we hear, "There is POWER in the BLOOD." They:

'plead the Blood' to relieve fears and depression.

'plead the Blood' to cast out demons.

'plead the Blood' to remove a curse.

'plead the Blood' to heal and work miracles.

'plead the Blood' to get what they call the 'baptism in the Spirit' and to speak in tongues.

‘plead the Blood’ to be delivered from difficult circumstances, and harm.  
‘plead the Blood’ to protect their home and family.  
‘plead the Blood’ for revival, for intercessory prayer and for worship.

Blood, blood, blood. They have **personified** the blood of Jesus, even spelling it with a capital “B”. See here for the [Strange Doctrine of Blood](#)

Nor does the *death* or the *cross* have any mystical power. What I mean is, the physical death itself, or concentrating on the cross does not change anyone’s immoral behavior or even influence the person to change his behavior by leading them to repentance. However, the early believers did see his death as **very significant** (I do as well) because it proved Jesus’ love for them. It was the greatest act of love to lay down his life, even at the hands of sinners.

Jesus’ mission was all about moral purity and showed us how we could be pure by following his example. **Following and obeying Jesus would free them indeed** (John 8:36) from sinful living.

“The early Christians associated Jesus’ death with the concept of **reconciliation** with God. They believed his death as a martyr had resulted from his work to transform the character and conduct of unrighteous people, thus reconciling them to God. Peter wrote of this idea using martyrdom language. ‘*Christ also suffered [crucifixion] for sinfulness once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteousness, in order to bring you to God*’<sup>5</sup>

Scripture states Jesus came as the “*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” Jesus came to take away the sinfulness of the world. How does Christ do this? It is through some mystical power? Or is it through his example that we are to follow? When we obey Jesus by repenting of our sins, which he preached repentance, and live our lives in obedience, then we are free from sinful living. This is how Christ sets us free. We walk in the light as he is in the light. We are no longer servants of unrighteousness, but of righteousness. We must be ‘born again,’ which means a moral transformation, which does not come about until a person repents of his evil deeds. If we love him, we will obey him. We will keep his commandments.

There are many theories of the ‘atonement’. For that matter, the word ‘atonement’ was invented many centuries later by Tyndale (“at-one-ment”) to translate the same Greek word that is also translated “**reconciliation.**” Reconciliation simply means a *return to favor*.

And all things are of God, who hath **reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ**, and hath given to us the **ministry of reconciliation**; 2 Cor. 5:18

“God was in Christ, **reconciling the world unto himself**, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath **committed unto us the word of reconciliation.** 2 Cor. 5:19

Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make **reconciliation for the sins of the people.** Heb. 2:17

This is the HEART of the Gospel. It's all about **Reconciliation**. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He demonstrates to us how to be reconciled with God by living rightly. Deeds do matter! And we will be judged according to our deeds (John 5:28-29; Rom. 2:6-8, etc. etc.). A clear conscience is only a reality when we walk in the light, putting away dead (evil) works and serving the living God (Heb. 5:19; 1 Jn. 1:7).

I can't help but think back how the early believers must have spread the message of Jesus after his resurrection and ascension. They didn't know about systematic theology or about any kind of substitution, rather they are those who witnessed his life and followed him and told other people what Jesus taught them, they told of all he did – how he healed people, how he fed the thousands with so little, how he told others they are forgiven, how the rulers came against him, he made the blind to see, he raised the dead, how the authorities crucified him and how God raised him from the dead, which was proof Jesus was sent by God; and they could look forward to a resurrection as well!

The Scriptures do speak of Christ as a sacrifice for us (Eph. 5:21), but people think in terms that Christ had to be slaughtered in order for sins to be forgiven when throughout Scriptures God has always forgiven a person's sin when they came to him in repentance, turning from their evil deeds as he commanded and all he required. Today many Christians are under the assumption that Christ's sacrifice was somehow a punishment from God for our sins, who took the penalty for all sins ever committed to satisfy God's justice. I don't see this. Rather, I see them showing us that Christ was a living sacrifice as in sacrificial service to God as he taught us to be. It is a symbol of holiness. God is loving and merciful and never had a desire for either human or animal suffering for punishment of sin to uphold the law. The wages of sin is death and always will be unless a person repents and lives for God. When we are reconciled to God, we are not reconciled through punishment, but by repenting and living a pure life, as Jesus set the example.

You quote the original article where it states:

*God has never required a Substitution for man's sins or a Penal remuneration. Rather, He calls all sinners to repentance and faith PROVEN by deeds. (The scriptural evidence of this truth is overwhelming!) From the very beginning the ONLY reprieve from willful and deliberate sin was Repentance in which the broken and contrite sinner purified himself of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and laid aside his overflow of wickedness in genuine godly sorrow with a heart free from guile and cried out for Mercy. There was no Sacrifice sufficient to atone for deliberate moral sins in the Old Covenant, and New Covenant as well. The only solution throughout Scripture is the necessity of repentance, to turn from their evil ways.*

You respond by saying, "This is simply not accurate." You don't tell me why the comment is not accurate. You also say, "While it's true that God never required a substitution for our punishment," which is what I have been saying all along. The title of the article is the Flaws of Substitution Theories. How can you agree with me and then disagree? You continue, "it is not true that 'the ONLY reprieve from willful and deliberate sin was Repentance...the forgiveness of sins required repentance and sacrifice.'"

Repentance is not enough? How could God require sacrifice when I showed that there are sins for which there was no prescribed sacrifice? (Ex. Murder, Idolatry, Adultery, Sorcery, etc. etc.) No amount of sacrifices could cleanse anyone of these sins. The only solution **throughout** Scripture is the necessity of **repentance**. This is abundantly clear throughout the Old and New Covenant.

I had quoted Jesus when he said, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” and you replied that it was directed at a group of people who were offering sacrifice, but had not repented.” I agree. Jesus never renounced sacrifices, but he did criticize the Pharisees and Sadducees for the excessive preoccupation with the minute observance of the Law. They failed to understand, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Matt. 9:13; 12:3). In other words, they were so preoccupied with the “outward” cleanliness that they neglected inward purity (Mark 7:1-23; Matt. 23:25-38). When the Scribes confronted Jesus, they asked him “what was the greatest commandment of all.” Jesus gave his answer that the love of God and his neighbor was more important than burnt-offerings and sacrifices and was not far from the kingdom of God (Mark 12:33-34)

Remember, there were sins for which there was no prescribed sacrifice. Jesus was referring back to Hos.6:6 about their burnt offerings. Does God require burnt offerings or sacrifices? The one thing God prefers is to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with him (Mic. 6:8)

You continued to say,

*“Your use David’s repentance as an example. But David’s prayer must be read in its entirety: ‘For You do not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; You are not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. By Your favor do good to Zion; Build the walls of Jerusalem. Then You will delight in righteous sacrifices, In burnt offering and whole burnt offering; Then young bulls will be offered on Your altar.’” (Psalms 51:16-19).*

The point is, to me, that God always demanded **obedience**; and what the prophets always stressed was that the sacrificial system was useless without moral virtues. As seen in Mic. 6:8, the superiority stressed was that of justice, mercy, and love to all. These prophets did not deny that God required service from his people Israel, but insisted that they were neglecting the one kind of service which God demanded, the end of oppression of the poor, loving kindness, and justice. Until moral virtues were active in their life, then God delighted in their sacrifices.

Why? Because **obedience to God is better than sacrifice** (Ps 1, 5, 24, 119, etc.). As you pointed here in full context, it shows a corrective to the sacrificial worship that they accompanied. It is a broken spirit and contrite heart that God desires, it is then he delights in sacrifices rightly offered (Ps. 51:10-19).

Jesus ‘message was no different. To be angry with one’s brother without cause makes a sacrificial gift invalid (Matt. 5:23-24). Those who wanted to escape taking responsibility for their aged parents did so by declaring all financial support owed them ‘Corban’, meaning that it was dedicated to God as a sacrificial gift. They were seriously abusing the sacrificial law (Mark 7:9-13), which is also confirmed by his cleansing of the Temple.

However, having said all this, now that the temple and sacrificial system no longer exists as it did under the Old Covenant, what must a person do today to be right with God? Isn't the message of repentance (stop the sinning) still God's will for all man as it was in the Old Testament?

You say '*Why faith saves,*' and then said concerning what I believe, "*You often state that faith is required by God, and you state way more frequently that repentance or obedience are required by God.*"

Because it is. It is clearly understood, and the overwhelming evidence from Scripture is, that God demands repentance and faith **proven by deeds.** (Acts 26:18-20). The early believers **never** separated the deeds of faith from the act of repentance because they clearly understood the nature of divine reconciliation. They did not speak of some mysterious transfer taking place, but a restoration of favor determined on the condition of repentance. God had granted man "favor" (grace) so he could now approach the mercy seat of "reconciliation" on the **condition** of a repentance that included **not** merely a "change of mind," but the **stopping** of sin as well.

You go on with your definition of faith, "*The Biblical definition of faith involves believing in (or trusting in) the love of God for us (1 John 4:16-18).*"

Many sinners out there believe God loves them. They all *believe in (or trusting in)* the love of God for them. Does this change their immoral behavior? No. You have proven my point stated in the article, "The 'Clearing' of wrong doing that results in a pure heart (2Cor. 7:11), becomes a 'COVERING' by which the sinner '*Trusts*' in the sufficiency of Christ's accomplishment to satisfy public justice instead of returning to obedience and actually **DOING** what is right to reconcile his past life of sin."

The Biblical fact is that **faith is synonymous with obedience.** A person can believe all he wants about how much God loves him, but real faith is a work. It is a work of righteousness. **DEEDS** are linked with faith. It is *obedience to the truth* (1 Peter 1:22). Faith is not just a mental assent, it involves being "faithful." Devils believe and acknowledge God exists (James 2:19), because anyone can "*believe in*" or "*trust in*", but only those who **OBEY** are in Christ (Acts 5:22; Heb. 5:9). It is a faith (faithfulness) that works by love (Gal. 5:6) and purifies the heart (Acts 15:9) by being obedient (1 Peter 1:22).

Scriptures are clear that **repentance** is the alternative to divine punishment. There is no need for a substitute. I still have not heard an answer to the question; In what manner does a Moral Government teacher preach repentance? That's the central issue in this discussion. **IF** the repenting sinner is coming to Christ as his Substitution to divine punishment, **HOW** can his heart be purified from the corrupting influence of sin in such a repentance?

The real issue to this whole matter is **WHEN** does the sin stop?

Other links that may be of interest:

[Sacrifice](#)  
[When Does the Sin Stop?](#)

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<sup>1</sup>A.J. Wallace & R.D. Rusk [*Moral Transformation: The Original Christian Paradigm of Salvation*] p. 300

<sup>2</sup>Foxe's Book of Martyrs, p.9

<sup>3</sup>A.J. Wallace & R.D. Rusk [*Moral Transformation: The Original Christian Paradigm of Salvation*], p. 227

<sup>4</sup> Ibid p.237

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 229