# STRICTURES ON CALVIN'S PENAL SUBSTITUTIONARY ATONEMENT THEORY: IDENTIFICATION AS AN ALTERNATIVE PROPOSAL

Virgil Warren, PhD

## Introduction

Salvation through Jesus Christ is the most distinctive feature of Christianity. Herein lies its primary difference from previous divine economies, other religions, and human agendas. In Christ, God is concerned with more than letting us know about him, about his moral standards, and about our responsibilities within his purposes. Salvation is not from ignorance, as by revelation; it is not deliverance from material existence as in Gnosticism and eastern dualism; it is not deliverance from individuality as in Hinduism. It is deliverance from alienation and all the negatives that grow out of it.

Salvation is not primarily an impersonal state or condition, so it is not primarily a matter of being headed for a place of future bliss rather than future punishment. There is no such thing as being saved without being in fellowship with God because salvation is reconciliation; it is renewed fellowship with him. Since it is interpersonal, interpersonal means accomplish it. Penal substitution cannot be the correct understanding of the atonement because substitution belongs to another category from the one in which alienation stands. So the question is, *"What interpersonal 'mechanisms' does the New Testament offer in Christ's provision for reconciliation?"*

## I. Observations Against John Calvin's Penal-Substitution Theory

The following comments shoulder a negative burden of proof to show that John Calvin's penal substitution theory is foreign to the Christ's atonement in the reconciliation process. Such a verdict would not apply, of course, if John Calvin's legal theological method were correct, where penal substitution would make sense. Penal substitution, however, does not belong in non-Calvinistic theology, in interpersonal systematic theology.

### A. The act-guilt-penalty series

Alienation comes from guilt, which comes from action. By the nature of the case, an action cannot be transferred from one person to another; so the guilt it produces cannot be transferred, and the penalty for the guilt cannot be transferred. It does not matter whether some second person is willing to take the penalty (as in paying someone else's parking fine), whether he is sinless or not (a son's speeding ticket); whether he is human, divine, or angelic; or whether he or a third party prescribed the penalty. The simple fact that he did not commit the sin means that he cannot be considered guilty of it or penalized for it.

What is true negatively is also true positively. Relationship/blessing corresponds to righteousness, which arises from action. The nature of the case cannot include transferring righteousness from one person to another because righteousness arises from acts as surely as unrighteousness does. Both goodness and guilt are moral qualities that derive from behavior.

Neither from the negative nor positive side, then, does substitution describe Christ's role in our salvation. Guilt cannot be transferred to him so he can take the penalty in our place, nor can his righteousness be transferred to us so we can experience fellowship with God.

B. The testimony of scripture

More importantly, what is obvious from the nature of the case comes clear also from the direct teaching of scripture. The Old Testament Law itself forbade punishing one person for another person's sin: *"Everyone will be put to death for his own sin"* (Deuteronomy **24**:16; Leviticus **18**:5; 2 Kings **14**:6 = 2 Chronicles **25**:4). The soul that sins is the one that dies, not someone else (Ezekiel **18**:20). People cannot give *"the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul"* (Micah **6**:7) or use *"the blood of bulls and goats to take away their sin"* (Hebrews **10**:4 < Psalm **40**:6-8). Even in legal theory, divine jurisprudence refused the substitution concept.

In the New Testament, Romans **3**:21 says that righteousness is apart from law (χωρὶς νόμου), which says that it is not accomplished by legal means. In Galatians **3**:21 Paul says so directly, *"If a law had been given that could make alive, truly righteousness would have been by [the] Law"* (εἰ γὰρ ἐδόθη νόμος ὁ δυνάμενος ζωοποιῆσαι, ὄντως ὁ νόμου ἂν ἦν ἡ δικαιοσύνη). The only way there could be righteousness, or life, under law would be for each person to continue doing from the start everything required by the Law (Deuteronomy **27**:26). Salvation from unrighteousness is not even theoretically possible in such a situation. That is why Paul continues in Romans **3**:22ff by saying that righteousness must happen in another category besides law, under what he calls "grace/faith" and "promise" (Galatians **3**:16-18). In Galatians **3**:12 he states that faith and law are parallel categories: *"[The] law is not of faith."* If salvation is by grace/faith, it is not by law; so it is not by substitution, which is a legal mechanism. Grace/faith cannot be something that takes place inside of law, or law would be providing the mechanism by which salvation occurs; that is the proposition Paul categorically denies (Galatians **2**:21; **3**:21). The fact that he uses substitution imagery in the same contexts should not obscure his more basic point about realities in Romans **3-4** and Galatians **3** that substitution is an image, not the reality.

C. The test of consistency

Any movement that rejects the belief that Adam's descendants are counted guilty-to-hell for Adam's sin, cannot embrace penal substitution. "Guilt is personal," we say. Yet many of us have taught that the very mechanism which we deny brings lostness is nevertheless the one we affirm that brings salvation. If guilt can be transferred from us to Christ, it can be transferred from Adam to us. We cannot deny original guilt-unto-lostness for a reason we use to gain righteousness-unto-salvation.

D. The righteous-unrighteous-Christ paradox

If substitution were so, Christ as substitute would be sinful but as to himself would be righteous. As to himself he would please the Father, but as substitute he would displease the Father. As to himself he would be God's friend, but as substitute he would be God's enemy. The same person would be both righteous and unrighteous, pleasing and displeasing, related and alienated at the same time. One person cannot view another favorably and unfavorably at the same time in regard to the same thing. A personal relationship cannot be and not be at the same time in the same sense. Such things are not possible even theoretically, much less psychologically.

E. Christ did not actually receive our penalty.

Jesus Christ did not in fact experience the penalty God established for sin: *"The wages of sin is death"* (Romans **6**:23). If physical "death" is the penalty meant, Jesus did not die in our place because Christians still die. If spiritual "death" is the penalty meant, again he did not die in our place. Spiritual death would mean permanent objective separation from God. But Jesus did not experience permanent objective separation from the Father. At most, he endured a temporary subjective sense of separation from him—as *"the cry of dereliction"* may imply. The cry can be viewed as the way he felt in contrast to what he knew. Besides, in quoting Psalm **22**:1 here, he drew attention to its Messianic connection with the cross event transpiring before the onlookers. The fact that Messiah would suffer was the biggest hurdle for Jews to get over in accepting him as Messiah (I Corinthians **1**:23; Acts **17**:3; **3**:18; John **12**:34, *etc*.).

F. The continuity of kind between cause and effect

1. Alienation is not the kind of thing where substitution can even occur. One person cannot substitute for another who has alienated himself from a third party. Evangelicals rightly describe a saved person as one who has a "personal relationship with God" through Christ. In other words, the salvation state is interpersonal. Since a problem must be solved in the realm of the problem, a legal problem must be solved legally; a nature problem cannot be solved except by natural cause; a logical problem cannot be solved other than logically; an interpersonal problem cannot be solved by other than interpersonal means.

2. *"The law of the harvest"* states that the nature of the cause must correspond with the nature of the result. Grapes do not come from thorns nor figs from thistles (Matthew **7**:16; Luke **6**:44); you reap what you sow (Galatians **6**:7-9); what is of flesh is flesh (John **3**:6). In this case, the result is salvation, which is reconciliation, which is interpersonal. Law and interpersonalism are parallel categories; they are different kinds of things that operate by feature natural to each. Since the result is not legal, the cause is not legal; and substitution does not represent how Christ saves us. A relationship cannot be established, re-established, or experienced vicariously. Jesus Christ is an interpersonal basis for reconciliation with God or he is no basis at all.

G. Law as a secondary principle in salvation history

Law was a temporary add-on to interpersonal process. The grace-faith-promise system does not take place inside of law-works-merit. It is the other way around: God added law to promise temporarily for practical purposes to prepare people for the realities that would come through Christ. In Galatians **3**:15-29, Paul is definite about that way of relating "law" and "grace," "works" and "faith." His two terms *grace* and *faith* (*vs*. *law* and *works*) are code words for actions on the two sides of a personal relationship during reconciliation and fellowship; that alternative to law we are calling "interpersonalism." "Promise," another word from the Abrahamic event, belongs to interpersonal process. If law is a secondary principle in salvation history, then a legal principle like substitution cannot be the primary principle in reconciliation.

At this point belong all the observations which show that interpersonalism is the ultimate reality and that other categories are secondary to it: what scripture considers most original, most central, most enduring, most ultimate; the way Christianity is defended, and its central vocabulary (cp. "Bases for Interpersonalism").

H. Personal human experience

If we, "being evil" (cp. Matthew **7**:11), know not to spank a willing, innocent child for a guilty other one's misbehavior, how much more does the heavenly Father know not to punish one Son for other kids' sins.

I. Suffering *vs*. guilt

In various ways, the guilt of one person can bring suffering to another (Exodus **20**:5; Deuteronomy **5**:9), so the fact that Christ suffered horribly does not mean his suffering had a substitutionary connection with our guilt. It had a different real value—the supreme possible obedience that established his righteousness in the flesh to the degree God would later call Jesus' followers also to obey (John **21**:18-19).

J. Proclamation to pagan audiences

In The Acts, when Paul presents Christianity to pagan audiences, he does not put salvation in substitutionary terms: **17**:22-31 in Athens and **14**:15-17 in Lystra. Since there are only two cases, we do not put undue weight on this observation, but it confirms our conclusion from elsewhere. Substitutionary language represents a *post facto* reading of Christ's death on the analogy of Old Testament sin offerings, especially the paschal lamb (Exodus **12**:46; Numbers **9**:12; cp. Psalm **22**:17; **34**:20; cp. John **1**:35). When New Testament authors like the Hebrews writer comment on the aspects of Christ's atoning work, they simply play out the features of sacrificial imagery wherever they have corresponding features in interpersonal process. That is something they would be less prone to do with Gentile audiences.

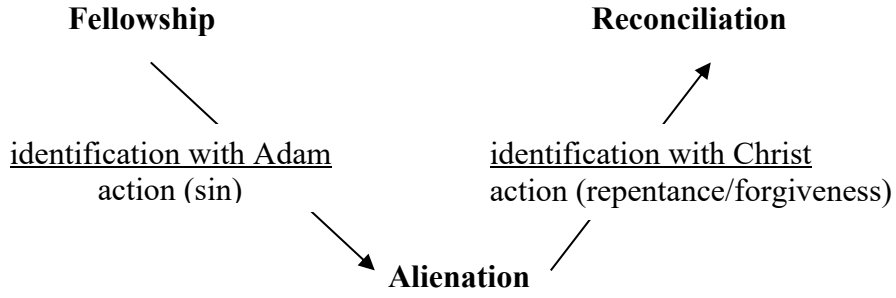
With so many strikes against it, we feel justified in looking for another understanding of Christ's work than the one John Calvin proposed in his penal substitution theory.

## II. The Alternative Proposal: Identification

A. Statement of the concept

Reconciliation starts and ends with God. His incarnational identification with us in the human condition prompts our identification with him in return. His unconditional "grace in the first instance" (establishment of atonement) leads to his conditional "grace in the second instance" (application of atonement). God's identification with us motivates our identification with Christ as the condition for righteousness unto reconciliation.

In keeping with interpersonalism as the distinctive characteristic of the Christian worldview, the following diagram summarizes the pattern of "salvation" as reflective of 2 Corinthians **5**:14-21 and Romans **5**:10ff. It applies to both individual and corporate humanity. As we have identified with Adam unto estrangement, so we identify with




Christ unto reconciliation. We get into First Adam and Second Adam the same way—by acts of identification. We identify with First Adam by an act of sin like his; we identify with Second Adam by an act of commitment to righteousness like his.

Included in this process is the distinction between the deed and the imputation of the deed. Doing something wrong does not necessarily mean having it held against us (Psalm **32**:2, *e.g.*). Doing good does not necessarily make us good (Genesis **15**:6; Galatians **3**:6). So, it is a matter of imputing evil or goodness to us on some appropriate basis. Imputation can an interpersonal activity, not a legal one that makes us automatically guilty of Adam's sin or good from Christ's obedience. In each case, God views us as like the one we identify with by our sin, on the one hand, and our commitment, on the other hand. But being viewed is done by the other Person, not produced by our own acts as under law.

Identification is the distinctive mechanism in all cases of reconciliation. In this case, we add the fact that Christ is superior to us. Identification means who we "are" as defined by relationship to another. In reconciliation it means who we "become" as defined by relationship to offended Other. (All sins are against God; cp. Luke **15**:21. *"against heaven and in your sight"*; Matthew **6**:12; Luke **5**:21ff.) It includes commitment to <u>him</u> as a person, which means acknowledging his leadership; committing to his values, ideals, and purposes; and aspiring to live out in ourselves what we see in him. It means fidelity to Christ and reserving certain behaviors only for him. By implication,

identification means turning from all past values, ideals, and purposes that are inappropriate to this relationship—repentance. It means relating to him in a way that is total, permanent, and exclusive of all parallel relationships. Psychologically, identification means having a sense of nearness to him and orientation around him to give us centeredness. It means viewing life from his perspective and wanting to be around him as "home" (cp. Philippians **3**:20; Hebrews **12**:18-29; *etc*.). We share his destiny, we are "in sympathy with" him, we are "on his side," we participate in any rejection he receives (cp. Hebrews **13**:13), we take his name. Baptism is our performative act of initial identification with him; the Lord's Supper is our periodic reaffirmation of that identity. Identification means committing ourselves to the same degree of obedience that he demonstrated—even to the point of violent death on a cross (Matthew **10**:38; **16**:24; Philippians **2**:8; cp. Hebrews **5**:7-10). Granted relationship based on aspirations and intentions is exactly the point behind salvation by trust (in another) rather than works (by ourselves). Identification with Christ is a concrete expression of aspiration, intention, and commitment. It is all-encompassing, full-degree, and interpersonal.

B. Bases for the concept

**First**, we can view the bases for atonement theory negatively. Primarily (1) salvation is essentially interpersonal reconciliation. Anything else follows from that fact. In 2 Corinthians Paul uses *reconciliation* to characterize his ministry (**5**:18-19) and the content of his message (**5**:18-20). Besides being interpersonal, atonement theory must meet two other biblical criteria. (2) Christ is the only savior for any person ever saved: *"There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved"* (Acts **4**:12; cp. John **4**:6). He was the only one appointed to this role, the only human on earth qualified for it, and the only one appropriate to it. Finally, (3) Christ did not die for nothing: *"If righteousness is through [the] law, Christ died for nothing"* (Galatians **2**:21).

**Second**, the bases for atonement theory must be viewed positively. The Great Commission is an instructive place to begin. It speaks of baptizing disciples *"into the name of Father/Son/Spirit."* Three points interest us here because they each imply identity; conjointly they emphasize it. *"Into Christ"* occurs elsewhere in connection with baptism (Romans **6**:3; Galatians **3**:27), and baptism should be understood as a performative act of personal identification with Christ. The nature and meaning of the covenant sign correspond with the nature and meaning of the covenant (Jeremiah **31**:31-34). *"The name"* indicates who a Christian is (Matthew **28**:19; Acts **8**:16; **10**:48; **19**:5). In several texts about identity, baptism is part of the topic, which means again that baptism is an act of personal identification with Jesus Christ. Among other things it marks who we are, and any benefits involved follow from that. *"Baptism unto Moses"* is a comparable expression in 1 Corinthians **10**:2. The disciples were called *"*Christians*"* in Antioch and thereafter (Acts **11**:26; cp. **26**:28; 1 Peter **4**:16; cp. 1 Corinthians **1**:14-16).

One of Paul's frequent expressions for identity is "in Christ": *"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation"* (2 Corinthians **5**:17; cp. Romans **16**:7, 9, 10; 2 Corinthians **12**:2; Galatians **1**:22; *etc*.). *"Putting on Christ"* is a similar idea in Galatians **3**:27.

When the Corinthians began identifying themselves with various Christian leaders, Paul reminded them of their true identity. Rather than calling themselves "of

Paul," "of Cephas," or "of Apollos," they were to consider themselves "of Christ" (1 Corinthians **3**:23); it was Christ who was crucified for them, and it was into his name that they were baptized (**1**:13).

"Dying with Christ" is another metaphor for identification.[1] Using baptism to picture the conversion process, Paul says that in baptism we have died with Christ (**6**:8). As we arose from baptism in analogy to his resurrection, we are now to live transcendently; we are to live the resurrected lifestyle with Christ. In Colossians **3**:1-4, Christ's ascension is another figure for transcendent living; we are to have our minds set on things above. Spiritual death and burial of the old person leads to resurrection and ascension. In baptism we have been united with the likeness of his death (or perhaps *"united with him in the likeness of his death"*).

Although the writer of Hebrews stresses the substitutionary imagery associated with Jewish animal sacrifice, he exhorts the readers to *"go out to [Christ] outside the camp, bearing his reproach"* (**13**:13). Jesus speaks of "coming to him" to find rest for our "souls" (Matthew **11**:28-30).

We are to put trust in Jesus as the One who saves us from our sin (John **3**:16; *etc*.). Eating his flesh and drinking his blood may be another way of expressing identification (John **6**:51-58). The saying has apparent connections with the Lord's Supper.

Some of the above expressions we could read as entrance into a legal category, being in a legal category, *etc*.; "Christ" would then be understood as personification of something impersonal (cp. *"Moses is preached/read,"* Acts **15**:21; 2 Corinthians **3**:15). Similarly, putting trust in Christ could have a legal sense; we could trust him as our penal substitute who fulfills the legal requirement of *"continuing to do all"* (Deuteronomy **27**:26). Penal substitution involves identification with Christ, but it does so only to make him a legal substitute for us. Our approach says that identification with him is all there is, which makes the identification simply interpersonal rather than also legal. Identification is all there is because the result is interpersonal and the cause has to match it, and because the ultimate reality in salvation is interpersonal.

In other words, the crux of the salvation issue is settled systematically before we ever get to atonement within it. The larger context and the nature of the case always set the reading of specific statements; that is why we cannot decide a matter like this simply by reading statements. Doing so can turn into "proof-texting" because writers use imagery as well as strict speech, so we must use systematic context and the nature of the case to qualify figure by fact. The fact is that salvation is interpersonal; so the mechanisms for it are interpersonal, and the statements of scripture about it are meant in an interpersonal sense rather than a legal sense.

C. Advantages of the concept

Identification removes the criticism that Christianity is a "bloody old religion." Blood is involved, not because it is inherently part of what the religion requires, but because people murdered a good man—they shed his blood. Christians need not worry about responding to flippant caricatures; but if the criticisms are not caricatures but

exaggerations, we do well to distance ourselves from them as unnecessary stumbling blocks.

Identification allows for accepting Jesus as the Messiah at his first coming. Penal substitution theory requires people to sinfully reject him so he could save them from sins like rejecting him. Although accepting him is not even theoretically possible under substitution, the Jewish leaders were counted guilty for doing God's will (John **19**:11; **18**:12-14, 28-32).

Identification avoids the specter of a holy God tempting ignorant men to do evil (James **1**:13-14). Jesus did not speak in vague parables to keep the people ignorant of his real mission lest they should accept him as the Messiah and he could not save them because they accepted him. He did not bait the Pharisees into sinfully rejecting him so he could get himself killed to save them from their sins (Matthew **23**, *etc*.). He did not "plant" Judas among his disciples and make him treasurer so he would betray him for money and then be sent to "his place" for doing it (Acts **1**:16-26, *etc*.). He did not give Pilate the "silent treatment" so he would not have adequate reasons to acquit him (John **19**:9; cp. Matthew **26**:62-63; **27**:12-14).

Identification makes Christ's whole life the direct basis for our salvation. His death epitomizes his redeeming work rather than exhausts it. It differs from his other actions in degree, not kind or meaning. Yielding to crucifixion is his most extreme obedience rather than the only relevant one. Under penal substitution theory, the death of Christ is a discrete act as far as laying a foundation for salvation is concerned. It is the *"one act of righteousness"* in Romans **5**:18, so to speak. The rest of Jesus' life is, of course, preparatory for that discrete event because Jesus had to live perfectly up to that time so his sacrifice would be the sinless sacrifice that substitution required. But the rest of his life was preparatory for the basis, not part of the basis.

But being able to connect all of Christ's life directly with his atoning work meets the requirement that Paul himself seems to bring into the atonement. In Romans **4**:25 he uses parallelism to say that Jesus was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. If in fact his death as a discrete obedience is a penal substitution that brings justification, how would the resurrection be for our justification? A few verses later Paul says that, having been reconciled by Christ's death, we will be saved by his life (presumably his resurrected life, **5**:10). Already in John **17**:4 during his high priestly prayer, Jesus said he had completed the work that the Father had given him to do (τὸ ἔργον τελειώσας δέδωκάς μοι ἵνα ποιήσω). In **19**:28, prior to his actual death, Jesus knew that everything had been accomplished (τετέλεσται). In both cases, the idea seems equivalent to the last word on the cross, *"It is finished"* (τετέλεσται, John **19**:30).[2] If the statements are not in principle the same, we wonder how he could say the same thing about his work up to the point of Gethsemane that he says about his work up through the next Sunday. Without penal substitution in the picture, his death is not something different in kind and purpose from the rest of his life relative to human redemption. Identification with Christ answers the problem of having to get people lost (children, saved Jews, saved followers of John the Baptist, everyone unevangelized) before baptizing them.

## III. Clarifications and Responses

Some useful clarifications relate to the nature of interpersonalism itself even before we get to its implications for atonement theory specifically. First, **(1)** interpersonalism does not require the equality of the persons in the relationship. God is the leading person in all our associations with him. As purposeful creator and benevolent sustainer, he has the responsibility and the right to determine our purpose and behavior. Since he is greater, he is "lord," not just "friend" (Psalm **100**:3, *etc*.; plus John **15**:13-15; James **2**:23 < Isaiah **41**:8; 2 Chronicles **20**:7). In terms of leadership theory, God is natural leader before he is formal leader; and his manner of obtaining and exercising leadership over us follows the implications of the biblical view of proper leadership theory (cp. outlines on leadership in the *Basic Christianity* in this website).

**(2)** Whenever we speak about "shared values," we are speaking loosely to describe interpersonal process. In the divine-human setting, "shared values" does not imply complete mutuality. We do not negotiate the ethical principles that derive from our purpose, nature, and relationship with him. He sets the framework and gives us freedom within it.

**(3)** There is a standard of behavior under interpersonalism as surely as there is under law, and that standard is perfection just as surely as it is under law. Law is simply a kind of setting in which the standard exists. Legal systems are rooted in <u>authority</u> and driven by authority. A legal standard is rooted in the authority of the lawgiver, so it need not even conform to the nature of the case to be valid. In legal processes, authority connects cause and result. In interpersonal processes, the leader earns the right to set standards, and uses <u>influence</u> to connect purpose and result.[3]

A. <u>Why does the Bible speak of salvation in substitutionary terms if in fact no substitution occurs</u>? Scripture often speaks of Christ's work in substitutionary language. **(1)** Isaiah of old declared, *"By his stripes we are healed . . ."* (**53**:5; see vv. 4-6, 8, 10-12). In the New Testament **(2)** Paul says, *"God made [him] to be sin for us"* (2 Corinthians **5**:21); *"Christ became a curse for us"* (Galatians **3**:14). **(3)** Peter reflects Isaiah **53** when he writes that Christ bore our sorrows and by his stripes we are healed (1 Peter **2**:24).[4] The issue is whether such verbiage is meant as reality or imagery. Non-substitutionary theory understands it as imagery. Doing so does not deny the teaching of scripture; it denies that scripture teaches what penal substitution theory makes of it.

Taking substitution language as imagery or analogy is natural for the following reasons. **(a)** The discontinuous descriptions of Christ's atonement require that analogy is present in these descriptions: ransom (Matthew **20**:28; *etc*.), the brazen serpent (John **3**:14-15; *etc*.), animal sacrifice (Hebrews **10**:1-12; *etc*.), purifier (Hebrews **1**:3), founder (Hebrews **2**:10; *etc*.), conqueror (Hebrews **2**:14-15), example (1 Peter **2**:21-23), representative (Hebrews **2**:5-18), priest (Hebrews **5**-10), primogenitor (Colossians **1**:13-24), begetter (1 Peter **1**:23), purchaser (1 Corinthians **6**:20), protector (John **10**:11), testator (Hebrews **9**:16). Because the pictures are discontinuous, they do not form aspects of the same whole; at best one could be real and the others analogies to it.

**(b)** Some individual imageries must in fact be imageries because they contain elements foreign to what they represent. Notably the ransom analogy implies someone to pay the ransom to, but there is no such someone. Likewise, the substitution theory involves antinomies like those noted above (note "C" of Part I). Whenever paradoxes

arise in a viewpoint or whenever we have to use paradox to maintain the image, we are dealing with an image rather than a reality.

As with all analogies, **(c)** there are some elements in common between the imagery and the reality. On the negative side, both substitution and "identification" involve another person who endures pain because of something we did. Had we not sinned, Jesus would not have been involve painfully in the human predicament. On the positive side, in both substitution and "identification" there is a connection between our righteousness and his. By entering the extremes of our condition, Jesus qualified himself as an appropriate object of identification. In the human situation he became righteous by carrying out the will of the Father for him to the final degree, thus making him a very appropriate object of identification unto righteousness. In both substitution and identification there is a connection between our sin and his suffering and between his righteousness and our being viewed as righteous. Jesus may be viewed as a substitute, not for taking our punishment, but for replacing Adam, so to speak, as the representative head of the "new race: with whom we can identify (cp. Romans **5**:12). On the basis of these common elements, substitution can serve as helpful imagery for identification even though in other respects the manner of connection between these elements differs in the two mechanisms. In ransom, substitution, and Christus Victor, a helpless needing first person is saved by a second person without the needing person contributing to causing the salvation.

Analogies are often used to gain affective advantage. From the negative side, in this case substitution language causes us to feel, *"If I had not sinned, he would not have had to go through all that!"* From the positive side, substitution language helps us feel good about ourselves without feeling proud. Jesus is not simply an example of moral living or a source of motivation to repent of immoral living, but an object of identification in terms of whom the Father regards us as righteous unto fellowship with himself.

Now we can answer more directly the original question about the use of so much substitution language if there is no substitution in the atonement. The reason is twofold. **First**, substitution language was natural for people from a Jewish religious background. Even in Gentile territories the initial thrust of the gospel was among Jews (see below under "D"). Judaism had associated forgiveness with sacrifice, the sacrificial system being instituted in anticipation of Messiah's violent death.

**Second**, substitution language was corrective for people of Gentile philosophical background. Among Gentiles it was important to emphasize the positive character of matter because Greek dualism—Gnostic dualism in particular—degraded or repudiated fleshly existence. Although pagan religions did not prepare people well for associating forgiveness with sacrifices, it was useful to retain Jewish sacrificial imagery to reinforce a positive attitude toward Christ's incarnation, suffering, and resurrection.[5]

B. Strictly speaking, we need not deny penal substitution except as an ultimate frame of reference for salvation theory. Substitutionary atonement could apply under the Law of Moses. Christ came to save them that were legally lost. He was born of woman, born under the Law, to redeem them that were under the Law (Galatians **4**:4-5). We can say that those legally lost under the Law were legally saved by penal substitution, although that legal frame of reference itself was a secondary one. After all, law and

interpersonalism do share perfection as the standard; it is just that law has no provision for overcoming failures to live up to that standard. Legal mechanisms cannot finally take care of the problem because the problem is an interpersonal one: you cannot be justified by law because it is simply a statement of expectations with no remediation for failure to do so (cp. Hebrews **7**:19; Galatians **2**:16). Substitution imagery could be used and could be used as the most prominent imagery because it could apply in the lesser plane of legal human lostness and because such a condition would pertain to a significant element in the original Christian community. Besides, substitution imagery has the values noted above under III A. Penal substitution may be thought of as the functional equivalent under law for what ultimate self-sacrifice is under personal relationship.

One characteristic of an event is that it can simultaneously have more than one meaning, value, and purpose. Christ's death as an event can accomplish more than one kind of thing at the same time—penal substitution and culminated righteousness. Even in the legal context, however, we do observe that Mosaism refused the transfer-of-guilt principle except as symbolic ritual.

C. Is Christ's work merely symbolic? Certainly not. The sacrificial Passover lamb, the scapegoat ritual, and the like were symbolic forms of later reality (Hebrews **10**:1; cp. **8**:5; **9**:23), but Christ's work is the substance of which such forms were only foreshadows (Colossians **2**:17; Hebrews **8**:5; **10**:1. As far as what we are saying is concerned, substitution could perhaps be called "symbolic" although we prefer to speak of "substitution imagery," "substitution language," or "substitution analogy." It is substitution, however, that is symbolic, not Christ's work itself. What he did was real, and he did it for real reasons. He lived in real history subject to the features of the real human condition, subject to real death, even to violent death and that of a most horrible sort (Philippians **2**:7-8). He thereby established his own real righteousness as a man in the human arena. In doing so, he qualified himself as the only appropriate object of real human righteousness that we can really identify with. Our personal commitment to the Righteous Object of identification is God's "condition" for viewing us as righteous like him, which is a natural condition for fellowship with him who is righteous.

These points characterize all personal relationships. Fellowship always rests on being viewed as righteous, which in theory could be because we are righteous. But since "nobody's perfect," that possibility never exists either between people or between people and God, either in initial reconciliation or in continued friendship. In all social relationships, the issue is not specifically what people really are or do but how they are viewed by others. Relating is a practical matter. As with most practical "systems," a personal relationship can survive some foreign or contrary elements. As long as the "heart," or attitude, overrides actual foreign behaviors, a friendship can continue because the persons can decide to continue it. Repentance-forgiveness can remove "exceptions" to right behavior as a barrier to association; the other person can view the first as good even though the first is not absolutely so or actually so. The offended party uses appropriate "conditions" for viewing the offender as good. Those conditions always amount to some kind of identification with the offended party. Repentance itself involves identification with the other person. If the other person understands that the first one does care about

him, he can overlook individual failures at expressing care: *"Love covers a multitude of sins"* (James **5**:20; 1 Peter **4**:8).

In the case of reconciliation with God, Christ is an "extension" of the other side of the relationship—God the Father. In identifying with Christ, we identify with the Father himself for reconciliation, fellowship, and blessing (Matthew **28**:18-20). And that is what God calls on us to do. Of course, that is what impacts everything we do and are.

D. Is the proposed theory a form of the moral influence? Moral influence is aside from the idea here even though Christ's life and work for our salvation does shed moral influence. As a theory of atonement, however, such a viewpoint is not satisfactory for a couple reasons. **First**, moral influence does not avoid works; it does not feature God's reckoning the unrighteous as righteous. Without that feature, our righteousness in God's eyes could rest only on our own success at godly living; hence, it would be a personal righteousness (Leviticus **18**:5). It would mean actually continuing to do all—a perfect righteousness (Deuteronomy **27**:26). In combination these facts would put us in a legal perfection situation because "works of law" (Romans **3**:28) expresses the principle of personal perfection (Galatians **3**:10-12). "Holy," "righteous," and "just" mean perfectly holy, righteous, and just. Under that circumstance, once we sin we theoretically put ourselves into an irretrievable situation because imperfection cannot be overcome by the nature of what imperfection is. If somehow we did get back into fellowship with God, we would have to continue by living perfectly. We would still be in bondage to the legal perfection requirement; and if we failed again, we would be in bondage to the imperfection result. Moral influence misidentifies the sense in which Christ saves us. Influence applies to conversion; identification applies to atonement. Conversion deals with behavioral change—the new "how." Identification has to do with the new relationship—the new "who."

At best, moral influence would put Christ in the picture as an example to emulate and a motivator to repentance and good works. His love and example would influence us to holiness so we could have fellowship with a holy God. That would omit God's reckoning us righteous (grace) in contrast to our being righteous (works in response to moral influence). But repentance cannot cause the kind of result salvation is—reconciliation. A relationship cannot be caused by actions done on just one side of it, especially actions by the offending party. The decisive factor in renewal from an estranged relationship is the forgiveness by the other.

**Second**, moral influence does not include identification with Christ. The Messiah is the Righteous Other in the relationship. More specifically he is the Righteous One who serves as an extension of the Righteous Father (John **10**:30; *etc*.). The most crucial part of the atonement is this point: a righteousness reckoned to us by God because of our identification with the Righteous One; imputing righteousness is the positive side of forgiving sin. Jesus Christ is more than a martyr to a cause, the founder of a movement, or prophet for God; beyond such lesser things, he is the object of identification. Moral influence does not address past failure very well, whereas what we are saying addresses it by making forgiveness the decisive factor in eradicating past failure from the present situation. Forgiveness eradicates it by God's mentally removing it from consideration in present and future relationship with him.

A word of clarification may help in regard to the chapter entitled "Benefits of the Atonement" in my book *What the Bible Says About Salvation*. The chapter highlights three benefits of the atonement: repentance, righteousness, and resurrection. Let it be noted that these three form a chronological sequence, not a causal one. Repentance occurs chronologically before God reckons us righteousness, a reckoning that takes place before our resurrection at the last trump. Repentance motivated by Christ is not meant to be the defining category in which righteousness and resurrection then somehow take place. Christ's role would be limited to that of motivator for such repentance. Forgiveness would be because of repentance only rather than because of the character of the Righteous One with whom identification unto righteousness—the next step—is subsequently made. Our understanding, however, places Christ's decisive role as savior in the second step, not the first. Identification-unto-righteousness-unto-reconciliation is the heart of the atonement. Moral influence is not so much false as it is insufficient and irrelevant because the moral influence would have to get us to moral perfection to work and that does not even take into consideration past failures that have already broken the perfection requirement under law and in all relationships. Moral influence is a good truth, but it does not deal with atonement; it does not have anything to do with recreating the relationship itself; that has to be done by the offended person. Offenders might improve their life quality, but it will not make them perfect, it will not replace God's choosing to forgive, and it will not have Christ's righteousness to make up the difference between performance and perfection, that is, the righteousness the Father views us as having because of commitment to the Righteousness One. Beyond moral influence lies identity with the objectively righteous Father-through-Christ and the Father's reckoning.

The view presented here has been called "the interpersonal theory."[6] While such a label describes it correctly, it does not define it satisfactorily because it does not indicate the manner of connection between Christ's righteousness and ours that the Father views us as having. The specific "mechanism" of salvation is identification-plus-reckoning—atonement plus imputation. Identification is an interpersonal act on our part and reckoning is an interpersonal act on the Father's part. "Repentance and confession cleanse away all past obstacles to the forgiveness of sins" is simply not what is meant here.[7] Identifying with the Righteous One is the Father's condition for his reckoning us as righteous unto reconciliation. Our righteousness lies in God's mind.

The criticism here may stem from a confusion between what might be theoretically possible and what actually is. For the sake of argument, we might agree that repentance could be all that God might require and still be a just Justifier. But the New Testament indicates that within the repentance-forgiveness framework, he in fact specified an appropriate expression of repentance, trust, and identification with the Father: identification with the Righteous One incarnate, crucified, and resurrected. Even if God did not inherently have to establish that condition in that way, he nevertheless did so and did so for the most appropriate reasons. What he did establish is what we must state. When we preach the gospel, we center it around Christ's place in the atonement process. Even if Christ had not come among us as an extension of the Father, there would still be identification. The identification would have been directly with the Father himself rather than indirectly with him by virtue of identification with Christ, who is (at) one with the Father and like the Father—except for his having been in the flesh.

Appropriateness is at work here more than inherent necessity. God established an appropriate condition, which involved the incarnation of his Son to become that object of identification in the realm of human history. We do not have to interpret what God did as something he had to do or something he had to do that way. We need to say that it was appropriate for him to do so in a gracious effort to resolve an interpersonal problem. Inherent necessity is a characteristic of legal process, logical process, and natural process because those processes are deterministic. But we are dealing with an interpersonal problem, so the characteristics of the solution are the ones that are natural to interpersonal process, which is not deterministic in a positive sense. To put this differently, Satan did not put God under bondage by bringing sin into God's creation, so he had to kill his Righteous Son to save his sinful sons.

E. Does the proposed view deny then that Christ had to die? That depends on what is meant by "had to." Different kinds of necessity belong to different kinds of categories—law, nature, logic, interpersonalism. Besides, necessity can be figured in light of prior considerations that themselves may not be inherently necessary relative to originating purposes. But once those prior considerations have been decided upon, subsequent steps must follow. It was necessary for Christ to die given the Father's earlier choice for him to do so. It may not have been necessary for the Father to will for him to die, however, given fundamental purposes. Though God as sovereign is not subject to external, superior norms and controls—like the furies relative to the pagan gods, nevertheless out of concern for his people, he graciously did through Christ what would assist in drawing us to himself by his extreme expression of love for us (Romans **5**:7-11)

But even without inherent necessity, it is clearly most appropriate for the Father to call on the Son as savior to carry his obedience as far as the Father was going to call on Christ's many brothers to carry their own obedience (Hebrews **2**:5-18; **5**:7-9). It is inappropriate to expect more of your followers than you are willing to do. It was "necessary," then, for practical purposes for Jesus to do what he did, even if a person might imagine that it was not inherently necessary for theoretical ones.

Furthermore, we can say that, given the legal setting under Mosaism, it was necessary for Jesus to die as a penal substitute because he came first[8] to save them that were under law, not just to save them that were under humanity ("born of woman," Galatians **4**:4-5). For appropriateness, we take it, the Father had already decided before times eternal that Jesus would die (Revelation **13**:8).[9] Establishing a temporary legal setting for national Israel could bring in penal substitution without adding anything to what was already going to happen on grounds of appropriateness—the death of the savior Son. Saying these things, however, does not necessarily say that during Mosaism penal substitution was a real operative principle of divine jurisprudence.

There is no denying that scripture says Christ died for our sins (1 Corinthians **15**:3; *etc*.). The question in this section of the essay is a theoretical one—how his dying was for our sins and whether what he did was the only thing he could have done. As always, readers must get past the statements to the reality itself. They do that by understanding the full context of revealed information, by contemplating the nature of the case, and by applying general principles as they read specific statements. Applying that interpretation technique is important because human language in the Bible may speak

about subjects analogically as well as strictly, and readers must distinguish the two types of speaking.

For example, the Old Testament says quite clearly that Aaron was to put all the transgressions of the Israelites on the head of the scapegoat and send it away into the wilderness, and it would *"bear the iniquities"* of the people into the wilderness (Leviticus **16**:20-22). We judge the ceremony to be symbolic, not real, because sins are not the kind of thing that can be laid on the head of a goat, and because sins cannot be carried from one place to another and thereby get separated from someone by getting lost in a desert.

The text also clearly says that the other goat as well as a young bull was to be killed and offered as a sin offering (Leviticus **16**:6-10, 15-19). It does no good to insist on the wording of the Leviticus texts because the larger context of revelation elsewhere says that *"the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin"* (Hebrews **10**:1-11 < Psalm **40**:6-8). Surely the denial of the salvific effectiveness of animal sacrifice was as grating on the ears of Jews who heard Christian preaching as non-substitutionary atonement is on the ears of John Calvin's followers. It was for these reasons that many Jews considered it blasphemous to say that the temple was not essential to the divine plan (Acts **6**:14), that the Law and customs of Moses could be superseded (Acts **6**:14), that circumcision need not be enjoined on Gentile converts to the Jewish Messiah (Acts **15**, *etc*.), and that national Israel was a temporary manifestation of the people of God (Romans **11**, *etc*.).[10]

Jesus did pray fervently in Gethsemane, *"If possible, let this cup pass from me"* (Matthew **26**:69; *etc*.; cp. Matthew **26**:54). The fact that the Father did not take it away does not prove that he could not take it away or that it was not inherently possible for him to remove it and still accomplish human salvation. When God does not give a "yes" answer to our prayers, we do not infer that he cannot do so; we say that his grace is sufficient for us (cp. 2 Corinthians **12**:9).

From the other side of the issue, we might question how Jesus could have asked God to remove the cup without knowingly praying against God's inherently unchangeable will on this matter. Would such a prayer have bordered on sin, a virtual rejection of his own appointed mission? Furthermore, how could there be any real meaning to Jesus' later comment that he could still ask the Father to send twelve legions of angels to keep him from being delivered and the Father would send them (Matthew **26**:53)? Likewise, Hebrews **5**:7-10 says that Jesus cried out to him who was able to save him from death; the Father was <u>not</u> able to save him from death if his death was inherently necessary. Under penal substitution God was not sovereign at this point; he was bound by the nature of the case he himself previously had to establish.[11] Did Satan have God "over a barrel?" At least we can say that God's not removing the cup does not show that he could not have removed it.

It is important to keep in mind one of our three original criteria—that Christ did not die for nothing (Galatians **2**:21). Saying that he did not die for nothing, however, is not the same as saying he had to die. It means simply that his death was not useless in that Mosaic law-keeping was a practical enough basis for human righteousness, and in that his dying more fully demonstrated God's love for the people he was lying a foundation to save.

F. <u>Since substitutionary animal sacrifices were not actually effective for salvation, why were they instituted at all if they did not even foreshadow a future reality?</u> Such a

question, when answered, is not answered directly from biblical statements, but from theological perception based on the nature of the case and guided by the principle of consistency. The appropriate response is, first, that animal sacrifices were logically after what they prefigured. In light of the future fact that the Messiah would be killed, substitutionary animal sacrifices for the forgiveness of sins could be instituted as an analogy to the future event that culminated in Messiah's bloody death on a cross. Had there been no such event in the offing, the sacrifices might not have been instituted. Sacrifices were already part of Near Eastern culture; so God could institute them as a culturally relevant practice filled with a new symbolic meaning that derived from a future analogous reality. Substitutionary animal sacrifices were instituted because by analogy they foreshadowed an event in which Messiah shed his blood in death on a cross for our sins. Animal sacrifices did not foreshadow a substitutionary event. Substitution had to do with the animal sacrifices, not what they foreshadowed. That is why in part they were not effective. Besides not being human or "sinless," they were substitutes, which are artificial in punishment for guilt.

G. Is not the proposed view a denial of the blood atonement? Scripture says, *"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission"* (Hebrews **9**:22). The text from Hebrews, however, is speaking *"according to the Law,"* which is not a final frame of reference. The fact is, Jesus did die a violent death as part of what he did for saving us from sin; the statements about blood atonement are adequately understood as *post facto* sacrificial language that carries through on analogies to the Old Testament ritual preparation for his ministry.[12] The reason for the blood terminology in the first place is not that blood has any inherent power to cleanse away something like sin, but that the basis for cleansing away sin involved violent death in this case, given the future fact that Messiah would be killed as a result of his incarnation to save us flesh-and-blood people from our sins.

H. Does the proposed theory deny imputation?[13] In a sense it does, but it is John Calvin's imputation that it denies. The proposed view denies imputation in the sense of legally transferring righteousness from Christ to us. Imputation is not at all denied in the sense of regarding, reckoning, or imputing righteousness to us—considering us righteous like Christ. We are viewed, reckoned, regarded as being like the One with whom we have been willing to identify ourselves and to whom we are willing to commit ourselves and to the same degree of obedience to the Father. Righteousness is imputed, not from Christ to us, but in God's mind regarding us as like Christ. Righteousness is imputed to us in God's mind, not transferred from Christ to us in the legal records. So to speak, salvation is not something that takes place "on paper" but between persons, not on stone but in hearts, not aside from God in the legal process but in the mind and will of God as person. The point is how we are viewed righteous by God in terms of his Son and why he views us so. He does not consider us righteous because we are righteous nor because someone else's righteousness has somehow been objectively transferred to us, but because we identify with, and commit ourselves to, the Righteous One. God subjectively regards us as "like" the One we are willing to identify with, commit to, share the values and purposes of, and accept the leadership of. God's attitude toward us is not based decisively even on our repentance, but on our identity with the Messiah.

## IV. Reasons for Concern

### A. Correct systematic understanding

As with all matters scripture speaks about, we want to be believing what God means rather than something else. That is not just a concern for being right. Mistakes on fundamental issues can skew other parts of the picture, and atonement through Jesus Christ is about as basic as anything distinctive to Christian teaching.

### B. Evangelism

Paradoxes and inconsistencies work against conversion. Can an unbeliever love, trust, and serve an arbitrary God? Can we expect someone outside of Christ to accept what does not make sense? Such questions assume that John Calvin's theory is irrational, given the rest of revelation. The fact that a doctrine does not make sense to someone does not mean it is false or cannot be what God meant. But the question here is not about accepting the truth; it is not about God's will or intention itself or about his right to choose; it is about our interpretation of his revealed intentions, given the rest of what he says elsewhere on this and other topics. Inconsistencies, dilemmas, and paradoxes created by our interpretation cannot be justified by appealing to the weakness of human wisdom. After all, it is the weakness of human reason that creates dilemmas from self-consistent revelation. When we formulate doctrines from scripture, we take responsibility for at least postulating answers to difficulties created by our misformulations. Inconsistencies should warn us that we have not done our work right. Satisfying answers have not been given to difficulties like those posed in Part I above. Unless adequate responses can be developed or an alternative understanding can be derived from the New Testament, our evangelistic efforts will be relatively unproductive among thoughtful people.

### C. Missions

Penal substitution atonement theory weakens the cross-cultural application of the Great Commission. Unlike the ancient Mediterranean cultures, much of the modern world has no tradition of sacrifice, much less sacrifice for forgiveness. So sacrificial imagery does not provide a natural point of contact for the gospel. Especially under the threat of advancing Islam, presenting salvation to Muslims through an imagery based on penal substitutionary sacrifice needlessly limits its effectiveness. From its inception Islam has rejected animal sacrifice as irrelevant to divine-human relationships. Today's industrial nations similarly lack a tradition of animal sacrifice. The same is true of all the former communist bloc countries as well as western Europe and North America. If substitution is not rooted in reality, it should not be the required vehicle for expressing salvation through Christ in situations that do not even have a cultural notion of substitution. Conveying atonement through substitutionary imagery becomes dysfunctional among peoples to whom such imagery is foreign. And that is on top of the

need to remove explanations of Christian concepts in ways that do not make sense, that are internally inconsistent.

## Endnotes

[1]John Dahms called attention to this theme as a neglected "emphasis" in the atonement: *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, March, 1993, p. 15.

[2]It might be possible to understand Jesus' words in John **17**:4 as meaning, *"It is as good as finished,"* but there is certainly no need to take them that way aside from the required implications of penal substitution theory. It is doubtful that there is any difference in the words for "finish" that would affect this question: τελειόω (John **17**:4) *vs*. τελέω (John **19**:30). One more conceivable variable might be a subjective-objective variable: psychologically Jesus was already "over the hump" in anticipating what he had to face the next morning after John **17**. The *"strong crying and tears"* (Hebrews **5**:7), the angel had come and ministered to him, and the sweat like blood were over (Luke **22**:43-44[ms]). The synoptic gospels, however, do seem to put that "break-over" point later after his threefold prayer in Gethsemane (Matthew **26**:36-46; Mark **13**:32-42; Luke **22**:39-46).

[3] In nature, <u>force</u> connects cause and result; in logic, <u>form</u> connects them.

[4]One meaning of **(4)** Old Testament sacrifices is forgiveness of sins. The connection is particularly close with the <u>Passover lamb</u> both as to violent death, the unblemishedness/sinlessness of the one slain, and the time of death. The paschal lamb generates all the New Testament lamb imagery for the Messiah as savior from sin: *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"* (John **1**:29; cp. **1**:36; 1 Corinthians **5**:7; 1 Peter **1**:18-19). The Lamb terminology is the dominant image for Christ in the Book of Revelation (**5**:6, 8, 12-13; **6**:1, 16; **7**:9-10, 14, 17; **12**:11; **13**:8, 11; **14**:1, 4[2], 10; **15**:3; **17**:14; **19**:7, 9; **21**:9, 14, 22-23, 27; **22**:1, 3). The sacrificial-lamb imagery melts into the Suffering Servant background from Isaiah **52**:13-**53**:12 (note Acts **8**:26-39). The <u>Lord's Supper</u>, instituted at Passover, ties into that background as well (Matthew **26**:26-29 = Mark **14**:22-25 = Luke **22**:14-23; cp. 1 Corinthians **11**:20-32). **(5)** Christ's "<u>bearing our sins</u>" comes up in Hebrews **9**:27-28 as well as 1 Peter **2**:24. **(6)** Combined with ransom imagery, Christ said he would give his life as a ransom "<u>in place of</u>" many (Matthew **20**:28 = Mark **10**:45). **(7)** *"Dying '<u>on behalf of</u>' sins"* (ὑπέρ) is less precise, but it could refer to a substitutionary idea (1 Corinthians **15**:3; Galatians **1**:4). Likewise, Christ tasted of death "for" every person (Hebrews **2**:9). **(8)** In playing out the <u>Adam-Christ imagery</u> in Romans **5**:12-21, Paul says that as by the trespass of the one the many were made trespassers, so by the one obedient act of the One the many were made righteous.

[5]A third reason for the substitutionary imagery could be that (3) substitution could apply in the lesser plane of legal lostness (see next ¶, "B").

[6]Cp. Jack Cottrell in *God the Redeemer*, pp. 424-29.

[7]*Ibid*., p. 426

[8]Jesus himself came first to save the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matthew **15**:24). He sent his disciples first to the Israelites (Matthew **10**:5-6). Even in the Gentile territories, the gospel went first to the Israelites (Acts **3**:26; **13**:26; Romans **1**:16; **2**:9-10; cp. **11**:11-24). Salvation comes from the Jews (John **4**:22; Romans **3**:1-2; **9**:4-5).

[9]The text of Revelation **13**:8 reads, οὗ οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς τοῦ ἀρνίου τοῦ ἐσφαγμένου <u>ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου</u>. The underlined phrase is positioned next to "slain" (ἐσφαγμένου). Since that connection makes good sense, it is probably to be preferred to the ASV and NASB analysis, which connect it with "written" (γέγραπται). If *"from the foundation of the world"* does belong with "written," the statement does not connect with our point in this argument.

[10]The similarity between these items and the Messianic atonement is not absolute, of course. The former items were temporary because from the beginning they were to be superseded by Messianic realities. We do not imply by the comparison that the Messianic imageries are not analogical because they are temporary. Our concern is to draw attention to the hermeneutical principle of authorial intent. It is not the wording that seals the case for a certain meaning, but the intent of the author; and the author may choose to speak analogically for practical reasons instead of speaking strictly for theoretical reasons. In other words, interpreters must bring to bear the near and distant systematic context on the specifics of a presentation; the "distant context" must shape the "near context"; the general must shape the specific.

[11]The words of the Hebrew writer could refer to the Father's <u>ability</u> rather than to a situational <u>possibility</u> given the salvation plan already in place. The text, however, puts the issue in terms of his obedience.

[12]Other texts that speak of Christ's atonement in terms of blood are Matthew **26**:28 (cp. Mark **14**:24; Luke **22**:20; 1 Corinthians **10**:16; **11**:25, 27); Acts **20**:28; Romans **3**:25; **5**:9; Ephesians **1**:7; **2**:13; Colossians **1**:14, 20; Hebrews **9**:12-14, 20, 25; **10**:19, 29; **12**:24; **13**:12, 20-21; 1 Peter **1**:2, 19; 1 John **1**:7; **5**:8; Revelation **1**:5; **5**:9; **7**:14; **12**:11; cp. Hebrews **10**:22.*

[13]*op. cit.*, p. 425.