

Dear brother Turner,

Greetings, and thank you for the response. I appreciate your diligent attention to details, and I should like to make this rebuttal to your response.

1. *Regarding whether or not a volunteer can substitute himself for another without violating the Law of Moses as cited...* You wrote, “Neither the letter nor the spirit of Deuteronomy 24:16 prohibited one from graciously volunteering to pay the deserved penalty of another.” A defense of volunteerism does not prove that Jesus’ death had to be vicarious. I agree that He died willingly, just not vicariously. Also, one must be careful not to confuse *debt* with *penalty*, and I will take that up momentarily, for penalty and debt are not the same things.
2. *Regarding whether or not God is amenable to the laws He gives man...* In paragraphs 2 through 5, you explained that the laws God gives are only bound upon man, not upon God Himself. I agree that God cannot be bound, against His will, to the laws He gives that bind mankind. But God can choose to subject Himself to laws. Jesus took on flesh and became subject to the laws of nature (gravity, inertia, etc.), the laws that govern the life of flesh (food, shelter, etc.), the laws of Rome and Judea, subjection to His earthly parents (Luke 2:51), and the Law of Moses since He was born under it (Gal. 4:4). What Jesus did was foreshadowed in the Law (Heb. 10:1), which draws an unbreakable link between Jesus and the Law. God chose to have a perfect sacrifice that fulfilled all the standards of the Law of Moses: an unblemished Lamb to take away sin (John 1:29).

If God had exercised His divine right to ignore the Law of Moses, we could not lay any charge against Him for it. But if the Law of Moses does prohibit substitution, and God freely chose to prepare a sacrifice in accordance with the Law of Moses, it is the substitution theorist who must admit his error. But even if the Law of Moses does not prohibit substitution, or if God exercised His divine right to ignore the Law, that still does not prove that the sacrifice had to be vicarious, for the doctrine still must be written somewhere in the scriptures before we can believe it.

On this matter you also wrote, “Therefore, I view your first mistake as trying to make God Himself subject to the law code He has given to His sinful creatures—a law code which was designed to prevent them from making the same sort of mistake you have made, which is one that perverts justice and righteousness by making God a sinner for doing what He, but not man, had the perfect right to do.” I am not trying to make God Himself subject to the law code He gave man. The scriptures themselves teach that God (Christ) subjected Himself to the Law when He was born under it (Gal. 4:4-5), lived sinlessly according to it (a “high priest...without sin” Heb. 4:15), and died as a perfect sacrifice in fulfillment of the standards which the Law required. If Jesus can volunteer to be a sacrifice, why can’t He also volunteer to be under the Law? I lay no charge of sin against God for giving Jesus as the sacrifice, I merely point out that God chose to do it that way.

3. *Regarding Ezekiel 18...* Your explanation of Ezekiel 18 took into account the historical context of the message, but overlooked the words that are actually written! Yes the Israelites were complaining about their situation, but notice God’s promise to change their conditions in verse 3: “As I live, declares the Lord God, you are surely not going to use this proverb in Israel anymore.” Then God declared that, from now on, each person will live or die according to his own deeds, and vicarious punishment was not part of the plan going forward.
4. *Regarding Paul’s assumption of the debt of Onesimus...* Paul’s action regarding Onesimus was certainly an act of grace. No law compelled Paul to assume the debt, neither Roman law nor Jewish law nor Christ’s law, and it would have been wrong to charge it to Paul against his will. Since no law compelled Paul to assume the debt, nor prohibited it, Paul cannot be charged with sin by taking the debt upon himself, and it appears that you and I agree on this. Likewise, I do not charge Jesus with sin for willingly

taking away the sins of the world, for His sacrifice was an act of grace, done even in accordance with the law of God's own gracious nature. You cited Albert Barnes, "*He was willing, by putting himself in the place of Onesimus, to bear the consequences, and to have Onesimus treated as if he had not done it.*" I must disagree with you and Barnes' explanation here...it was not Paul and Onesimus who traded places...it was the debt which was moved (imputed) from one to the other. If Paul and Onesimus were trading places, Paul would become the servant of Philemon, and Onesimus would have stayed in Rome.

Perhaps this is where you and I fundamentally differ on this larger issue. I say that Christ intervened to take sin away so that God need not "pull the trigger" on those who have saving faith, and your position has God pulling the trigger on those who have saving faith but Christ stepped in front of it to take the bullet for them.

So you wrote, "*As I see it, then, you have but two choices: you must recognize that you have (1) wrongly interpreted and applied the passages under discussion, or (2) you must view Paul as sinning when he asked Philemon to "put that to my account."* No, I don't have to take either of those options since Paul's voluntary assumption of the debt was not a matter of law or sin, but an act of grace. Paul did not sin by assuming the debt, and he did not sin by involving Philemon. But the real issue at the heart of this substitution theory debate is not the condition of Philemon, to whom a debt was owed (equating to God), nor the condition of Paul, who assumed a debt he did not owe (equating to Jesus), but the condition of fortunate Onesimus, who was released from a debt he could not pay (that's us). It was not the men who moved, one to take another's place...it was the debt that moved, from one man to another. And when the debt of the first man was taken away, he was debt free. Where substitution theory gets off-track here is that it confuses debt with penalty. They are not the same. If you have ever taken a loan, you know there is both a debt to be repaid and a penalty to suffer if you fail to pay it; you prefer to pay the debt and avoid the penalty, right? Jesus took our debt away to save us from the penalty...that is what sacrifice achieves, and Colossians 2:14 actually says He "canceled out the certificate of debt...having nailed it to the cross." Hebrews 9:28 says, "so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without reference to sin, to those who eagerly await Him." It does not say He bore our penalty...it says He bore our sins, just as John the Baptizer declared (John 1:29). But substitution theory says, without a single scripture to support it, that Jesus took our penalty away. No, hell (the real penalty) still exists, and you and I can still go there if we incur new sins (debts) which are not taken away before judgment comes. Do you believe that you still bear your debts even now, but that you are exempted from the penalty of hell?

5. *Regarding the crux of the matter...* You said the crux of the matter is "*whether one is permitted to voluntarily take the penalty of another.*" No, that is not what I am arguing against. You are confusing penalty with debt. My position is that Christ's sacrificial death on the cross results in the forgiveness of sins (debts) for those who have faith, so that they are justified by His blood, spared from God's wrath, and thus saved from the eternal penalty which will rightly fall on those who die in their guilt. I believe that God is just when, on judgment day, He condemns the unforgiven sinner to pay the full penalty due for his own unremitted sins (debts) in an eternal torment. I believe that God is just when, on that same day, He welcomes into eternal bliss those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb, not because the penalty was already paid, but because the penalty cannot be laid against them since their sins (debts) were forgiven in Christ.
6. In paragraph 12 you wrote, "*what I find hard to believe about your position is how you can reject the vicarious or substitutionary nature of Jesus' sacrificial death while claiming to believe that the sum total of God's word is the objective standard for everything we believe and practice.*" Brother Turner, I will wholeheartedly embrace the "vicarious or substitutionary nature" of it when you identify a scripture that uses those words. In spite of your efforts to disprove my position, which is that Christ's sacrifice does not have to be vicarious in order to be sufficient to save the believer, you have not yet proven your position at all, which is that Christ's sacrifice must be vicarious. Again I ask you: where is the scripture

that actually says He died in our place?

You discredited Barnett by citing his own findings regarding the inconsistency of lexicons. This works both ways though...you can be no more sure that "anti" or "huper" mean "in place of" than Barnett can be that they mean "for the sake of." Yet not a single decent English translation, with all those scholars (many of whom believe in substitution theory), found fit to render either preposition as "in place of." I agree that *"we are not at liberty to pick and choose which types we impose on the antitype, who is Christ Himself."* You cannot find the word "substitution" in any scripture that describes Christ's sacrifice, nor can you find it permitted in the Law of Moses (the types), but you are imposing substitution upon Him (the antitype), which is your own *preunderstanding*. I maintain that substitution theory is an interpretation of man, not the actual words of God which we defend. You accuse me (and those like me) of having already made up our minds to exclude substitution, but perhaps it is you who have made up your mind to force substitution into your interpretation. All you have to do is produce one single scripture that actually says "in our place" or "substitute" or "vicarious" relating Jesus' death to mankind...just one scripture, and I will defend that scripture with as much vigor as I have employed in writing this!

7. The Garbage Man analogy is just that: an analogy. It is not the perfect explanation of Isaiah 53 and was not intended to be such. It didn't have to be a garbage man...could have been any of several other analogies. It is merely an illustration that shows that Isaiah 53 can be understood without substitution, and that Isaiah 53 does not have to teach substitution, which you and others have imposed upon it by your own *preunderstanding*.
8. *Regarding Romans 3:26...* You challenged my explanation of justification, saying, *"where does the Bible ever say anything about sinners who are saved by the precious blood of Jesus being viewed by God as "innocent" or "not guilty"? It doesn't."* Thank you for conceding that something that is not actually written must be rejected! That's been my point all along. But I'm happy to let the scriptures speak. Let's start with Romans 4:6-8, where Paul, speaking of David and quoting Psalm 32:1-2, links righteousness to having sins forgiven, covered, and not imputed or taken into account. Hebrews 8:12 and 9:17 say our sins are remembered no more by God. John 1:29 says He takes away the sins of the world. There are others you know, but these are sufficient to show that **a person can have his sins forgiven, covered, not imputed to his account, remembered no more, and taken away.** And since you brought up the case of Onesimus, what was his standing with Philemon, regarding that debt, once it was put to Paul's account? Was Onesimus not regarded as innocent of the debt at that point? Yes he was...freed from the debt, and exempt from any penalty that might come from it, not because the penalty was suffered by another in his place, but because the debt was taken away from him before the penalty was exacted. Since you quoted from Albert Barnes and Adam Clark, to answer your question, I want to quote from someone more like ourselves, our departed brother Robert F. Turner, himself an advocate of substitution theory, who said in his book "Sermons on Grace" on page 77:

To be 'justified' is to be pronounced free of guilt. It was a legal term, used in courts of law. When a man was tried, all evidence heard, and the conclusion reached that he was innocent, he would be pronounced not guilty. He would be 'justified.' The word 'justified' and 'righteous' are from the same basic Greek word.

You wrote, *"I therefore reiterate, where are "innocent" and "not guilty" used to described those who have been saved by the blood of Christ?"* In 2 Corinthians 7:11, "In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be **innocent** in the matter." The Corinthian Christians had in fact done wrong in their original handling of the case of the man who had his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5), drawing Paul's rebuke. But their true repentance resulted in their innocence in the matter. The Philippians were urged to "prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach"(Phi. 2:15); I wonder how Paul expected them to achieve innocence, if it was not by the blood of Christ? Innocence is

achieved either by sinless perfection or by cleansing from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9); Jesus was innocent His entire life, but we receive the declaration of innocence by being cleansed by His blood...that's how the Corinthians and the Philipians reached it.

9. *Regarding blood and death...* Yes I believe the blood and the death of the body of Jesus are inextricably linked. Your citation of “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” goes to my point as well, which is that Christ’s role as the sacrifice was determined before sin entered the world, before there was any person to be a substitute for, and that He was only One God ever destined to death on a cross. God specifically foreordained that Jesus would die on the cross as a sacrifice. God didn’t create man, see man sin, and then later decide that man’s own death would be insufficient and that a substitute had to go in, akin to a “pinch-hitter” entering the ballgame at a critical point, or a “substitute teacher” taking a class while the regular teacher is out sick, or using a stick of butter where a cup of milk was called for in a recipe. Jesus was, as you wrote in paragraph 19, “the *only* one who was qualified.” Substitution theory has Christ doing man’s work on the cross. I maintain Christ did God’s work on the cross (grace!)...work that only God could do (grace!), that only Christ was qualified to do, work that was predetermined before the foundation of the world, not as a substitute, but as exactly that which was the only thing God would accept.
10. *Regarding how I arrived at my conclusions...* In paragraph 25, you asked if I arrived at my conclusions the same way brother Barnett did. No, I did not, and I don’t think it is fair for you to assume that brother Barnett put the cart before the horse in how he arrived at his conclusions. As I mentioned in the text of my previous email, as a teenager I wondered about substitution theory, though I had never been told there was a reason to doubt it, and long before Barnett published his book. But for many years I preached substitutionary atonement in numerous illustrations, though it always bothered me that I could not ever find a scripture that actually said substitution...only indirect suggestions that depended on human interpretation such as you have offered. And if anyone had challenged me on it back then, I probably would have defended it in much the same way you are now.

I arrived at my present conclusions by objective Bible study. When I started studying this topic in depth, I abandoned the notion that Christ’s death had to be, or could not be, substitutionary in nature, and simply let the scriptures speak for themselves. I did research with Greek and Hebrew lexicons and such to find meaning and usage of words. I read commentaries of course, seeking to know how more learned men had explained various passages. Barnett’s book confirmed much of what I had already read, and gave me additional points to consider. I read history as well, to see where various interpretations originated. Of course I’ve read things written by our brethren and things written by scholars of numerous denominations. I found that Barton W. Stone conflicted with Alexander Campbell on substitutionary atonement (Stone opposed it). I found that typical Methodists today reject it, while Catholics and Calvinists and Pentecostals embrace it. But in the end, for me, it all came down to the actual words in the Bible. The absence of the specific words that would clearly teach substitution settles it, just as the silence of the scriptures regarding mechanical instruments in church music today prohibits us from using them. I don’t require further evidence than that. I believe the actual words of the Bible.

11. *On what Jesus suffered on the cross...* You wrote in paragraph 26, “*Truth is, what Jesus, who was God enfleshed, actually experienced in His passion (viz., His suffering and agony on our behalf) is quite beyond the comprehension of finite creatures.*” I am sure you are aware that 2 other men were crucified alongside Jesus that day. Before that day, crucifixion was not an uncommon punishment levied upon criminals, and since that day, many more have suffered the same cruel fate. No, you are wrong on this to say that no one can comprehend what Jesus suffered in the flesh. Thousands have experienced it and comprehended it, and the Bible nowhere suggests that He suffered in the flesh any more greatly than any other human being who was crucified. Perhaps you were referring to spiritual suffering, as you wrote in paragraph 28, “*When He suffered on our behalf, He suffered not just in His physical human body, but in His divine nature as well.*” Please tell me, brother Turner, **who inflicted this suffering upon His divine**

nature? Did Satan do it? Did the Father do it? Who harmed Jesus' eternal soul? What does the Bible ACTUALLY SAY about this alleged suffering of His divine nature? Where do you find that idea in the scriptures? 1 Peter 3:18 says he was "put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit", but you oppose Peter by saying Jesus suffered in the divine nature as well. Again, you must find yourself defending either the actual words of the Bible or a human interpretation that imposes meaning where the words are lacking.

In paragraph 28 you also wrote, "*His suffering as He was suspended between heaven and earth on Calvary's tree was more than equivalent to eternal punishment in hell for every member of the human race.*" More than equivalent to eternal punishment in hell? Again, this is fanciful speculation, based on a "preunderstanding" seeking to impose meaning where words are not written, and without actual foundation in the scriptures. And then in paragraph 29, you stated "*In spite of all that Jesus was experiencing in our stead, He did not believe He was being totally forsaken by the Father.*" You have created a state of suffering for Jesus that is less than totally forsaken, yet worse than eternal hell...is it some version of purgatory? The prophecy of Genesis 3:15 says "He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel," but you have Jesus getting the worst of it. I beg you brother, repent and return from this speculative folly!

12. *On universal atonement...* You referenced Barnett's comments on universal salvation. I'm not here to defend Barnett, and if you take issue with what he wrote, he is quite capable of defending himself.
13. Finally, you have said repeatedly that you do not support the Calvinist/Catholic versions of substitution theory, and yet you have quoted from denominational writers (Barnes and Clarke) who defend it and you have defended the denominational idea that Jesus' spirit went to some sort of hell for punishment. I find nothing in your letter that differs from what Calvinists/Catholics teach on substitution theory, and I find that even your methods of imposing your preunderstanding mimic their own, resulting in the same errant human interpretations.

Thank you for this discussion. Your inputs have compelled me to examine the scriptures more closely, with the result that my conviction on the matter is further strengthened, and I am emboldened to discuss this matter with more and more people. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be so enlightened.