

Your original post on Facebook ARE discussion thread:

“David, in your response to Aaron Whaley, you mentioned that the concept of penal substitution requires the imputation of our sins to Jesus on the cross. Yes, it does. You then went on to say, “I think all of us here reject the idea of imputation as well.” I assume you have kept up with what has been said on this thread, thus, I am made to wonder what in the world made you think that I do not believe man’s sins were imputed or reckoned to Jesus. That’s really the argument I’ve been making from the very beginning. I did deny the Calvinistic idea that Jesus’ perfect doing is somehow imputed to those of us who render obedience to Him by faith. Again, this makes me think you are equating the so-called substitutionary theory of the Calvinists with the arguments I and others have made. So, let me get to the point. You say, “Some here say that the sins were taken away by a non-substitutionary sacrifice, thus rendering the sinner legally innocent (justified), and thereby canceling the need for punishment...the propitiation ‘turned aside’ God’s wrath by removing guilt,” which is your position as I understand it. My question for you, and I am expecting a biblical response, is HOW could such a sacrifice alone do that?”

Dear Brother Allan,

I apologize for not responding sooner to this. Let me begin by saying a couple of things about where I'm coming from on this discussion. First, I'm not here to defend the slides published by ARE that prompted this discussion. Second, I'm not here because of some great fear of Calvinistic doctrine sneaking in. We can discuss these issues without making any reference to Calvinism at all, and I won't make any references to it in this message. I am participating in this discussion to defend the actual words used in the Bible.

I apologize if I misrepresented your position when I said that "I think all of us here reject the idea of imputation as well." After reading your further explanation in the discussion thread, I think we agree that our sins were “put on” Jesus, though we may have slightly different understandings of what “put on” means. I read your article on your web site “Did Jesus Die Vicariously?” and since I see that you already agree that Jesus’ sacrifice is acceptable to God, I don’t see any point in trying to defend His sacrifice. Nevertheless, I’ll indulge both of us in the foolishness of further discussion.

You challenged me to answer "HOW could such a sacrifice alone do that?" (The antecedent of "that" is the propitiation which turned aside God's wrath by removing guilt.) I’m sorry to disappoint you, but I won’t be backed into a corner of saying salvation is this “alone” or “only” anything; salvation is everything the Bible says it is. I will, however, defend my conviction that Jesus’ death was not substitutionary in its nature. This is not difficult to show, for the Law and Prophets specifically prohibited substitutionary deaths of a man in place of another man.

Deut. 24:16 "Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin." (Also quoted in 2 Kings 14:6.)

Ezek. 18:19-20 "Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?' When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself."

Isaiah 5:20 "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

Take note that these are the actual words of the Bible. Not "conveyed ideas" or "implied concepts." I'm not interpreting or explaining them...they are clear to understand. The "conveyed ideas" and "implied concepts" of substitution theory can only be arrived at by human interpretation, not by the actual words that are written. Human reasoning leads to such theories, but the clear actual words of God prohibit such conclusions. To say that the idea of substitution is "clearly suggested" is to admit that it is not explicitly stated in actual words.

The prophets also foretold a new covenant in which there would be no substitutionary deaths of man for man (bold emphasis mine):

Jer. 31:27-34 "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and with the seed of beast. As I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy and to bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant," declares the Lord. "In those days they will not say again, 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge.' **But everyone will die for his own iniquity**; each man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth will be set on edge. "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "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. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Hebrews 8 makes it abundantly clear that Jeremiah was talking about the new covenant in Christ.

So what we have here is, by the Law of Moses and the Prophets, proof that substitutionary death of one man for another man was prohibited. And in the new covenant, substitutionary death of man in place of another man was also prohibited. Since Jesus lived while the Law of Moses was still in effect, He was subject to it while He lived. If Jesus died as a substitute for one man or any number of men, He violated the Law of Moses and the inspired word of the prophets. And since we know Jesus never actually sinned, the sacrificial death of Jesus could not have been a substitutionary death.

I could stop here and be satisfied that the scriptures eliminate substitution theory. But I'll indulge us both a little further in the foolishness of writing. Next I will explain why it didn't need to be substitutionary to provide propitiation.

Consider the first Passover of the Hebrews in Egypt, recorded in Exodus 12. Go ahead and read it to refresh your memory of the exact words, for we are interested in exact words, not just "conveyed ideas" or "suggested concepts." God gave specific instructions to them on how to prepare for the Passover. They had to spread some of the blood on the doorposts and lintel of the house (verse 7). When the destroyer came, God was looking for one thing: the blood on the doorposts. Note verse 13 very closely: "The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt." When God came, He came looking for the blood. It had to be the right blood (the blood of the Passover lamb), it had to be in the right place (the doorposts), and it had to be there at the right time (the night the destroyer came).

My point here is that the right blood, in the right place, at the right time, is what turned away the destroyer. It saved the Hebrews from God's wrath...it turned away God's wrath...it propitiated God's wrath. God specifically stated exactly which blood He required: the blood of the lamb. Not as a substitute for human blood, but as the only blood He would accept. For the Hebrews in this case, God was both just and justifier. He was just in that He justly poured out His wrath on those who deserved it: the Egyptians and anyone who failed to obey the Passover properly. He was the justifier in that He provided the Hebrews a way to escape that wrath: a sacrifice and the blood to turn away the destroyer. And the New Testament confirms it in Heb. 11:28 "By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of the blood, so that he who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them."

How does this relate to Christ? Paul told the Corinthians "Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7). On judgment day, when people stand before God's judgment seat, God will be looking for the blood. Those who stand in their own guilt will be punished with eternal death...that is justice Those who stand washed in the blood will be given eternal life.

Now here is why the blood is so important:

Genesis 9:4 "'Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.'"

Leviticus 17:11 says "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement."

Leviticus 17:14 says, "For as for the life of all flesh, its blood is identified with its life."

Deuteronomy 12:23 "Only be sure not to eat the blood, for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh."

The blood is important because of the relationship between the blood and the life. In the sacrificial system of the Law of Moses, it was the blood that was used to make atonement and to consecrate holy things (Heb. 9:19-21 states it well). It was the blood that was sprinkled on the people, applied to Aaron and his sons, applied to the altar, and sprinkled on the mercy seat. And under that system, it had to be the blood of bulls and goats, for that is specifically what God commanded under the Law of Moses. No other blood was permitted, just as “strange fire” was not permitted. And when they observed everything properly, God accepted the blood to atone for sins. However, the Hebrew writer demonstrates that the blood of bulls and goats did not actually take away sin, and the Law made nothing perfect. The blood of the Lamb of God was required for that. The blood of Christ was the only blood that could ever totally deal with sin. Not as a substitute for human blood, but as the original blood that was the only blood qualified to serve in such a role. Hebrews 13:11-12 says “For the bodies of those animals whose blood is brought into the holy place by the high priest as an offering for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the gate.”

I want to point out also that there was propitiation in the sacrifices of the Old Testament. I haven't counted how many, but I have observed that there are many times in the Old Testament when a burnt offering was “a soothing aroma” to the Lord. The “soothing aroma” of Noah's burnt offering resulted in God's covenant to never destroy the world by water again. The “soothing aroma” of the numerous burnt offerings ascended to God. If a propitiation is something that appeases God's wrath, a “soothing aroma” has that same affect. Indeed Paul said, “just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma” (Eph. 5:2). That is propitiation, a propitiation by sacrifice, not by substitution. And in that propitiation by sacrifice, God is both just and justifier.

Romans 3:24-26 “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Rom. 5:9 “Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.”

The publicly displayed sacrifice of Jesus demonstrated the righteousness of God, who desires for all men to be saved. The blood flowed back all the way to Adam, so that God was able to pass over (forgive) those sins previously committed. It also flows forward to be available for us today. **When sins are forgiven, sinners are justified. When sinners are justified, they are regarded as righteous, innocent, not guilty. God's wrath is not directed at people who are righteous, innocent, and not guilty. Therefore, God's wrath was propitiated...turned away from those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb that was slain. God is still just...for a just God punishes those who die in their sin, and a just God does not punish people who are righteous. And God is the justifier, for He justifies us by the blood of Christ poured out in His sacrificial death.**

Substitution theory cannot account for how the physical death of the body of Jesus somehow satisfies the true penalty of sin, which is eternal death in the lake of fire. The only way substitution theory can satisfy the true penalty of sin is if it holds hands with the “forsaken theory” which sends Jesus to hell when He died, rather than allowing Him to go to Paradise as He said He would. So substitution theory, itself no more than a human interpretation of a seemingly “implied concept,” and based on a poor translation of the Greek preposition “huper,” depends on another theory that is also an implied concept based on a misunderstanding of a Psalm. A house built on such sand cannot stand. Again I ask you, are you defending the actual words of the Bible, or these implied concepts and human interpretations?

Substitution theory requires God to punish the only truly innocent person and let the truly guilty people go free. How is that justice? It is a miscarriage of justice. Imagine if our courts today decide to lock up all the innocent people and let the criminals run loose! True justice occurs when guilty people are punished and innocent people are free. God’s justice will punish sinners, and God’s justification will set sinners free from sin and free from punishment through the blood of Jesus.

The blood of Christ is a recurring theme in the New Testament for our salvation:

Matt. 26:28 “for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins”

Acts 20:28 “shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Eph. 1:7 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses”

Eph. 2:13 “you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ”

Col. 1:20 “and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross”

Heb. 9:12 “through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

Heb. 9:14 “how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

Heb. 10:19 “we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus”

1 Pet. 1:18-19 “knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.”

1 John 1:7 “if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin”

Rev. 1:5 “To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood”

Rev. 5:9 “for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation”

Rev. 7:14 “they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb”

And that is how a sacrifice provides propitiation...through the blood that justifies. Certainly I have not written a comprehensive treatise on everything related to our salvation...the Bible contains all such information. But I do think I have written enough to show that a sacrifice does not have to be substitutionary in order to provide forgiveness, justification, and propitiation. A sacrifice in which the right blood (Jesus' blood) is applied to the right place (the soul of man) will turn away (propitiate) God's wrath. And for this reason we sing, “Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?”

Thank you for your time and consideration in reading all this. I look forward to your response.

For King and Kingdom,

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