

# **Why Did Jesus Have To Die**

**Brian R. Will, MD**

**Version 1.0, July 23, 2018**

## *Dedication*

To my wife, Carlene whose love, devotion and genuine Christian walk has been a veritable *North Star* in the navigation system of my life. It is only because of her abiding patience and unfailing encouragement that I could muster the determination to spend my weekends, mornings and evenings studying, praying and preparing this book

To all those who wish to radically alter the future of mankind by fully understanding *Why Jesus Had to Die*;  
*This book will change your life forever*  
*It did mine*

As an ophthalmic surgeon I make my living making blind people see  
Every day I get to witness the miracle of providing amazing clear vision for my patients  
This book is so much more than that  
The Bible is a book that makes spiritually blind people see  
However, we have not yet fully seen  
Jesus counsels Laodicea to buy from Him a spiritual eye salve  
As an eye physician, I can attest that the message of this book is the prescription for that salve  
The revelation of the purpose of Christ's death is the veritable recipe for the solution formed by the hands of Jesus and placed on the eyes of the blind man at Bethsaida  
When the scales fall from your figurative eyes and you fully understand the purpose of the Atonement  
your vision and your life will be transformed  
just as Saul's vision was so completely altered that  
God had to give him totally new name  
*This book is for that generation of newly born "Pauls" who will change the world!*

## *Table of Contents*

Chapter 1....	Why Did Jesus Have to Die? – The Paradox.....	Page 7
Chapter 2....	Defining Old Testament Typology.....	Page 29
Chapter 3....	Typology, Parables and Living Parables.....	Page 37
Chapter 4....	The Scientific Method.....	Page 53
Chapter 5....	New Testament Living Parables.....	Page 54
Chapter 6....	The Book of Job and the Atonement.....	Page 84
Chapter 7....	Joseph and the Atonement.....	Page 229
Chapter 8....	The Benjamin Antitype.....	Page 327
Chapter 9....	From Egypt to Kadesh-Barnea: Moses, Mount Sinai and the Atonement.....	Page 427
Chapter 10..	Esther, Mordecai and the Atonement.....	Page 512
Chapter 11..	The Noahic Flood and the Atonement.....	Page 556
Chapter 12..	Gideon, the Midianites and the Atonement.....	Page 608
Chapter 13..	Sabbath Typology and the Atonement.....	Page 637
Appendix 1.	References for Feeding the 5,000 and the 4,000.....	Page 704

## *Preface*

"*To boldly go where no man has gone before*" – an iconic phrase made popular by the original *Star Trek* science fiction series which described the missions of the imaginary Starship Enterprise. The complete introductory speech for the genre, spoken by the inimitable Captain James T. Kirk is:

*Space: the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its five-year mission: to explore strange new worlds. To seek out new life and new civilizations. To boldly go where no man has gone before!*

This phrase fully describes, in a figurative manner, my personal journey that has been the creation of this book. Like the fictional explorer Captain Kirk, it was my mission to search out and find the answer to the question of "*Why Jesus Had to Die*" – a question whose answer has seemingly mocked theologians and lay persons alike for over two millennia.

The dilemma regarding this mystery began literally within days of Christ's death. After His death and resurrection, Jesus met with His disciples on the road to Emmaus. Disheartened and confused by His death on the cross, they were despondent. They did not understand "*why*" He died. However, even more puzzling was that Jesus' answer to this question was not based upon any new scriptural revelation or a radical New Testament teaching, but rather on the theodicy and revelation of His work of Atonement as described in the Old Testament and most specifically, within the writings of Moses.

*He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. John 24:25-27*

Despite this revelation on the Road to Emmaus, the New Testament never declares an answer to this conundrum or reveals the specifics of His discussion with them. There is no book written by one of these apostles; no exhaustively enlightening chapter or; even a comprehensive paragraph on the basics of the Atonement. Equally perplexingly, according to Jesus, the answer to this paradox was to be found in the cob-web laden pages of the Old Testament – a part of the Bible that I read only selectively and infrequently, but generally did not understand.

As a result, when I began this mission of discovery, my personal understanding of why Jesus had to die was based on the common belief that He died to pay the penalty for my sins and the broken Law and, in doing so, provided a path for me to experience salvation and communion with God. With this preconceived notion – one commonly shared by fellow earthlings and Christians – I began this expedition, fully expecting that this concept would be the narrative I would find in the Books of Moses and the prophets.

On my journey to “*explore strange new worlds,*” I determined to take Jesus at His word and exhaustively examine the Books of Moses and the prophets, searching for the specific answer that Christ gave to His disciples on that lonely road in Judea. To my knowledge, no person since the apostles has ever successfully completed such an undertaking. As a result, this book’s mission fulfills its mandate “*to boldly go where no man has gone before.*”

Along the way, I found that many explorers had previously created maps of their travels and left records of what they had found – each one wishing to help me fully explore the new ideas and worlds they claimed to have already discovered. These travelers included numerous authors of books on the Atonement and Old Testament typology, creators of Wikipedia content and a host of internet theologians, writers and bloggers.

Each man seemed to possess their own version of the map, providing a perspective of what they believed lay ahead and they were all eager to share this knowledge. In the fictional Star Trek’s Federation, there is a simple rule – “*If the map doesn’t agree with the planetary alignment, the map is wrong.*” For this voyage, I determined the rule variant to be – “*If the perspective of the writer doesn’t agree with the Bible, their opinion is wrong, regardless of how sincere and ‘godly’ they might be.*”

Many of the ideas and maps provided by these authors of books on the Atonement, the authoritative ideas of respected theological icons published in various Christian journals and the internet theologians, bloggers and writers proved to be very wrong. They directed me into galaxies, planets and Atonement models that either did not exist in the Bible or were otherwise incorrectly defined. They spoke of mythical forces in the universe, the validity of which was solely based upon ideas passed down by generations before but having no Biblical foundation. In many cases, I found that these mythical forces did not exist. However, in studying the Old Testament, I found instead forces at work in the universe that were even more powerful, more logical and more advanced than anything I had previously understood or imagined. In many cases, the information portrayed by the men I encountered was simply a corrupted version of false ideas conceived hundreds of years before; produced by early Christians or conceived in the Dark Ages. On the contrary, other descriptions of the Atonement from these Bible explorers of ages past were so detailed and so enlightening that my discoveries were rapidly advanced as these highly insightful concepts were most instructive of the nuances of this strange new theological world I began to experience.

Like the fictional character of Captain James Kirk and his crew of the Enterprise, this book chronicles the intrepid voyage of what might reasonably be called the Starship “*Atonement.*” Its conclusions are concepts that, when I began this theological voyage, were completely foreign to my belief system and very fabric of my being. They were as alien as the multifaceted Borg, Klingon or Cardassian civilizations encountered by Kirk and crew. At first, I much preferred the erroneous ideas and maps of those misguided philosophers and clerics who believed they knew the way. However, any honest explorer must chart what he finds and report back his observations with complete fidelity. This I have done.

Along that journey, in a similar manner to the crew of the *Enterprise* who were frequently drawn into strange planetary systems, required to navigate dangerous asteroid belts, confronted by aliens and subjected to the powerful pull of black holes – my journey was never in a straight line. In this mission I was confronted with ideas that conflicted and refuted many of my most cherished beliefs. For every few steps forward, I had to take several backward to correct my theology based on what the Bible narrative was describing. I began to discover truths I had never understood, and the Bible became an odyssey that I could not stop reading. I have tracked and backtracked and used my notes to refine the map of this seemingly strange new world many times. Although this book is long, it has actually been written several times over, my having created and discarded entire sections and chapters on occasions too numerous-to-count, as my depth of understanding the types and antitypes increased over time.

This book is a description of each of the figurative “*voyages*” of my imaginary Starship “*Atonement*.” The maps made during each of these voyages may not be perfect even yet, but even in their rudimentary state they very accurately describe the answer to the paradox of “*Why Jesus Had to Die*.” This enigma that has dogged Christians since nearly the day Christ died has now been solved and the answer is as compelling as it is wonderful, marvelous and meticulously detailed. The depth and sheer volume of detail on the mechanism of the Atonement described in the Old Testament is as profound as it is irrefutable. Moreover, it is the key that unlocks other aspects of the theological universe that have been both confusing and controversial.

It is my hope that together, we can pose additional even more complex questions needing to be solved; construct even more advanced “*deep-Bible*” probes and launch reconnaissance missions that reach further into the universe of Bible truth as we continue to refine the specific details from my discoveries so we may more fully understand God’s plan for His remnant church. In doing so, it is my sincere prayer that we may soon herald Christ’s imminent return to save humanity and redeem His children.

Brian R. Will, MD

# *Why Did Jesus Have to Die?*

## *Chapter 1*

### **The Paradox**

#### **“Why did Jesus have to die?”**

The question pierced the comfortable atmosphere in our Bible study like a knife. On its surface the question seemed so basic, so simple as to not even merit the attention of such an astute group of Christians. Our study participants ranged from highly educated professionals including physicians, dentists, veterinarians, accountants, retired ministers and even employees of the church – most of whom were lifelong Christians well versed in the Bible.

Yet at this moment there was an uncomfortable pause. No one spoke. The silence was deafening. Despite my own years of Bible study and what I considered to be a great “personal relationship” with Jesus, my spinning brain could only come up with the traditional simplistic response of – “He had to die for my sins.” At that moment I realized this rhetoric merely explained the “what” behind the purpose for Jesus’ death – not the “why” – nor did it in any way explain how His death suddenly removed my sin and guilt.

Finally, thankfully, a retired minister blurted out – “It was a legal thing. He died due to the demands of the Law.” Okay – now we were all off the hook and could move on to more important issues such as the admonitions of Peter regarding social interaction between church members or even the controversy over the ordination of women.

Unfortunately, the question of “why” Jesus had to die had effectively been ignored. Instead of an answer, we were all thankful to accept a clichéd response that had no substance and could not be theologically defended.

It turns out the question that stumped the brightest minds in our group has been the focus of study and controversy since soon after Jesus died on Calvary. We should not have felt so badly about our corporate lack of insight into the reason behind the death of Jesus because, to date, there is no universally accepted answer to this dilemma within the spectrum of Christian belief.

Although there are many differences of opinion regarding doctrine amongst the various Christian denominations and sects; the recognition that our understanding of the Atonement is incomplete and highly controversial is shocking. The mechanism of how God saves sinners and what Jesus’ death has to do with accomplishing this feat is “the” fundamental tenet of Christianity. Despite this doctrine being foundational to everything else we believe about God and mankind, after over 2,000 years of study and debate by scholars and lay persons alike, there is still no clear consensus amongst Christians or even within denominations regarding the details of how our salvation is accomplished. Moreover, although

some Christian denominations may favor one model over another, no group has been able to construct a case that fully exculpates their model or defends it against the meritorious criticisms of alternative contradictory models.

As a consequence, one of the greatest challenges faced by Christians since the Cross and Resurrection has been to fully explain the fundamental mechanism of the Atonement. Theologians note that despite detailed treatments in scripture of topics ranging from meat offered to idols to the importance of male circumcision, there is no “Atonement” chapter found in the New Testament. Nor were there any theological conferences held within the early church where they hammered out the details of this important topic. Like the silence in our Bible study, the apparent profound lack of didactic teaching on the mechanics of the Atonement in the New Testament is deafening.

If we accept the notion that God is personally responsible for the inspiration of the Bible, irrespective of one’s perception of the nature of how inspiration actually works, the apparent oversight in scripture on such a critical concept can only stagger the theological mind. Did God simply forget to explain why Jesus had to die? Or is there no actual answer to this question, thus relegating mankind to a seemingly endless debate over incompatible metaphors and contradictory theological models? The answers to this dilemma appear irreconcilable with any reasonable view of an omnipotent and omniscient God. In such a paradigm, an omniscient God doesn’t forget to mention something so critical to man’s salvation, or otherwise become distracted and overlook big theological details. Neither should there be fundamental theological questions for which He has provided no correct answer, either through His Son or His servants the prophets.

Alternatively, has the answer been hiding in plain sight; remaining hidden due to a corporate spiritual blindness? If the latter is true, then a chapter of scripture or a theological conference specifically on this topic would be highly redundant and a completely inadequate method to explain the truths regarding the Atonement process. If a comprehensive and fully detailed answer to this question regarding why Jesus had to die had already been articulated within the Bible itself, then what would be the purpose of attempting to add to that answer in a few paragraphs?

We find such a dilemma in other aspects of the life of Christ. For example, in the New Testament gospels, Jesus never delivered an expository speech on His role as the Messiah and how His Messianic mission was divided into two parts. Despite this omission, it is well accepted within Christianity as a whole that during the first phase He came to earth as a suffering servant, while in the second phase He returns as a conquering monarch. Apparently, Jesus believed these two phases had already been carefully and comprehensively explained in the Old Testament narrative. Therefore, adding to this revelation was unnecessary and would negate the need for man to study scripture in a comprehensive manner.

Such a criticism would be analogous to bemoaning that the author of a textbook on the Principles of Quantum Mechanics failed to provide a summary chapter, giving a broad but otherwise woefully simplistic description of the field. In this case, the details of Quantum Mechanics are already clearly presented in detail within the book itself, making a summary chapter useless. Moreover, it would

provide readers who chose to focus on that chapter the illusion that they understood Quantum Physics in its totality, when the reality was, by limiting their study to this summary chapter and ignoring the substance of the entire book, they attained only a superficial and incomplete understanding of the subject.

So why did Jesus have to die? Did God forget to explain the Atonement? Is there no actual answer to this question? Or is the answer already described in the Bible in such a comprehensive manner that a compact cheat sheet or “Cliff Notes” version would be useless or even counter-productive to the creation of a complete Biblical theodicy? Searching to find the answer to these questions became a personal journey.

### **The Atonement**

Theological discussions on the Atonement over the past 2,000 years can generally be categorized into two major themes:

1. The Focus is on God the Father. Jesus died for the sake of God the Father or the Law of God, where the latter is frequently portrayed as representing the character of God. Jesus’ death would change the heart and mind of God the Father by appeasing Him or satisfy the Father or the demands of God’s Law. In these Atonement models, the focus is on modifying the righteous wrath of God the Father or the demands of the Law, so that He is no longer bent on destroying man, who has rejected God and trampled on His Holy precepts.
2. The Focus is on Man. In these models, the problem is not with God, but man. Man has been profoundly confused by Satan and their separation from God caused by Adam’s sin. As a result, it is man’s confused and distorted perceptions of God that needs to be changed. Jesus died to fully disclose God’s character to man. In doing so, mankind can attain a correct understanding of God and realign his loyalty from Satan to God.

Although there are many variations of these themes over the past two millennia, atonement models virtually always fall within one of these two categories.

At its very essence; the Atonement describes how human beings can be reconciled to God through Christ's sacrificial death. Atonement refers to the forgiving or pardoning of sin in general, and the “original sin” in particular, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, enabling a reconciliation between God and His creation. In English, we recognize the word is comprised of the concept of “at-one-ment”; creating harmony or “oneness” between God and man. No Atonement model can be considered complete if it does not fully address the actual mechanism of how the death of Jesus mitigates both personal and original sin.

Within Christianity a number of models have been proposed. Historically, only three or four main theories have gained widespread acceptance. Since these topics are generally described in great detail in numerous scholarly works, I will only summarize these concepts here.

Within evangelical circles and mainstream Protestantism today, the “Satisfaction Theory” developed by Anselm of Canterbury and modified by the Reformation into what we today consider the “Penal Substitution Model” is the prevailing understanding of the Atonement.

The second most commonly held theory is the “Moral Influence Theory,” developed by Peter Abelard during the Enlightenment period; although its proponents perceive that Abelard merely restated Augustine's view on the subject and the Moral Influence Theory was a teaching of the early church; predating Penal Substitution by more than 1,000 years.

A third model less popular within evangelical circles is “Ransom Theory.” There are many authoritative sources for information on these various models from which a reader unfamiliar with these concepts might find additional information. Because of this, I will only briefly outline these various concepts.

### **Ransom Theory**

Because of its inherent simplicity, let's examine this model first. Ransom theory describes the Atonement in a manner similar to modern “ransom-ware.” With ransom-ware malware, computer hackers hold an institution's data hostage until they receive a financial payment. They then provide the encryption password and release the data systems. Similarly, ransom theory holds that with mankind being held hostage by the devil, our release and freedom occurred when Jesus' death paid a ransom for our salvation. Within this third category there are effectively two prominent variations – Ransom and “Christus Victor.”

In the purely Ransom model, Jesus liberates humanity from slavery to sin and Satan, and thus death by giving his own life as a ransom sacrifice (Matthew 20:28). Victory over Satan consists of swapping the life of the perfect (Jesus), for the lives of the imperfect (humans). One of the most significant challenges to this theory is explaining to whom the “ransom” is paid. Paying Satan is obviously unacceptable because it gives him a power over mankind and God that he does not have. Similarly, paying God is equally untenable as God is not a deity whose allegiance can be purchased with either blood or money. Unfortunately, there are no other entities to which such a ransom can be paid.

Alternatively, the second version of the ransom model is the “Christus Victor” theory. This is the model accepted by Christian icons such as C. S. Lewis. In this model, the life of Jesus is not used as a ransom in the traditional sense but as a method of defeating Satan in a spiritual battle, thus freeing enslaved humanity by obtaining victory over the captor. Although deemed inadequate by Anselm, vestiges of this model remain within Christian thinking today, as this view appears to gain support from purely Biblical sources such as the Book of Revelation. It is also commonly reinforced in hymns and songs by a frequently “theologically-incorrect” host of Christian musicians.

Despite these objections and theological inadequacies, the term “ransom,” in relation to the Atonement, is commonly and freely used by Bible authors and by many respected Christian speakers and songwriters through the ages.

## **Penal Substitution Model**

The principle model held by Christians in modern times is the “Penal Substitution Model,” derived by the Reformers from the model by the 11th century theologian Anselm, generally called the “Satisfaction Theory.” Although this view of the Atonement is widely held today, Moral Influence theorists suggest that the introduction of this theological construct so many centuries after the apostolic church period argues against its validity.

In Anselm’s satisfaction model, humanity owes a debt not to Satan, but to the sovereign God himself. A sovereign may well be able to forgive an insult or an injury in his private capacity, but when acting in his official capacity, he cannot do so if the state has been dishonored. Coming out of a worldview dominated by feudal lords, knights and serfs, Anselm postulated that when a “lord’s” honor was challenged or denigrated in any way, it was the obligation of the lord’s knights and serfs to avenge the wrong or obtain revenge so that honor could be “satisfied.” Anselm argued that the insult given to God, as King of the Universe, is so great that only a perfect sacrifice could satisfy it, and that Jesus, being both God and man, was this perfect sacrifice. Therefore, this doctrine teaches that Jesus gave himself as a “ransom for many,” to God the Father Himself.

The commonly held Protestant "Penal Substitution Model" is derived from Anselm’s satisfaction model. In the Penal Substitution Model, instead of viewing sin as an affront to God’s honor, it is viewed as the breaking of God’s moral law. Placing a particular emphasis on Romans 6:23 (the wages of sin is death), penal substitution sees sinful man as being subject to God’s wrath, with the essence of Jesus’ saving work being his substitution by bearing the curse in the place of man (Galatians 3:13). A variation that also falls within the substitution model group is Hugo Grotius’ “governmental theory,” which views Jesus receiving a punishment as a public example of the lengths to which God will go to uphold divine moral order.

The Penal Substitution model often appears to be prominently displayed in our portrayal of the final judgment before God the Father in a heavenly court. In this imagery, the sinner is deserving of death because of his or her breaking of God’s holy law, but is saved by Jesus, our advocate to the Father, who holds up His blood-stained hands saying, “My Blood, My Blood.” Seeing the hopeless sinner through a glass smeared with the blood of Jesus, God the Father’s wrath is appeased and, then and only then, is He able to accept the sinner into the heavenly courts.

The Penal Substitution Model effectively asserts the Bible teaches that God, despite the example of Jesus’ life and modeling of unconditional love, is ultimately a deity whose righteous “anger” and conditional love must be placated by the blood sacrifice of a sinless human who takes the place of Adam. This is the only manner by which mankind can be redeemed. Unfortunately, this is a harsh, pagan view of God. In this model, God pours out His righteous wrath on any who dare challenge His authority, His Name or His Rules. Instead, He demands life, blood and death in order to be assuaged, propitiated, appeased or satisfied.

Proponents of the Penal Substitution Model frequently respond to this criticism by suggesting that God is more or less tragically trapped by the external demands of His own Law, which forces Him to require His Son to die before He can forgive sinners. It is for this reason that our retired minister suggested – “It was a legal thing.” Moreover, it is during the final judgment that Jesus pleads with God to forgive sinners based on His blood-stained hands, held up in defense of the reprobate sinner who stands condemned by the Decalogue as a lawbreaker.

An additional criticism of the Penal Substitution Model is that it splits the godhead. In effect, one member must die in order to satisfy or appease the other. One is apparently more willing to forgive and offer mercy than the other and must persuade the other member to acquiesce. Some have gone so far as to describe this as a form of “child abuse” where a son is severely beaten and punished for the father’s anger over an event he has no involvement in. Clearly, when portrayed from this perspective, the idea of God actively killing His only Son in order to appease His anger seems ridiculous. Moreover, since God the Father and Jesus are one, the notion that one-half of the character of God is willing to forgive while the other half demands death, punishment, pain and revenge is equally incompatible with any rational Biblical view of the relationship between God the Father and His Son.

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of the Penal Substitution Model is that it appears to misrepresent the very character of God. The scriptures describe God as filled with infinite mercy. The Psalmist declares that, “*the Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works*” (Psalm 145:8, 9). Moreover, the entirety of Psalm 136 declares multiple times just how merciful God is – ultimately recognizing that there is no beginning or end to His mercy - “*Oh, give thanks to the God of heaven! For His mercy endures forever*” (Psalm 136:26). In the Old Testament sanctuary, the Shekinah glory was found in the Holy of Holies upon the “Mercy Seat,” further confirming that God is merciful. In addition, Isaiah declares this about God - “*I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins*” (Isaiah 43:25).

In contrast to this picture of God, proponents of the Penal Substitution Model contend that the godhead is composed of three separate divine persons, wherein strict and inflexible justice must be attributed to the Father or the first person of the triad. This model declares that God the Father cannot pardon any person without the fullest penalty of sin being paid. Unless someone else pays the infinite punishment incurred by sin against infinite purity and Holiness, no mortal can escape everlasting destruction. The second person in such a godhead (i.e. Jesus) is therefore portrayed as all merciful and, although He is without sin of any kind, is willing to suffer in man’s stead; thus “paying in full” the demands required of the first person of the godhead.

Clearly a God, or any other entity, who not only demands but requires payment in full for every sin of every ransomed sinner, can *never* be described as showing mercy. Despite such an obvious paradox, Christians promote the Penal Substitution model, wherein no mortal for whom God the Father has not been “paid” can be spared. This characterization is not compatible with any known notion of mercy. Jesus Himself described the foolishness of such an idea in a parable.

*“Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.*

*“But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?’ And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him.*

*“So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.” Matthew 18:23-35*

God is *infinitely* merciful – an even more powerful adjective than merely being forgiving. Portraying God the Father as requiring payment in full for every sin and every sinner effectively categorizes God as the *“wicked servant”* who demanded repayment of every denarii or penny he was owed. *This is clearly the complete opposite of mercy.* In accepting this model, we are defaming the character of God as He has described Himself in Holy Scripture.

### **It’s Just a Metaphor**

Those theologians who promote the Penal Substitution Model are not blind to these obvious objections. Recognizing that they are in a difficult theological position, to deflect such criticism they immediately indicate that the Penal Substitution Model is merely a *“metaphor.”* However, this position also appears problematic.

A metaphor is defined as a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable or, as in this particular case, a description that can only be regarded as representative or symbolic of the actual object or event. Although metaphors are commonly used in speech and literature, when used in the context of a describing an idea, object or event, they are generally reserved for concepts that are highly abstract.

The concerns raised by defining any model of the Atonement so that it can only logically exist as a metaphor are two-fold. First, we must accept the notion that the mechanics are so abstract that they

can only be defined through the use of metaphorical language. For a topic so fundamental to Christianity, it seems unlikely that the mechanism underlying the manner in which Jesus' death saves me from sin is so abstract that it can only be described through the use of a highly imperfect metaphor. If true, then the entire notion of quarrel between God and Satan is rather absurd. The proposition of calling lost souls to a form of "salvation" for which we have no actual definition or description beyond a highly imperfect or arguably incorrect metaphor, while relegating those who might logically reject such an amorphous and ill-defined proposition to absolute death cannot reasonably be deemed as justice.

Secondly, in general, simply calling erroneous ideas a "metaphor" in order to gloss over obvious disconnects of the symbolism from the object itself does not make the ideas any less wrong. This is true irrespective of the metaphor under review. The rationale for excusing this behavior appears to occur due to a confusion of the terms "limited" versus "imperfect" versus "erroneous."

Metaphors by their nature are "limited" in their ability to describe an abstract concept. An excellent example would be Luke 15 where Jesus provides the Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin and the Lost Son. Each parable provides insight into the nature of God's relationship with lost mankind. Each parable is "limited" in its ability to describe this relationship – hence all three are useful to create a more comprehensive understanding. In some senses, we might even characterize each parable as slightly "imperfect" because they are limited in their ability to describe the fullness of the unconditional love God exhibits for us. That said, the three parables, although limited and imperfect, do not in any way provide the reader or listener with either an erroneous perspective or create competing concepts that contradict each other. Rather, when placed in juxtaposition to each other, they create a more accurate and more complete picture of the object than each could provide by themselves.

Recognizing that any metaphor is both limited and imprecise is not the same as discovering it is fundamentally erroneous. For example, I may assert that an elephant's skin is composed of large black and white stripes. Any observer can determine that this is factually untrue and scientifically indefensible. The fact that I might convert this erroneous assertion to a metaphor – i.e. "The skin of the elephant is 'like' a zebra" – a statement that is certainly limited and imperfect – does not make the original factual error any less incorrect. Certainly, both of them have skin. However, both the original assertion regarding the coloration of the skin and the metaphor are scientifically incorrect and focusing on the imperfect metaphor in order to gloss over the scientific inaccuracy of the observational error does not make the assertion any less incorrect.

As a result, we must make a distinction between metaphors that are truly limited in scope such that those limitations are commonly corrected through the use of redundant metaphors, as in the case of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin and Lost Son; versus metaphors in conflict with other known truths about the object and, instead of being complemented by redundant metaphors, are fundamentally incompatible with them. Simply defining the Penal Substitution Model as a metaphor does not permit us to systematically ignore its seemingly illogical and potentially erroneous perspective.

Of additional concern is that the entire concept of the Penal Substitution Model drives a narrative entirely focused upon the severity of Jesus' punishment. Specifically, as our penal substitute, Jesus' punishment must attain some cosmic threshold to meet the precise amount of pain required by God or Satan (or whoever is in charge of the record keeping aspect of the Atonement), in order to placate the Law or God's requirements. If there was an Olympic event for pain endurance, Jesus would obtain a gold medal. As a result, the severity of the punishment becomes of paramount importance while the yardstick by which we measure this achievement is never defined.

We can find this notion fulfilled in the sensational movie *"The Passion of the Christ"* by the popular actor and director Mel Gibson. Gibson's principle focus is the severity of the physical and mental pain Christ endures. If this pain can reach the threshold that meets God's demands for a "penal substitute," then Jesus becomes man's representative and redeemer.

More enlightened theologians reject this notion, sensing that other men have endured equally or perhaps even more painful deaths than Jesus. As a consequence, they focus on the mental and spiritual pain experienced by Jesus, suggesting it was the "second death" experience or the profound separation from God that qualifies Him as man's substitute. In this paradigm, it is this spiritual pain or punishment that gains Him the gold medal. Although this approach moves the penal goal posts, it does not change the final equation. God must extract a sufficient amount of pain – physical, mental and/or spiritual from the God-man, Jesus, in order to meet the threshold of what it takes to satisfy the justice demands of the Law.

Unfortunately, both explanations rely upon the magnitude of severity of the death process as the mechanism or currency that purchases our salvation. Either approach effectively combines the previously noted problematic aspects of the Ransom model with the Penal Substitution Model, thereby making them both equally theologically indefensible.

Yet the New Testament clearly promotes the concept that Jesus is "our substitute." It is this seeming departure from logic and reason that has propelled men to argue for a more rational and reasoned approach to the Atonement.

### **Moral Influence Theory**

The Moral Influence Theory suggests that the primary purpose of Jesus' life and death was to promote positive moral change within humankind rather than to minister and die as a penalty for sin. Although there are many variations of this theory, the principle concept is that positive moral change is affected through an understanding of the teaching and example of Jesus. Its proponents suggest that its roots extend back to the second and third centuries AD and, if this is true, the fact that it substantially predates the appearance of the doctrine of Penal Substitution by several centuries.

The Moral Influence doctrine of the Atonement represents a salvation paradigm that focuses on the power of God to effect positive moral change in sinful man. Rather than focusing upon an external

“forensic” or “legal acquittal” as a method of salvation, Moral Influence depicts God as being principally concerned about a person’s character and restoring a right relationship between God and man. In this construct, “good” is characterized as demonstrating unselfish love towards others while “evil” is a self-love that destroys and separates man from God. God, through the Holy Spirit, works to effect positive moral change within the hearts and minds of individuals; thereby transforming the world to become more loving and increasingly reconciled to God and His character of unconditional love.

In the absence of a substitutionary Atonement, this is a concept most evangelical Christians would soundly reject. With no legal acquittal or “justification by faith,” as taught by the Reformers, there is no alternative but to believe that God will judge souls based on moral character attested to by each person’s moral conduct.

Moral Influence theory appears to be profoundly influenced by the statements of Jesus regarding His relationship with the Father – *“If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”...Jesus said to [Phillip], ‘Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father’*” (John 14:7, 9). During His earthly work, Jesus freely accepted sinners as His friends; demonstrated unconditional acceptance for all and; sought to influence sinners for good rather than promoting their destruction through the power of a righteous wrath. In this hermeneutical paradigm, God the Father must do the same.

As a result, the life of Jesus becomes the lens through which the entire Bible must be interpreted. To that end, Moral Influence proponents rightly point to the large quantity of moral exhortation found in the Epistles. They note that virtually all New Testament passages that refer to a final judgment appear to depict an ultimate determination based upon moral conduct. They then put forward the numerous passages in the New Testament that encourage moral change based on the incentive of gaining a positive outcome in God’s final judgment and; they identify clear passages throughout the New Testament that portray the idea that a belief in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus will effect moral change in the lives of His followers.

The Moral Influence perspective is generally viewed to be in conflict with the Penal Substitutionary view of the Atonement as the two belief systems propose radically opposing criteria for salvation and judgment. Moral Influence focuses on the healing, reconciliation and resulting moral change within believers that ultimately leads to an acceptance by God in His final judgment, which is based exclusively upon one’s inner moral character. In stark contrast, the Penal Substitutionary paradigm completely rejects any saving value of human moral change. Rather, salvation comes through faith in Christ and His death on behalf of sinners, which then leads to a positive final judgment based entirely upon what Christ had done for us and our faith in that accomplishment – not on moral qualities or any “right relationship with God” that we possess.

There have evolved many variations of the Moral Influence model and each brings a slightly different point of view to our understanding of the importance of the Cross of Calvary, their collective perspectives are that God’s character is exclusively oriented toward unconditional love and developing a

personal relationship with each person by deploying a system of grace more powerful and more beautiful than has ever been imagined. These various perspectives describe a God who is completely trustworthy and is always on our side; producing immense healing in our sin-damaged and self-condemning souls, restoring us to proper intimacy with God and one another. Moreover, God's unconditional love and non-coercive nature form the basis for His desire for us to relate to Him as friends rather than fear-driven servants.

Theologians that promote Moral Influence theory reasonably question whether a maximally loving God can be combined with a God who authors both 1) a legal substitutionary Atonement in which God must be *fully paid for sin and sinners* and; 2) that a loving God would execute an active eternal destruction on the wicked as described by the Penal Substitution Model.

For supporters of Moral Influence, the notion of *Jesus* demanding the death of a perfect, sinless man in the most brutal and painful manner possible to "atone" for Adam's sin is incompatible with a loving God. Moreover, they collectively promote the idea that the revelation of God through His Son *Jesus* is the lens through which the entire Bible must be interpreted. This "new light" provides a license from which to reinterpret many of God's actions in the Old Testament as being a distortion created by His attempt to communicate with a highly unsophisticated humanity.

Despite the attractiveness of the Moral Influence model, proponents of the Penal Substitution Model frequently point out the numerous times God appears to take deliberative action in destroying people in the Old and New Testament; taking great pains to remind everyone of all those Old and New Testament texts that seem to promote the idea of an appeasement that resulted from the death of *Jesus*. Then there is the issue of the Old Testament sanctuary service and the Day of Atonement narrative that does not seem to fit within the Moral Influence models. In addition, these ideas fail to incorporate a clear Bible theme that appears to describe *Jesus* as our "substitute." These latter metaphors appear to paint the opposite imagery promoted by *Jesus* in the Prodigal Son narrative – a parable loved by Moral Influence proponents – further complicating any reconciliation between the models.

As a result, proponents of both paradigms frequently accuse the other of cherry-picking their metaphors and their understanding of God. The Moral Influence model is frequently criticized as relying too heavily upon the life and teachings of *Jesus* and His statement in John 14 regarding seeing the Father through His example while ignoring other explicit statements found in both testaments in which God appears to take definitive action towards destroying sin and sinners (i.e. Noahic Flood, Sodom and Gomorrah).

A reliance on metaphors appears to fall prey to the previously voiced concern that metaphors are both limited and imprecise. Using them to support an Atonement model contradicted by other Bible metaphors as well as the plain language found in both the New and Old Testaments only serves to demonstrate that even with the use of highly illuminating but limited metaphors; when used to the exclusion of other contradictory statements and metaphors, can lead to an incorrect conclusion regarding the object under examination.

## Jennings' Healing Substitution Model

The Jennings model is highly attractive to Christians disillusioned with Penal Substitution and the pagan god it appears to portray. As a result, many of my personal friends are Tim Jennings devotees. For readers unfamiliar with Dr. Jennings, he is a highly respected Christian psychiatrist whose Atonement model is published in a book entitled, *The God Shaped Brain*. Dr. Jennings travels extensively, providing lectures and educational materials on his Healing Substitution Model. He also promotes his own Bible study materials on his website *Come and Reason Ministries*, where his classes and extensive video materials are available for live streaming. Jennings has also published a paraphrase version of scripture called "*The Remedy Bible*," which is his personal translation of the New Testament.

As a physician and surgeon, as are many of my friends and colleagues, one of the attractive features of Dr. Jennings' model is that it is based on concepts familiar to a medical doctor. Moreover, as the website suggests, it appears to be based upon logic and reason – both attractive attributes to a scientist and medical professional.

As a basic premise to his model, Jennings believes sin consists of the fear and selfishness we inherited as a "terminal illness." Moreover, that we have this "disease" is not "our fault." As a result, sin is redefined from breaking God's moral law to consisting of a damaged brain and a heart that is selfish and cannot be reconciled to God because He is served out of fear rather than love.

Jennings dismisses the concept of a substitutionary atonement that satisfies the demands of the law as a spiritually immature notion or mental construct provided by Bible authors for people who exist in a primitive stage of moral development. He uses a scientific and well-accepted seven-tiered scale of moral development as a foundation for this idea. In this view, the idea of penal substitution is designed for simple or primitive peoples in early stages of moral understanding. The idea of Penal Substitution is therefore unsustainable for mature Christians.

Moreover, Jennings appears to rightly assert that, if a hypothetical patient came to our office with an illness, the idea of taking their medical record and substituting the medical record of a healthy patient in its place rather than applying a therapy or other healing modality would be medical malpractice. Using simple logic, if such a solution for an illness is scientifically unacceptable it should also be theologically unacceptable.

Furthermore, Jennings believes that, as a clinician, it would also be reprehensible behavior to punish a patient for having an illness they acquired through no fault of their own. As a result, Jennings rejects the idea that Jesus took our place and was punished by God – the Great Physician – for our sins. In a similar manner to Moral Influence proponents, Jennings suggests that a significant purpose of the Cross was to reestablish a broken trust, not to pay the penalty for a broken moral law.

In the tradition of Moral Influence, for Jennings, sin always brings its own punishment. God does not punish the sinner or need the death of Christ to forgive or love us. God already does all of that.

Therefore, the idea that God needs to keep a record of sin in heaven for which we need Christ's intercession, atonement and forgiveness to "blot out" the entry from our personal "sin" record is nonsense in the same manner a doctor deliberately altering a medical record to portray a severely ill patient as being in excellent health is medical nonsense. The idea of a legal acquittal or forensic accounting of sin is summarily dismissed.

In the same manner as an earthly physician, Jennings asserts that the objective of God's, Jesus' and the Holy Spirit's interaction with man in his terminally ill state is to apply an effective cure, therapy, surgery or remedy to make man whole. This is the good news of the gospel. It is the result of this God directed healing of man's heart and mind that elevates man's moral compass to where he can have "no defects" and "no longer needs the written law" because he is in complete compliance with the "natural or design law."

Although Jennings dismisses the idea of a penal substitution, he includes a radically new concept regarding "substitution" that is contrary to classical Moral Influence thinking. Jennings asserts that Christ is our substitute; stating that Jesus "became human and took sinful mankind's position. He took our terminal condition upon Himself. He "became sin who knew no sin," in order to cure mankind from sinfulness. Though sinless, Christ died when He experienced the sense of darkness of God-forsakenness, crying, 'Why have you forsaken me?' At the cross, He experienced the consequences of sin much like unhealable sinners will in the end. In Christ's human brain, love overcame the temptation to save self (selfishness), thereby destroying the carnal nature and perfectly restoring God's law of love back into the human species, thus restoring unity between the human species and God." Through this conjoint mental gymnastic, Jennings appears to successfully marry the ideas of moral influence and substitution into a logically coherent whole.

Jennings also defines a specific healing aspect of the Atonement, stating: "The Atonement is the complete restoration of unity between God and sinful humanity achieved by Jesus Christ. Jesus achieved humanity's restored unity with God by revealing the truth about God to restore us to trust AND by restoring God's law of love into humanity through His victorious life while He simultaneously destroyed the carnal nature that He assumed when He became human. *He perfected human character, thereby restoring the human species back to the image of God as designed in Eden.* The human race was perfected in the individual person of Jesus Christ and Christ once 'made perfect became the source of salvation for all who obey him' (Hebrews 5:8). The completion of Atonement occurs when the universe is again at-one with God." [Emphasis mine]

According to Jennings, the good news of the gospel is that, through His death, Christ created a "remedy" He can now pass along to sinful humans, which He accomplished by "destroying the carnal nature that He assumed when He became human." In this manner, the substitutionary role of the Cross was to prepare a mind-cure, treatment or remedy that Christ can now infuse into our minds and hearts that affects the regenerate life. This idea depicts a marked swing of the salvation pendulum from a process about changing records to changing lives. Certainly, changed lives is good news.

The challenge with swings of the pendulum is that the pendulum often swings too far to one side or the other. With this shift we find that simply stating, “in Christ’s human brain, love overcame the temptation to save self (selfishness), thereby destroying the carnal nature, perfectly restoring God’s law of love back into the human species, thus restoring unity between the human species and God” does not fully explain what truly happened on the Cross of Calvary. Apparently, according to the Healing Substitution Model, something happened – neurologically, chemically, physically or spiritually – within Christ’s brain. What precisely occurred is not and likely cannot be explained. Nor is it explained how this change translates into a ticket to heaven for sinful man.

In addition, it is unclear precisely “why” Jesus had to die in order for this brain change to occur. Certainly, God knows how to fix our brains and hearts so we could be healed without needing to “discover” the secret sauce of the remedy by sending His Son to die by crucifixion. Moreover, most logically, this change in Christ’s brain function could occur irrespective of any demands of external pain, torture, exhaustion or rejection. However, in this model, apparently it is the proportion or degree of Christ’s suffering and His innate ability to resist the temptation towards self-preservation that acts like a sort of radiation therapy that somehow “zaps” the Christ’s brain back into alignment with the purposes of God. Although this mechanism certainly fits within a paradigm of how modern medical treatments cure physical ailments or even mental disease, the Atonement is never described in these terms within the Bible. Moreover, from such a model it stands to reason that for us to become saved, we must also undergo a similar brain “zapping” event or process to align us with God’s demand for righteousness. This criticism is not directed towards disputing whether or not God can heal men’s hearts and minds – the latter being a fundamental process that occurs in the mind of a man undergoing sanctification – but rather to question how this concept can be defended from scripture as a core mechanism of the Atonement.

In effect, the crux of the Jennings model appears to stand upon Christ’s brain being “carnal,” then becoming “not-carnal” through His experience on the Cross. These terms typically mean that in coming to earth, Christ assumed a sinful nature (carnal) and the events of the Cross somehow allowed Him to transform His brain into one with a sinless nature (non-carnal). These terms appear to define a process completely foreign to the Biblical narrative. Moreover, since Christ already had a sinless nature in heaven, the entire process of assuming a sinful nature and overcoming the temptation to save self (selfishness) so He could obtain a sinless nature that He could then pass along to humans seems to add an unnecessary step to the healing methodology. Why not simply give the sinless (non-carnal) nature to everyone who asks and save all the time and energy of 6,000 years of human suffering?

Lastly, if the saving mechanism for mankind only occurred within Christ’s brain during a single instant in the past, it is effectively something that cannot be objectively validated, verified or examined, either now; in a future judgment event or; within all of eternity. That the key mechanism for the Atonement and the decisive razor that separates saints from sinners cannot be clearly understood or objectively examined by humans, angels or other intelligences in the universe, appears difficult to reconcile with the concept of a God of transparency who both defends His law and character to the universe and His ability to objectively save some men and not others. This is highly troubling.

Perhaps the most disquieting aspect of the Healing Substitution Model is its treatment of the substitutionary atonement of Christ – a trait it shares with Moral Influence. In both, there is a fundamental denial of the Biblical concept of faith in Christ and unmerited favor or “grace,” wherein Christ’s death on the Cross on behalf of sinners can lead to salvation based entirely upon what Christ did for us and our faith in that accomplishment. In a similar manner to the classic Moral Influence Theory, albeit with a different mechanism, in the Jennings model, salvation is based entirely upon the saving merits of an inexplicable brain and heart healing mechanism, which is further defined as a journey rather than a destination. Precisely where on that journey the level of healing attained is sufficient to deem any given individual justified before God is undefined and unknowable.

In contrast, the idea of the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ is firmly rooted in both testaments. I do not have the time or space to fully explore this now. However, a few verses should illustrate this point.

*He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.  
Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten by God, and afflicted. **But He was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,  
And by His stripes we are healed.** All we like sheep have gone astray;  
We have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.  
He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth;  
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
So He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment,  
And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living;  
**For the transgressions of My people He was stricken.** And they made His grave with the  
wicked— But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence,  
Nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him;  
He has put Him to grief. **When You make His soul an offering for sin,**  
He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His  
hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. **By His knowledge My righteous  
Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a  
portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out  
His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of  
many, and made intercession for the transgressors.** Isaiah 53:3-13*

*Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.* Hebrews 9:22

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

It is Jesus who came that “by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.” Hebrews 2:9

*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. 1 Peter 2:24*

*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:21*

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. 1 Peter 3:18*

Jennings overcomes the challenges of the Old and New Testaments by simply creating a novel New Testament paraphrase Bible – *“The Remedy Bible.”* He asserts that the language of the Bible regarding appeasement terminology occurs from an improper translation. Jennings resolves this problem by creating his own version of the entire New Testament while effectively ignoring the Old Testament, which he justifies by arguing that the Bible translators were overly influenced by Anselm’s satisfaction theory; thus misinterpreting major New Testament texts regarding the relationship between God and man. This charge that may well be correct, but is very difficult to validate and a notion not held by any other recognizable Bible translators in modern history.

*The Remedy Bible* is characterized as a “paraphrase.” Generally, a paraphrase is designed to shape the language of the Bible into an easier to read form for a specific style of reader. Instead, rather than a paraphrase, in the *Remedy Bible* Jennings appears to remove offending verses that do not agree with his model and inserts language consistent with the ideas of Healing Substitution. This appears to be a classic case of modifying the data to fit the hypothesis. For Jennings, using the prism of this “new” New Testament that reflects his underlying philosophy and theories, he is able to provide his supporters with a Bible that fully exonerates his model, while doctrinal teaching from the Old Testament regarding God’s wrath or the Sanctuary service can be effectively ignored.

Overall, the Jennings model actively challenges the Penal Substitution Model using a highly scientific and reasoned approach. For legalists and Christians bothered by the pagan god of sacrifice depicted by Penal Substitution, Jennings appears to provide a welcome alternative. Moreover, Jennings forces us to remove our Penal Substitution “glasses” when reading scripture. This is a valuable imposition that directs us towards finding the correct understanding of the Atonement and its method and purpose in the plan of salvation.

Perhaps Jennings’ most valuable contribution is his tremendous insight into the changes in brain physiology that may occur when a sinner becomes reconciled with God. Through Dr. Jennings’ knowledge of brain function and human behavior, we can begin to understand that the Bible notion of God changing man’s heart and mind is not simply an ethereal process but one that can be documented by science and is a profoundly powerful biological and physiological power that produces true healing in the human mind.

## Other Models

For completeness, it should be noted that other theories include the government theory, the recapitulation theory, the "shared Atonement" theory and the scapegoat theory. For the sake of brevity, we will not discuss these models here as readers can find resources elsewhere that explain these less well-accepted models.

## Which Model is Correct?

My purpose is not to attempt to advocate for, defend or detract from any of these models. My principle concern is that the incompatibility of all the various perspectives is highly problematic. Ultimately, the Penal Substitution Model and the Moral Influence Theory in their various forms are contradictory and irreconcilable, as are the Ransom Theory and "Christus Victor." However, based upon scattered Bible texts, this "substitute," "example" and "ransom" terminology is commonly used in descriptions of the Atonement.

Moreover, although the Jennings Healing Substitution Model is highly attractive, appears reasoned and logical, and is accompanied by a cornucopia of fascinating brain science, it appears to circumvent traditionally difficult Biblical discourse on the wrath of God through a private New Testament translation that expunges or redefines broad passages of scripture in order to provide a substitution mechanism that is similarly private and not found in the original text; does not require a death event for its activation and defies objective validation. Yet healing is clearly a product of the reconciliation between God and man.

Perhaps one of the difficulties in creating models of the Atonement that play nicely with each other is the narrowness with which some definitions of Biblical terms are derived. For example, one rather glaring shortcoming of alternative models to Penal Substitution is that the authors appear so driven to eliminate any vestiges of Penal Substitution from their thinking that they fail to recognize that, although the terminology of "penal substitution" is not found in scripture, the notion of "substitution" is widely distributed in the same. There is a profound difference between the terms. For example, if I was to play in a game of football, the coach would likely routinely "substitute" players into the roster to provide our team with the most effective players for any particular play. Such substitution has nothing to do with any penal act.

In their salvation vocabulary, the phrase Penal Substitution appears to be always synonymous with the single word Substitution. Such verbal mathematics is vitally flawed. The resulting distaste for any theology associated with the word "substitute" has created a sort of straw man approach to Atonement theology wherein the term substitute becomes a boogey man that must be avoided at all costs – including the cost of tossing overboard the basic Bible tenet of justification by faith.

Moreover, just minutes prior to His betrayal and capture in Gethsemane, Jesus prayed to the Father on behalf of His disciples that they would have "*My joy fulfilled in themselves*" (John 17:13). Jesus had a

work to finish upon the Cross, and the fact that He could fulfill that role provided Him with “joy.” The concept of joy associated with enduring and dying for the sins of the world seems strangely out of place if these events were a punishment. Rather, Jesus clearly saw His role as man’s substitute as a path to accomplishing salvation for all mankind. It is His obedience to God’s will in becoming man’s substitute that provides unending joy. In that setting, being a “substitute” seems far less monstrous than the boogey man penal concepts that Moral Influence advocates are fleeing from.

### **Perhaps They Are All Correct**

In order to resolve this glaring lack of compatibility amongst theologians and between various Atonement models that all appear to have major Biblical support, scholars have frequently promoted an old proverb or fable to reconcile these divergent perspectives.

The fable is well known to the reader and involves the experience of six blind men who each interact with a large elephant. Because each man’s experience is limited to their sense of touch, they come to highly divergent views regarding the elephant’s anatomy. The man touching the trunk believes the elephant to be like a snake; the man touching the ear like a large leaf; the man touching the leg like the trunk of a tree; the man touching the abdomen like a wall; the man touching the tusk like a hard pipe and the man touching the tail like a rope.

Although many lessons can be gleaned from this fable, the principal notion used in the context of the Atonement is that absolute truth can only be obtained by combining partial observations into a cohesive whole. Once accomplished, the full picture is derived, enabling a full understanding to be discerned.

Another way of considering the Atonement problem is to consider each model as a part of a larger jigsaw puzzle. Once the pieces are placed together in their proper orientation, the full image is revealed, whereas previously one only had a disjointed and disconnected view of the whole.

The fable is predicated upon the fundamental concept that when we place the observations of the blind men together we obtain the picture of an elephant – a real animal that makes sense and behaves and performs numerous diverse functions according to its physical parts. Irrespective of its many facets, the animal can perform many tasks, and its capabilities are greater than the sum of its parts. Likewise, the puzzle ultimately renders a single picture that is both aesthetic and rewarding, while the individual pieces, when viewed by themselves, appear to be insignificant trash.

The challenge is that, when we put the various Atonement models together, rather than describing the parts of an elephant, we ultimately find ourselves assembling the head of a dog, the tail of a fish, the leg of a goat, the ear of a rabbit, the body of a rhinoceros and the neck of a giraffe. The animal we have concocted simply doesn’t exist. Not only is it unable to function better than the sum of its parts; it is unable to function at all.

Similarly, the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle have different faces and shapes that simply are not compatible with one another. They exist in a sensible fashion in isolation from one another. When placed in

juxtaposition, they collide and compete for part of a highly fragmented Atonement domain. Moreover, simply calling them metaphors does not fundamentally correct this problem unless we believe that Bible metaphors can be both limited and imprecise, as well as highly contradictory, irreconcilable and contain fundamentally flawed theology. I would submit that they can only be the former.

### **Seven Powerful Words**

Understanding the multifaceted context of the Biblical teaching regarding the Atonement is clearly complex. The fact that 2,000 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus we have no consensus on its exact nature seems highly problematic. We are not certain if it is an event, a process, or both. We don't know if it saves man or changes man or both. Most troubling is we find Biblical terminology that attempts to express the nature of the Atonement, but these words generally seem at odds with each other.

In understanding the Atonement from the language, vocabulary and expressions of the Bible, we find seven powerful words that define its nature, objective and outcome. Those words are:

1. Substitute
2. Example
3. Ransom/Redemption
4. Sacrifice
5. Reconciliation
6. Regeneration
7. Atonement

These words constitute the head, ear, tail, body, leg, nose, arm and hand of the animal that we are to assemble into a functioning living being. They are the pieces of the puzzle that must be precisely aligned for us to view and understand the beauty of God's panoramic photograph of our lives with Him. They must be defined and melded together into a cohesive whole if we are to ever fully appreciate the wonder of the Atonement.

### **Substitute**

This word often elicits fear and joy in the heart of the hearer. The Penal Substitution Model clearly paints an image of substitution that requires a picture of an angry God demanding appeasement and payment for sin. Such a belief, although it appears to bring joy to the sinner, has also been the driver of legalism, works-based religion and a view of a God who is unloving and unmerciful. Such a perspective has motivated many theologians to try to expunge the notion of substitution from our Biblical vocabulary. Yet, based on the scripture, we simply cannot escape the idea that Jesus is Our Substitute. We must understand the manner in which Jesus is the Substitute that takes away the sins of the world if we hope to describe the Atonement in any comprehensive fashion.

## **Example**

Moral Influence theory is the shining star of the perspective that Jesus, as an example, is a power that reconciles man to God and changes his moral compass. It portrays a God of infinite love and mercy, whose tender care, when lifted up, draws all men unto Him. These ideas are clearly revealed in the Biblical record. Yet, the Bible also clearly contends that man requires a Savior that covers his works which are as filthy rags. This tension appears to pit the Biblical vocabulary against itself. Our understanding of the Atonement must reconcile these apparent polarities.

## **Ransom**

The Bible clearly describes man as being in bondage to sin, with no capacity to extricate himself from this brutal, totalitarian captivity. That Jesus is a ransom for many is a basic Biblical concept that cannot be brushed aside or dismissed. However, the logical explanation of how such a ransom transaction can occur while being consistent with the remainder of the Biblical record remains elusive. The Atonement must embrace the redemptive/ransom work of Jesus on behalf of a humanity in bondage and captivity.

## **Sacrifice**

The premise that sacrifice is a component of the Atonement is foundational to much of the Old and New Testament teaching on this topic. However, the notion of sacrifice in our Biblical vocabulary frequently denotes an appeasement mentality often found within pagan cultures whose “blood sacrifices” to ungodly deities is both perverse and reviling.

Many Christians attempt to distance themselves from the terminology and precepts of sacrifice by building a theological wall between the testaments. In this manner, we seek to contain the notion of sacrifice to the Old Covenant, the Old Testament and define it as a theological compromise made by God to instruct an unsophisticated and morally simplistic culture on the nature of Christ’s work for man’s salvation. This is clearly at odds with Paul’s assertion that all scripture is useful for instruction in the faith.

An understanding of the Atonement must embrace the Biblical idea of sacrifice in a manner synergistic with all seven words of our Atonement vocabulary.

## **Reconciliation**

It is clear from the Biblical record that the trust relationship between man and God was broken in the Garden of Eden. An Atonement methodology solely intended to provide a “sacrifice” or an appeasement likely does little to restore man’s faith in the trustworthiness of God. Moreover, God simply cannot unilaterally create trust in Him at the sound of the trumpet on His return. Trust, like love, must be earned – it cannot be fabricated. As a result, our understanding of the Atonement must

provide for a process wherein trust is restored and; an outcome that fully re-establishes this broken relationship.

### **Regeneration**

The Bible is clear that heaven will not be inhabited by sinful human beings. The Atonement is the mechanism by which sinful humans are transformed into a race of perfect people, forever growing in the grace and mercy of God. Understanding precisely how and when this transformation occurs is fundamental to any comprehensive picture of the Atonement. The regenerate life, as described throughout the Biblical narrative, is a journey fueled by the grace and power of God in the life of man. We must fully embrace this aspect of Christian growth and development within our understanding of the Atonement.

### **Atonement**

Although it seems to be circular logic to include the word Atonement as part of our understanding of the Atonement, the expression is an integral part of a comprehensive Biblical theodicy. The idea of how the Atonement realizes a state of peace and intimate unity between God and man must be addressed. The notion of “At-one-ment” or creating an outcome wherein God and man are indeed “one” is foundational to the plan of salvation. In the Bible, God frequently describes this process by drawing an analogy through the use of the imagery of a Bridegroom and His bride. In practical reality, it is through this union that a man and woman become “one flesh.” Such an outcome cannot be commanded, contrived or created through magical processes. An understanding of the Atonement must describe the process by which God and man become “one.”

### **The Journey Begins**

Clearly there exists an understanding of the Atonement that blends all these disparate ideas into one cohesive whole. The problem is we don’t have that understanding – yet.

Truth is not a secret. It exists in plain sight for all to see – however, all may not be able to see that truth. By analogy, Orville and Wilbur Wright did not invent the science or the laws of aeronautics. These laws existed since the dawn of the universe. In order to understand these laws, they simply observed nature, experimented with gliders, tested various combinations of wings and propellers in a makeshift wind tunnel and built a powered flying machine – all tasks that were available to any inventor of their time. Their ability to attain powered flight did not occur because they discovered a single secret that was hidden in obscurity in a place or location that only they could find. It occurred because they systematically developed hypotheses and then systematically tested them against the reality of physics and flight.

The Wrights came to understand these principles by examining the evidence. In this case, they were successful principally because no other person had their tenacity, discipline or discernment. Without their scientific contributions, men likely still would be unable to fly. Their patented principles of control

of powered flight are the same principles that allow modern jets to successfully fly today. Prior to their “discoveries,” men did not believe that man could fly, any more than an elephant could sprout wings. Yet the ability to fly had existed since the dawn of time.

Like the laws of aerodynamics, I assert that absolute truth regarding the mechanism and principles of the Atonement exists and has been available to the discerning student since the plan of salvation was conceived in the mind of God. Jesus clearly explained the mechanisms of the Atonement to His disciples on the Road to Emmaus. If so, why are we confused and in conflict over this basic tenet of Christianity?

Did God forget to provide us with that picture? Did He deliberately withhold this information from mankind because we are too simple to grasp the depth and breadth of its magnificence? Did He give us a jigsaw puzzle without the picture on the front of the box? Is the Atonement a cacophony of disconnected sounds that cannot be synthesized into a glorious symphony? Is it an animal composed of dysfunctional parts incompatible with life? Is the Atonement so abstract it can only be described using contradictory metaphors – a phenomenon not seen with any other major Bible doctrine? Is it justice for God to expect men to accept a form of salvation that cannot be objectively or accurately defined or defended? Can unfallen beings or angels judge the veracity of God’s character and Law if the methods defined and used to save man and ultimately destroy Lucifer are unclear and lack mechanisms for objective validation, or are contradictory, limited, imperfect and metaphorically erroneous?

Or is the problem of the Atonement actually explained in great detail in the Bible; but we have simply been unable to see the forest for the trees?

Why Did Jesus Have to Die? Seven powerful words. One comprehensive answer. The journey begins.