

These following reviews and related correspondence were first published in our Circular Letters between May 2010 (No 243) and September 2011 (No 251).

A Review of “Change Us, Not God”

A few weeks ago I received an email from one of our readers in Australia asking me if I would consider reviewing John Launchbury’s book “Change us, not God.” This I agreed to do and so obtained a copy from the author. I had already seen reference to this work on the Christadelphian Worldwide forum so I could now discuss it more fully with others here also.

My first impressions of John Launchbury’s book, after a quick first read, was favourable and I considered the work very readable but I’m afraid first impressions didn’t last long. Upon a closer study of the work I began to feel there was too much left out and too much of little value put in. Who was the writer addressing? At times it seemed to be Sunday School scholars, other times he was putting forth his views on certain scriptures on which there have been vigorous theological arguments. And why does the writer say so much about our names being written in the Book of Life during our life time and not at the time of the resurrection as though this is a new idea? Then he finished this section by saying we are told this in the scriptures “time and time and time again.”

And I am assured by this writer, but have apparently forgotten, that I once used to try and excuse my sin rather than own up to it and seek forgiveness - though I truly can’t recall ever trying to justify my wrong doing to God; and this brings me to the title of the book “Change us, not God” – the title put me off ever wanting to read it; has there ever been a Christian who would consider changing God and not him or her self? However the subtitle makes much better sense – “Biblical Meditation on the Death of Jesus”. This I suggest should have been the title.

But a friend reminded me that “everyone deserves a fair and reasoned hearing.”

So I must continue on to the positive side. We are told early in the book that

“the goal of this study is to try to recapture the simplicity of salvation as taught throughout the Bible. We will study the atonement (as it is often called), away from metaphors, allegories and symbolisms. We will lay aside analogies and instead concentrate simply on finding the basic principles.”

We appreciate the merit of this approach because metaphors, allegories and symbolisms have been widely misunderstood, misused and argued over, so they are perhaps best left to a minimum at least until some basic principles have been thoroughly absorbed and then these should naturally fall into their rightful places.

The book is divided into some 28 sections of roughly six or seven pages each, in which the writer gives brief expositions on about two hundred and fifty or so quotations dealing with a very comprehensive range of topics connected with the death of Jesus with encouraging exhortations on how disciples of Jesus should be influenced to live lives well pleasing to our heavenly Father.

The writer correctly rejects those theories on the atonement which have been added by the churches since the 3rd century showing the falsehood of their doctrines regarding the Ransom Theory; Satisfaction Theory and the Substitution Theory with their injustices and God-dishonouring concepts.

Under the heading “To Change Us” there follows quotes from Colossians 1:21-23; 1 Peter 2:21 and Philippians 3:10 exhorting us to see in the crucifixion the compelling need for us to respond to such love “that we should follow in his steps” “becoming like him.” Then the writer repeats an earlier proposition that there were two fundamental reasons for Jesus’ death, so on page 20 we read:

1. “His death is supposed to have a profound and transforming effect on us. It is the beginning of a process in which we must thoroughly participate,” and

2. "His personal sacrifice played a major role in the development and perfecting of Christ himself."

He says

"This proposition claims that the death of Christ was an event designed by God with natural consequences through cause and effect; those consequences affecting any of us who are willing to be affected by it, and profoundly affecting Jesus himself."

I suggest we now come to the real purpose of the book, for next we read,

"This is a bold proposition because most Christians were brought up on the idea that the death of Jesus was exactly about some kind of metaphysical or spiritual transaction, and not about natural cause and effect at all"

- and the writer proceeds throughout his work to show that no transaction was needed; just the cause and effect was sufficient. So the writer is keen to show us how the sacrifice of Jesus consisted of His entire work of preaching as well as His final yielding to His crucifixion, yet with His death on the cross not an essential part of our salvation for he says "We will see that God could always forgive us" - even without Jesus laying down His life for the sheep; even though He was delivered for our offences.

The writer, correctly in my view, having ruled out theological teachings of substitution and related transactional theories which were designed to satisfy God's supposed need rather than our genuine need, continues over many sections, to consider aspects of the reasons for Jesus' death. These sections show a number of ways in which we should be influenced for the better by Jesus' example of dedication to and love for His Father. I agree wholeheartedly with the exhortations in these sections. All of which should make us feel very humble indeed as we contrast this with our 'natural' behaviour and should convince us of the need to follow His example of doing right and so help bring us to God. "Not my will, but thine be done" and if we should follow righteousness then our salvation is assured.

One portion in particular I found very moving where John Launchbury, on page 42 under the heading of "Nowhere to lay his head", writes,

"On another occasion someone said, "I want to follow you!" Jesus said, "Are you sure? Do you know what it would be like to follow me, with nowhere to sleep?" (Luke 9:8). Peter said, "We've left everything to follow you" (Mark 10:28). If Peter, Andrew, James and John and all the others had indeed left 'everything' to follow Jesus, think how much more Jesus had already left! Everything! He had never had a wife, or children; never had a career; never had a house of his own, or any of the other comforts we crave in this life, not to mention all his inherent rights as son of God. It's hard for us to conceive the complete and utter devotion of our Lord; pouring every aspect of his life into rescuing us from our path of destruction.

"I think Jesus had truly exhausted himself by the time he came to Golgotha. In the literal sense I mean. There was nothing left. He had given every part of his life. When Jesus said that Abraham had rejoiced to see his day and was glad, the response was, "You're not yet fifty...! (John 8:56) This to a man in his early thirties! I wonder how old and tired he looked; pouring every ounce of his strength into serving the people around him, into building them up, rescuing them and saving them. By the time he arrived at Golgotha he had already emptied himself. There was next to nothing left. And having emptied himself, he enacts his final declaration. 'I give every part of me to you, my Father.'"

It was surely a very exhausted Jesus who stood before Pilate and Herod after a night of no rest, and little wonder He was the first to die on the cross - a merciful release not given to the other two victims who had their legs broken. O, the horror of crucifixion!

To continue with my analysis, I wish to give an example where I feel the writer assumes too much. On page 18 the writer quotes from John 14:30,31,

“I will not speak with you much longer for the Prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me, but the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”

Of this the writer says:

“This seems to capture the sense of the original text very well. We are now only about twelve hours before the crucifixion, and Jesus explains to the disciples what is going on. The world is being taught a double lesson, he says, the world must learn (a) I love the Father and (b) that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me.”

He continues,

“If we want a commentary of the purpose of the crucifixion from the lips of Jesus himself, then we should highlight this verse. It may not reflect the whole story, of course, but it is the aspect he chooses to emphasize just a few short hours before his death. He does not speak about a transaction in heaven. Rather, he highlights an impact on earth: the world must learn something from what is about to occur.”

Certainly Jesus said “the world must learn that I love the Father and that I do exactly what my Father has commanded me” but Jesus did not show the purpose of the crucifixion in this verse. Jesus never at any time showed the purpose of His crucifixion. For the simple reason that He would never boast! No! Such was never Jesus’ way. Even at such an hour as this He expressed humility and loving kindness in saying He wants people to learn, over time.

While the need for the Messiah was told in the Old Testament, it was left to the Apostles to explain more fully the purpose of the crucifixion. We find the most detailed explanation in the Apostle Paul’s writings, especially his letter to the Romans, but I don’t want to select one as more important than another for they all give us insights into the work of God in Jesus. But Jesus Himself held back from explaining what He was going to do at the end of His ministry, and at no time, from the moment John the Baptist proclaimed “Behold, the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” to His resurrection did He tell anyone the reason for His laying down of His life. The nearest He came to it was in His discourse in John 10:11-15 “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.” But the disciples didn’t understand and Jesus didn’t try to explain further. (Mark 9:32).

To some this may not seem a major point, depending on what one has in mind regarding the reason for the crucifixion or how one sees it as part of the purpose of God. But I believe it is central and crucial to the work of God in Christ.

On page 27 the writer shows a contrast between the sacrifices under the Law of Moses with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross in as much as all the sacrifices for sin under the Law were commanded by God and were carried out as He instructed as acts of righteousness; yet the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was carried out by sinful and unrighteous men who had refused to do God’s will and whom He destroyed for their wickedness (Matthew 21:41). Those carrying out the sacrifices under the Law of Moses were doing God’s will, whereas those who crucified Jesus were cruel murderers who despised the Son of God. Thus he concludes that the sacrifices under the law were not types of which Jesus was the Antitype.

He also shows that the laying on of hands symbolically transferring the sins of the people on to the Scape-goat is not necessarily the correct understanding, as the word “laid” which comes from “the Hebrew root word *pga* (pronounced pa-gah) which, according to some concordance work shows us that the idea of *pga* is actually that of meeting or encountering rather than any ritual laying on of hands. So Isaiah 53:6 is likely to be saying something very plain: “The Lord had him encountering the iniquity of us all.”“

Yet we find the same word (*pga*) occurs later in Isaiah 53:12, “For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession (*pga*) for the transgressors.” “Made intercession for” is very different from John Launchbury’s “encountering”.

So the writer asks, who offered Jesus as a sacrifice? And concludes that “It was Jesus who offered Jesus as a sacrifice.” “The act of submission was the one act of righteousness that was taking place in those events at Golgotha. Everyone else involved in the killing that day were engaged in raw sin. Murderous intent.”

The exhortation following these notes is that it was ordinary civilized people like us who murdered Jesus and they did so because Jesus was good; He was sinless and they rejected Him because they were opposed to good. What does that tell us about the sinfulness of sin! “As disciples we are holy people. Not in a self-righteous sense; but holy when we let the holiness of our Lord be upon us allowing his love and peace to reflect itself in our lives...”

In this very brief, partial and I feel, inadequate review the writer’s purpose seems to me to have been to show that the death of Jesus is supposed to have such a profound effect upon our characters as to transform us into subjects suitable for His Kingdom, and also Jesus death played an even greater role in Himself as to perfect Him to be King.

But I wonder if the writer feels he has “recaptured the simplicity of salvation taught throughout the Bible.” I am not at all convinced. I believe John Launchbury has overlooked two or three important Bible teachings which closely concern his subject, and these I wish to discuss in our next Circular Letter.

With love in Jesus to all. Russell.

(From C.L. 244 July 2010)

Following on from our last Circular Letter we continue the review of John Launchbury’s book “Change us, not God”

In order to do this it will be necessary to quote fairly extensively from John Launchbury’s book.

Under the heading “Dissecting Substitution” he writes,

“If the substitution theory is understood to be just a metaphor, then perhaps it can help us appreciate some aspects of salvation. But instead, the substitution theory is accepted by many Christians as if it were literal truth.

Remember that it’s important to see metaphor as metaphor, symbol as symbol and parable as just parable, not the reality itself. So let us see now why substitution cannot be taken literally. We’ll do this by treating the theory of substitution as if it were literal truth, and then showing what contradictions arise as a result.

Here are five serious challenges:

- 1). Substitution is unjust.**
- 2). The penalty is wrong.**
- 3). Nothing left to forgive.**
- 4). Salvation would be universal.**
- 5). Substitution puts the problem in the wrong place.”**

I will deal with all five of John Launchbury’s challenges but will start with his third challenge first:-

Challenge No. 3) “Nothing left to forgive.”

Under this heading John Launchbury writes:

“Substitution leaves no room for forgiveness. Suppose Bob owes me money. I keep saying, “Come on. Bob, you owe me five bucks. Pay up! Pay up!” Then Alice hears this and says to me Hey, I’ll give you the five bucks that Bob owes you.” Would it be fair for me now to go to Bob and say: “I forgive you your debt!” Not at all!

Alice has already paid the debt; there’s nothing left to be forgiven. It’s all been dealt with.

Do you see the implications for salvation? If Jesus has paid the debt, if he has satisfied the legal requirement, where is the need for forgiveness? There’s no role for it at all; the debt has been paid! Yet again and again and again, the Scriptures say that we come to God through forgiveness. For example:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

We have to conclude therefore that there is a real debt outstanding! God says: “I forgive!” But substitution would say it’s been paid, and hence there’s nothing left to forgive.”

So my response to challenge No 3 is this : -

Having correctly condemned the substitutionary theories introduced by theologians since the 3rd century John Launchbury went on too far when he wrote:

“Suppose Bob owes me money. I keep saying, “Come on, Bob, you owe me five bucks. Pay up! Pay up!” Then Alice hears this and says to me, Hey, I’ll give you the five bucks that Bob owes you.”

When John wrote this he should have jumped for joy and shouted “Eureka! I have found something I have never seen before!” But no, he went on to say “There’s nothing left to be forgiven. It’s all been dealt with,” and then he went on to say, “Do you see the implications for salvation? If Jesus has paid the debt, if he has satisfied the legal requirement, where is the need for forgiveness?”

Precisely, and that’s the point! It’s all been dealt with.

Let’s recap: Bob owes John five bucks and John demands payment. Alice pays John the five bucks. So now Bob doesn’t owe it to John but he still owes it to Alice. But Alice forgives Bob utterly.

Now let’s change the names – Adam owes his life to the demands of the law. Along come Jesus and says, ‘I will pay the debt of life that Adam owes; I will lay down my life in place of his; please let Adam live.’ The law is satisfied and Adam owes his life to Jesus. Jesus forgives Adam utterly.

Ever since Adam the entire human race belongs to Jesus. He bought the whole race when He laid down His life as the ransom (1 Timothy 2:6 and Mark 10:45). Adam’s life was passed on to us and so we owe our life to Jesus also and in Jesus is forgiveness.

Jesus was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8) and when He came to John for baptism, John proclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Jesus laid down His natural life so that Adam could continue to live out his natural life and thus begin the human race. Jesus never received His natural life back again. That life was in the blood shed at the foot of the cross and gone forever.

Regarding forgiveness; the sacrifices under the Law of Moses could not take away sin or they would have continued to this day (Hebrews 10:2) but God had no pleasure in continuing them once Jesus came into the world, because here was something better - “Lo, I come to do thy will, O God, (v.7). “Sacrifice and offering

thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me". Thus Jesus ended the first covenant to establish the second covenant.

The first covenant was made with the children of Israel as we read in Exodus 24:6-8, "And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words."

This covenant was established with the shedding of blood of the animal and this sacrifice was never repeated as it had established God's covenant with His people until the time came for it to be replaced.

The second (better) covenant was established with the shedding of the blood of the Son of God when the "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake" (Matthew 27:51) which ended the first covenant and replaced it with the new.

At the Last Supper Jesus "took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matthew 26:27,28).

Jesus' death was a reality. Jesus' death was a sacrifice in the truest sense of the word. 1 Corinthians 5:7, "For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." Jesus' death established a legal covenant for His disciples to come into covenant relationship with Him and His Father. It is covenant relationship that is essential for salvation, and this covenant relationship is a binding legal matter established in the shedding of blood in sacrifice of the Son of God.

Baptism into the death of Jesus brings us into this legal covenant relationship with Him. Jesus' disciples are no longer "in Adam." They are now "in Christ."

Challenge No 1. "Substitution is unjust." On this John Launchbury writes:

"The first problem of substitution is one of justice. Or, rather, injustice. Since when is it a mark of justice to punish the wrong person? The whole notion of substitution is based on the idea that the justice of God has to be upheld, and so he does what? He punishes the wrong man! Do you see how it erodes the very core of the idea of justice? The Bible never considers it just or right to punish the wrong person. A major theme of Isaiah's whole prophecy is to condemn those who take bribes, who allow the guilty to go unpunished, or who punish the innocent. For example, "Woe to those ... who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice to the innocent" (Isaiah 5:22-23). Proverbs has quite a bit to say on the topic too: Acquitting the guilty and condemning the innocent - the LORD detests them both (Proverbs 17:15).

Does it make sense that God might then go and do so himself? Of course not. God states the principle directly through Ezekiel: The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him (Ezekiel 18:20).

Substitution is a theory of legal justice, but contains a legal injustice at its core."

My response to this 1st challenge, that "Substitution is unjust":

It makes me very sad that people can write this sort of stuff, as though the Bible teaching of Jesus being our substitute is one of punishment; of punishing the wrong person. Do not such people know the supreme and unconditional love of both God and of Jesus? "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfil the royal law."

Of course Jesus was not God's 'whipping boy'! To imagine that the Bible teaching of substitution should be based on something so unethical beggars belief.

Dr Edersheim, in his book "The Temple at the Time of Christ" makes a valid point when he writes (page 32), "on one point the authorities of the old synagogue, previous to their controversy with Christianity, are agreed. As the Old Testament and Jewish tradition taught that the object of a sacrifice was its substitution for the offender, so Scripture and the Jewish fathers also teach that the substitute to whom all these types pointed was none other than the Messiah" and he points out that this agrees with what the writer to the Hebrews said in chapter 10, verses 11 and 12, "And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down on the right hand of God."

That these sacrifices were typical of Jesus' sacrifice was foretold numerous times in the Old Testament and as an example we can take Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12 where the substitutionary sufferings of the Messiah are referred to no less than twelve times.

Never was substitutionary sacrifice about punishment or appeasement but about saving whosoever will come into the legal covenant relationship with God through baptism into Jesus' death. This requires faith.

If a mother sees her child drowning will she not jump into the water in an attempt to save her child? And should she unfortunately drown and her child saved, would you not commend her for her brave attempt? Should we not commend Jesus for His courage in saving us? For giving His life so we could live?

Law is supreme and God subjects Himself to the principles of His own Law; He does not and will not violate Law to exercise mercy. As we read in Psalm 138:2, "For thou hast magnified Thy Word (Law) above all Thy Name (Love)." When man breaks the Law, he places himself in a position where God will not deliver him by an arbitrary act of forgiveness. To do so would vitiate, or lower the moral standard of Law and introduce a doubt as to the supremacy and sanctity of His Word to us and would leave room for doubt as to whether God is in all things faithful and unchanging. Although there is no literal third party, no personal devil, there is a legal principle of relationship and allegiance involved which takes its force and strength from the principles of justice.

To say that "Substitution is a theory of legal justice, but contains a legal injustice at its core" reveals the lack of understanding of what Jesus has done in laying down His life for His friends. John 10:14-18, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself."

There is no punishment in Jesus death. Jesus excludes it and so must we. But Jesus teaches substitution when He said "The son of man came... to give his life a ransom for many." Matthew 20:28.

Challenge No. 2, "The Penalty is wrong." Regarding this, John Launchbury writes:

"Note that the penalty Jesus bore is not the one we were condemned with. The penalty of sin is death itself, not simply the process of dying. The penalty of sin is eternal separation from God it is eternal destruction, oblivion - forever. That punishment has not been borne by Jesus.

Because Jesus is no longer dead, he has not borne the true penalty of sin. He tasted death, certainly. He experienced the agonies of death went into the grave and was dead for three days. But if he was supposed to be bearing our punishment, God should have left him dead.

Did God then change his mind and decide not to punish him with the punishment that was due to us after all? In the circus parable, it's as if the father says to the son, "You stay at home and I'll take

the younger brother, and then, halfway to the circus he telephones home and says I've changed my mind. Come after all!" He's not bearing the punishment.

Substitution is a legal theory, but it contains a mismatched penalty at its core."

Here are my comments concerning the second challenge:

God did not change His mind. The penalty of which Adam was warned was that in the day he ate of the tree he would die. He didn't die, he didn't suffer the penalty, but in due time Jesus, by taking the penalty on Himself took his place.

Neither the process of dying nor our death is the penalty for sin. And neither is eternal separation from God, eternal destruction, oblivion forever, the penalty of sin, but, for the sinner it is the result of suffering the penalty.

The penalty that Adam was warned of was judicial death – the putting to a violent, untimely death and Jesus suffered this instead of Adam. The penalty for sin we are warned of is also judicial death - the second death - and this will be suffered by those who reject Jesus as their Saviour with the result that they will cease forever. One ought not to confuse the result of the penalty with the penalty itself as John has done here.

To say that "Because Jesus is no longer dead, He has not borne the true penalty of sin" is to totally misunderstand or ignore the facts of the doctrine of redemption. Jesus bore Adam's penalty in order to give life to mankind. The whole of mankind was redeemed when Jesus died on the cross but that did not and does not give eternal life to anyone. What Jesus sacrifice did was give the opportunity of eternal life to as many as come to Him in faith of what He has done for them. "Greater love hath no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends." Sin is forgiven us because of Jesus love for us. It is Jesus who forgives us and without His sacrificial death that would not have been the case.

God so loved the world that He gave, in Jesus, the one needful sacrifice for sin, and purchased back to Himself all those who put on the name of Jesus Christ by faith and by baptism as a symbolic passing through the death which He suffered for us. Jesus carried out His Father's plan of salvation by laying down His life for the life of the world, and upheld His Father's law by meeting its claim and at the same time revealed the love and mercy of the Father from the beginning.

Challenge No. 4, that "Salvation would be universal." John writes:

Regarding this claim John writes,

"If Christ has fully borne the punishment due to sinners, if he has paid the price and earned salvation on behalf of sinners, then there's no reason why anybody should be condemned at God's judgment. Or put the other way around, why would God condemn any of us if Christ has removed the whole legal basis for any of us being condemned? There would be no reason. If the theory of substitution was true, then it would lead logically to a conclusion that salvation should be universal. But this is a problem. Most Christians agree that the Bible is quite clear that there is going to be a separation between those who are saved, and those who are not. To take just one example, Daniel says: "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2).

Salvation is not universal, so the substitution theory cannot be an accurate description of the mechanism of salvation."

My response to John's 4th challenge:

Regarding John's first sentence that "If Christ has fully borne the punishment due to sinners, if he has paid the price and earned salvation on behalf of sinners, then there's no reason why anybody should be condemned at God's judgment", this would be an obvious conclusion if his assumptions were correct. But

John Launchbury has only considered false substitution theories introduced by theologians since the third century and has not touched upon Bible teachings.

Jesus has not “earned salvation on behalf of sinners.” While salvation is a free gift to the faithful, it is not given because Jesus earned it for them but because of their faith; Jesus asked “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me...” (John 17:24).

And Jesus has not “removed the whole legal basis for any of us being condemned”. Of the unbelievers Jesus said, “he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Obviously, salvation was never meant to be universal. If it were then there would be little point in building characters well pleasing to Him.

Challenge No. 5 is “Substitution puts the problem in the wrong place.” About this John writes:

“The final problem, and this is a big one, is one of shifting the blame. We have a great tendency to blame others, to focus on someone else as the one having a problem. It’s a natural human act to say: You know what? It’s not really our problem! It’s really God’s problem.

The theory of substitution falls into this trap. It says that the real problem with salvation is that God was in a legal fix, that Jesus had to die to get God out of the legal problems. It allows us to say, “The problem is not with me, it’s with God!”

In fact, all the theories of atonement we described in the previous section fail in this same way: God found himself needing to ransom us from the devil, God’s honour was upset, or God found himself in a legal bind.

The real problem, of course, is not with God, the problem has never been with God. The real problem is with us! The real problem is our opposition to God - opposition and rebellion in my heart, in your heart! That’s where the challenge is, the rebelliousness of the human being. So that’s where the work of salvation has to be focused.

Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (Rom 6:1-3)

In other words, the real purpose of the death of Christ was not to change God, but to change us!

Understanding this shifts our whole perspective by introducing a radically different possibility from what we may have had before. In my own spiritual development, I had wrestled with all the transactional theories but it had never occurred to me to question the very idea whether the death of Christ was a transaction at all!

As I read Scripture more and more, I came to see that the death of Christ was not designed to deal with God’s difficulties; it was designed to make me different! It is to change me!

This is not being self-centered. It’s saying: “The problem is here with me. Whatever the death of Christ is designed to accomplish, it is designed to accomplish it by changing me, where the problem actually lies.

This approach to understanding the death of Christ is sometimes described as a moral influence interpretation, because it addresses the moral problem of sin: the damage sin does to us and to other people.”

My response to the 5th challenge:

There is little to say in reply to this fifth challenge. John Launchbury calls it “a big problem” but there is no problem except the big one of his own making or should I say, imagining. God is Almighty and does not get Himself into “legal fixes” or make problems for Himself.

We have seen how the writer has made a good job of showing the weaknesses of false substitution, but true substitution has no problem associated with it, though it seems some people have difficulty in accepting the supreme and unconditional love of God and of Jesus in releasing us from our bondage to sin at the cost of Jesus life - both working together for our redemption.

God said “For I am the LORD, I change not;” (Malachi 3:6) and neither should anyone ever expect Him to change; it is we who must change for the better, and the writer’s continual exhortation is for us to do better, to be Christ-like.

On page 6 of his work, John writes:

“This section is called Atonement Theories. That sounds grand and maybe complicated. So before we dive in, let’s take the mystery out of the words ‘atone’ and ‘atonement’, because they have come to mean different things to different people. They are words that come with their own baggage.

The origin of atone is very simple. According to my dictionary, it was invented by William Tyndale in sixteenth century English, coming from a contraction of the phrase ‘at one.’ Tyndale was trying to express the ideas of forgiveness and reconciliation. So, atonement just means to be united, or perhaps, to be reunited. Since the purpose behind the life and death of Jesus is to reunite human beings with God, the word is very appropriate. Notice that the word atone doesn’t imply any mechanism or method. So if you think sacrifice whenever you hear the word atonement, you may be reading too much into the word. Whenever we use it here, we shall just take it to mean reuniting, without any assumption about how that may be accomplished.”

But John says that, atonement is to “reunite human beings with God,” and also says “that’s where the work of salvation has to be focused.” In a sense this is true. But atonement is only one part in our salvation, a part which we did not do for ourselves. Jesus reunited us with, or reconciled us to God. It suits John Launchbury’s purpose to say he will not assume how atonement was accomplished but nowhere in his book does he distinguish between atonement and salvation and treats them as one and the same thing. They are not.

While exhortations are helpful and encouraging in order to help each other develop our characters, this is not atonement. To say it is atonement is to teach salvation by works. Though John says he does not agree with this as he asks, on page 20,

“How could our participation in salvation be squared with the idea that we are saved by grace rather than by works?”

However, his comment on Titus 3:3-8, is that

“If salvation occurred through a transactional process, then this would be inexplicable. Paul couldn’t have left out the one absolutely critical step. On the other hand, if the work of salvation is a process of transformation, a process in which we are changed then this list is exactly what we would expect.”

– and this is salvation by works which he tries to deny.

However, Atonement is through Jesus reuniting man with God by His sacrificial death, while salvation is through our faith in Jesus Atonement, and our works are our thankful response to both God and Jesus supreme and unconditional love. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.” (Ephesians 2:8).

Whenever we read the scriptures concerning the crucifixion of Jesus we constantly come upon such terms as ransom, redemption, purchase and bought. All these have one thing in common – substitution. Yet substitution is denied by some. If we consider only the false ideas on substitution introduced and taught by theologians since the third century, then we can understand their rejection of such God dishonouring teachings. We reject them too.

However, rather than denying the bible teaching that Jesus died instead of us would it not be better to try to understand the reasons why we are told that He died for us or instead of us, and how the atonement works and what it does for us and why? All the answers are given if we inquire and they are all naturally based on the unconditional love of God for His creation.

Some of the objections to the idea of substitution have been answered, such as ‘If Jesus died instead of us He should have stayed dead’ and this answer is simple enough - that Jesus natural life (Greek – psuche) did ‘stay dead’ and He was raised in Spirit life (Greek – zoe) - 1 Peter 3:18. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.” Jesus’ psuche (natural life) was in the blood and this was shed when He was crucified but Jesus could appear in any form He wished.

Another objection is which has been put forward is this - ‘how can the life of one man substitute for the countless lives of all the faithful?’ – and the answer to this is that Jesus laid down His natural life in place of Adam’s natural life. A single life for a single life. The exact substitute. One unblemished life that became blemished, replaced by an unblemished life given freely by Jesus. The Life of one Son of God for the life of the other Son of God. And to repeat that in other words - Adam lost the right to his natural life which hitherto had been unblemished and without spot, and Jesus freely chose to lay down His natural life which remained unblemished and without spot in place of Adam’s forfeited life, which was the exact price, an unblemished life, was paid in order to release Adam from the penalty for his transgression. This allowed Adam to continue to live out his natural life and pass it on to his children - and so, eventually, to us. The life we have from Adam is the forfeited life and that is why we are all counted as being in bondage to sin, concluded under sin; under condemnation.

These matters relate to our natural life - Jesus’ natural life in place of Adam’s natural life so that the human race could have natural life. This is only a part of the story of course because we have to consider eternal life.

But before we go any further we may ask why it was that Jesus alone could give His life for the sin of the world and not anyone else who had lived a blameless life? And the answer to this lies in the ‘virgin birth.’ Jesus was never “in Adam”. God was His Father and no man ever had two fathers. Our life has been passed down from Adam and we all receive this forfeited life from our fathers but Jesus life was not passed down from Adam and so He did not receive Adam’s forfeited life. The ‘Virgin Birth’ made sure of this. For everyone else “The scripture hath concluded all under sin that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ be given to them that believe” (Galatians 3:22).

The result of receiving forfeited life is that we are concluded under the one sin of Adam, so that the faithful can receive the promised blessings. The importance of this is seen in 1 Corinthians 15:22, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” When we realise we are ‘in Adam’ we can accept the gospel and be baptised into Jesus. We are then ‘in Jesus’ and no longer ‘in Adam.’ We cannot be in Adam and in Jesus at one and the same time. We are either in covenant relationship with God through Jesus or we are not. We have, individually, to come into this covenant relationship through baptism in order to receive the blessings of grace and escape the destruction that is in the world. If we are in covenant relationship with God then we are redeemed, ransomed, purchased and bought, and can receive forgiveness through Jesus.

This is redemption; this is reconciliation; this is atonement; this is deliverance by the paying of a ransom. “He that hath the Son, hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I

written unto you that ye believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life” (1 John 5:12-13).

Let us go back to Adam.

Adam, by his transgression failed to seize his opportunity of earning eternal life and so God, rather than destroying Adam, in His loving kindness provided another way – not through perfect obedience (that way had failed for Adam) but through forgiveness and faith, yet even this depended upon Jesus’ perfect obedience. Therefore our eternal life depended upon Jesus’ perfect obedience instead of ours. Substitution again.

The opportunity to serve God through forgiveness and faith has been provided in and through the various covenants which God has made with and for the benefit of mankind. The covenants of God are the action of God in which He bestows grace upon the subjects of the covenant in question as for example in Genesis 6:18 where God says to Noah, “With thee shall I establish my covenant, and thou shall come into the ark, thou and thy sons and thy wife and thy son’s wives with thee.” By grace they were saved from the destruction of the flood. God provided the covenant; Noah accepted. Any thought of a bilateral agreement is excluded.

The covenant God made with Abraham required that “every man child among you shall be circumcised, and it shall be a token of the covenant between me and you” (Genesis 17:10). Those not circumcised were barred from the covenant (verse 14). Separateness, or holiness, is an essential aspect of covenant blessing.

There were other covenants but I will mention just two more: -

The covenant God made with the children of Israel in Exodus 24:3 follows on from where all the people promised to obey God in all that He commanded - “And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. 4. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. 5. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. 6. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. 7. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. 8. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.”

The covenant under which we come in this dispensation was established when Jesus was crucified and “the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom” (Matthew 27:51) signifying the end of the Mosaic covenant. This last covenant in and through Jesus is far superior to any that preceded it; the one that all other covenants anticipated and the only one that was truly efficacious - Hebrews 9: 13,14, “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

We see from this that God has worked through Jesus as He said “This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent” (John 6:29).

In John Launchbury’s book there is little recognition of the work of God in Jesus Christ and the emphasis has been on what we can do to please God and so receive eternal life. This is salvation by works and eternal life cannot be earned; it is the free gift of God.

The good we do should be our own natural response to Divine Love. The free gift is assured for all the faithful.

With Love in Jesus. Russell.

Correspondence and Comments relating to John Launchbury's book "Change us, not God"

Further to our review of 'Change us, not God' by John Launchbury published in our last two Circular Letters, I have now received two emails from Brother Fred B. In the first of these he writes:-

"Whilst I have read and pondered the view that you have put forward, I am not all that sure that you have adequately resolved the arguments that Launchbury outlined. Take for example your response to 'Challenge No 3' as expressed on page 11 of CL 244.

You say that John's reasoning needs checking out and rightfully so, but in following your line of thought, I immediately run into difficulties.

The argument runs..... "Bob owes John five bucks and John demands payment. Alice pays John the five bucks. So now Bob doesn't owe it to John but he still owes it to Alice. How simple?"

To my way of thinking, this line of reasoning has overlooked the fact that what Alice did, using Launchbury's illustration, is gift (give) the amount to Bob, not advance it as a loan requiring repayment. This changes the equation significantly.

Following this, you proceed to recast the example by changing the names, putting it this way....."Adam owes God his life. Along comes Jesus and says, 'I will pay the debt of life that Adam owes; I will lay down my life in place of Adam's; please let Adam live.' Again, very simple. And that is what happened."

In looking at it this way, it seems to me that we are still left with the very problem that Launchbury has endeavoured to highlight. That is, if Jesus paid what was owed by Adam, then God has nothing left to forgive. And, to my simple way of thinking, this appears to remain a very valid point.

One of the aspects of atonement explanation that I have a great deal of trouble getting my head around is that which relates to what is termed 'natural life' and 'spiritual life'. Examining the Garden of Eden scenario, I keep asking what was at stake when Adam and Eve were warned against eating from that certain tree? Was it a question of their 'natural life' or something much greater than this, their very existence. Existence which depended on maintaining a direct link/connection/ relationship with God.

I gain the impression that when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree they actually died spiritually. They cut the link that would have enabled them to enjoy unending existence. Permanent and unbroken fellowship with God. By eating from the tree, they fell into the category that Jesus evidently recognised when he said, "let the dead bury the dead". (Matthew 8:22). Those, who whilst being alive in the flesh, were in effect spiritually dead; dead in trespasses and sin (Ephesians 2:1). The condition that Adam and Eve placed themselves in, and all else who have chosen to imitate their bad example; there being no exception apart from Christ.

Looking at the picture this way, I am left with the impression that the understanding that Launchbury has endeavoured to convey, tends to offer a view point that is more harmonious in many respects than that embraced by the substitutionary stand point. However, in saying this, school is still out as far as I am concerned, as I see much food for thought, without attempting to address any other comments that you have made.

Having no wish to make this a lengthy note or unduly labour the issues, perhaps you would like to comment on what I have tried to convey so far, brief and all as it may seem.

Incidentally, I fully agree with what you have said in your email in respect to the need for Baptism as a prerequisite to entering into a right and proper relationship with the Father.

kindest regards in the faith and hope which we share through Christ Jesus our Lord. Fred B."

In reply to the points Brother Fred has outlined above I wrote :

"First I wish to thank you for your email regarding my response to John Launchbury's book ... I am sure the points you raise will interest others ...

I did make one mistake when I wrote "Adam owes God his life..." unfortunately, I have made this mistake before and should not have made it again but at least it gives me the opportunity once more to show that Adam owed his life to the Law of Sin and Death, and not to God. I think this is an important distinction for it highlights the supreme, unbounded Love of God and of Jesus (as I hope we shall see later). Yes, God is the Lawmaker and it is the Law that requires satisfaction. When a Ruler or Government of any country makes a law for governing the people those who infringe the law do not pay the Ruler or the Parliament, or the Judge who oversees the case. Yet the demands of the law have to be met.

In the case of Adam it was God who, temporarily, provided the satisfaction when He clothed Adam and Eve with animals skins, and it was animal sacrifices that again, temporarily satisfied the requirements of the Law in Israel, but since the crucifixion it is Jesus (again whom God provided), who has satisfied the Law of Sin and Death. So God, who made the Law, also provided the solution by which His Law was satisfied. What King, Government or Judge would do such a thing? Yet God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son for us. And then we have Galatians 3:13 which tells us that Jesus has redeemed us from the curse of the law. How? By being made a curse for us. How can anyone take away the teaching of substitution from this verse?

With Love in Jesus to you and yours. Russell."

I then received another email in which Brother Fred writes:-

"Hello Russell, Greetings and thank you for responding to my note ... I hear your further remarks, which you feel validate the substitution view, but I am not all that sure they make it an open and shut case. The more I have thought about this question, since being prompted to do so by Launchbury's book, the more I see problems with the substitution arguments. Particularly since reflecting on what I read in Hosea 6:6 "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." If God says He requires mercy rather than sacrifice, why would He turn around and require the sacrifice of His son in order to settle an account on behalf of another? That hardly equates with mercy in my book.

The substitution view point seems to be predicated on the argument that the demands of law must be met no matter what. To put it crudely, it seems to be indicating that God requires His 'pound of flesh' regardless, because justice/law reigns supreme, above mercy and forgiveness.

It implies that God has to be paid off, or Justice/law must get its dues, before mercy or forgiveness can be considered, but this flies in the face of the very idea of mercy and forgiveness.

I have two sons, and there is no way known that I could let one of them die the most horrible and excruciating death known, even if happy and willing to do so, so that a sinner could go free. I would free the sinner, even though he/she may deserve to die, cancel out all knowledge of past wrongs and give him/her a chance to make good/repent, so long as he/she showed contrition and sought mercy. I ask myself, why are we saying that God acts otherwise? Why does God have to be paid off? Are we saying that judgment/law must rate higher than mercy? That mercy/forgiveness can't be shown until the debt has been paid? I can't get my mind around this idea

We have a case in Indonesia as this very point in time. There are two drug offenders under the sentence of death. Indonesian law says drug offenders must die, but they are pleading for mercy. Apparently during then- already 5 years in jail, they have shown exemplary behaviour and have expressed a strong sorrow for their wrong doing, and seek a chance to make a better life. Indonesia have been known to refuse mercy before in the case of drug offenders. They are hard liners, and added to this is the fact that they would not

even countenance the idea of letting someone else step in and die, instead of the offenders. In their eyes, that would not be justice.

Yet, we say that this is what God does. He accepts payment for another person's wrong doings, by allowing an innocent person to put his head on the block instead. How can we call this justice?

Since I have been re-examining my thinking about the substitution understanding, I have held up until this time, the more I am beginning to think that the idea has been responsible for making me read a lot of Scriptures the wrong way. A bit like it is when one holds a Trinitarian view point about God, there just seem to be a lot of Scriptures that favour the understanding, but it is not until you dig a bit deeper, can it be seen that they do not necessarily imply what one tends to think. It is really hard to get a viewpoint out of your head, once it has been planted there, more so if held for a long time.

Incidentally, I saw a definition of Grace on the Internet yesterday that made me shudder. This was it: 'God's Riches At Christ's Expense'. This was saying to me, that God robs Peter to pay poor. How can this be a put forward as a definition of God's grace? How can beating up on your son, to pay someone else's expense, be equated with grace? ... No doubt you will be able to add some further thoughts that may well help reconcile my difficulties, if they are in fact reconcilable.

My main questions are why do the demands of the law have to be satisfied, as you say? Why cannot mercy and forgiveness be exercised instead? Are you saying that justice rates higher than mercy?"

In consideration of the above correspondence with Brother Fred I now add the following observations:-

In my Review of "Change us, not God", I wrote in Page 11 of our last C.L. in response to the author's argument regarding substitution, that "Bob owes John five bucks and John demands payment. Alice pays John the five bucks. So now Bob doesn't owe it to John but he still owes it to Alice. How simple?" But to this brother Fred wrote: -

"To my way of thinking, this line of reasoning has overlooked the fact that what Alice did, using Launchbury's illustration, is gift (give) the amount to Bob, not advance it as a loan requiring repayment. This changes the equation significantly.

But I don't think it does change the equation. In changing the names to show how they are applied in Scripture we don't find Jesus, who paid Adam's debt, asking to be repaid. Had Jesus not laid down His life, though we may have Adam's forfeited life passed down to us to give us this present life, it would have been of no benefit to anyone because we would not have received the chance of receiving eternal life as our sins would not have been forgiven. Jesus died as the Just for the unjust (substitution again). The other part of Jesus sacrifice is that He bought us with His own blood to be His own possession. If Jesus had not paid our debt He could not forgive us. We are not asked to repay the debt but only to appreciate His lovingkindness by following His example "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you."

But Brother Fred continues:

"In looking at it this way, it seems to me that we are still left with the very problem that Launchbury has endeavoured to highlight. That is, if Jesus paid what was owed by Adam, then God has nothing left to forgive. And, to my simple way of thinking, this appears to remain a very valid point.

True! God has nothing left to forgive. The law was satisfied and did not require payment from Adam as well as Jesus. And isn't that the point? In the Garden God provided the animal sacrifice to provisionally cover the debt and then, on Calvary, provided His Son to pay the debt in full. But that death only covered Adam's forfeited life so that he could continue to live his natural life. It was the manner of Jesus' death that was the full and final settlement for Adam - the judicial death which the Law of Sin and Death required. So I

say again, once the payment was paid in full on Calvary then there was no debt owing. This was the one death which allowed Adam and Eve to continue their lives. This was when mankind was redeemed - the redemption of mankind took place. Our present life is our redeemed life. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" as John the Baptist pronounced at Jesus' baptism. This "Sin of the world" was the one sin of Adam and not all the sins of mankind. But the law of sin and death is still in place for those who reject the covenant which Jesus effected by His shed blood – Luke 22:20, Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you."

Jesus' death was the start of the new covenant - just as in Exodus we read of the start of the old covenant when Moses sprinkled the blood of the heifer on the altar, on the book of the covenant, and then on all the people who had promised to abide by all that was in the covenant. (Exodus 24:7,8). Likewise Jesus established the new covenant for the people of God when His blood was shed on the cross. For those who accept the new covenant, their sins are forgiven for Jesus' sake. Those who refuse to accept the new covenant the law of sin and death still applies and they will suffer the second death. So we read in Romans 8:1,2, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death".

There is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood, and we find that the shedding of Jesus' blood is the only efficacious means by which anyone is, or ever has been forgiven. And this forgiveness covers all the faithful since the time of Adam and Eve to when there is no more death.

Brother Fred further writes,

"I gain the impression that when Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree they actually died spiritually. They cut the link that would have enabled them to enjoy unending existence. Permanent and unbroken fellowship with God. By eating from the tree, they fell into the category that Jesus evidently recognised when he said, "let the dead bury the dead" (Matthew 8:22). Those, who whilst being alive in the flesh, were in effect spiritually dead; dead in trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1)."

I am sure you are right about Adam and Eve losing their spiritual life when they transgressed the commandment. There are two words in the Greek, 'psuche' and 'zoe' which are used in the New Testament and they indicate which life is being spoken of. 'Psuche' is our natural life we receive from our parents, which has been handed down to us from Adam, and 'zoe' is used to indicate our spiritual life which leads to eternal life. (which I believe we receive when we are born again at our baptism).

This distinction is followed closely in the New Testament where we find this is adhered to in well over six hundred cases where these words occur, but when we turn to the Old Testament it does not seem so clear and we find some anomalies. Nevertheless, we find that when God breathed life into Adam he became a living soul and in the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Bible we find the words used for "living soul" are "psuche zoe" i.e. 'natural life spiritual life'. Yet nowhere in Scripture do we find that we are born with zoe or spirit life but only our natural or psuche life. Jesus however did not have His natural life passed down from Adam but from His Father. Hence the only reason for the virgin birth. And Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life (zoe, or spirit life), and that they might have it more abundantly" - this is the zoe or Spirit life along with our natural life at this time but the promise is for more abundant spirit life in the resurrection when we are changed in the twinkling of an eye and no longer need our psuche / natural life.

In Brother Fred's second letter he repeats some of his earlier points -

".. I hear your further remarks, which you feel validate the substitution view, but I am not all that sure they make it an open and shut case. The more I have thought about this question, since being prompted to do so by Launchbury's book, the more I see problems with the substitution arguments. Particularly since reflecting on what I read in Hosea 6:6, "For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." If God says He requires mercy rather than sacrifice, why would He turn around and require the sacrifice of His son in order to settle an account on behalf of another? That hardly equates with mercy in my book."

Let's look at the context of Hosea 6:6. We find that God is relating the state of man in relationship to His covenant; man is not doing as he should yet God is faithful to His word. It is not what man can do to put matters right with God, no amount of sacrifices can possibly do that, but God yet shows mercy and loving kindness to any who will come to Him in faith. So it comes down to what God can and has done for mankind. He didn't want useless sacrifices. They were useless because the offerers were not sincere; they were just going through the ritual without penitential hearts. They should have been performed both together but such was no longer the case. God also knew what He would do; He would provide the one and only sacrifice that was efficacious for all time.

Brother Fred continues,

"The substitution viewpoint seems to be predicated on the argument that the demands of law must be met no matter what. To put it crudely, it seems to be indicating that God requires His 'pound of flesh' regardless, because justice/law reigns supreme, above mercy and forgiveness."

"It implies that God has to be paid off, or Justice/law must get its dues, before mercy or forgiveness can be considered, but this flies in the face of the very idea of mercy and forgiveness."

But this is to suggest that God's Law of Sin and Death was unjust in the first place. However, God did not make the Law of Sin and Death and then ignore it! There would be no point in that. And to continue with your illustration - God does not require the 'pound of flesh' from the sinner who could not give it without perishing - He provided it through the only One who could give it - Jesus, and He provided Jesus with the necessary price! A life like Adam's at creation - free of condemnation. "'Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given' - His own Son - for us! The second Adam.

Let's consider Psalm 138:2, "...for thou hast magnified thy word (law) above all thy name (love)." You will see I have suggested "law" in place of "word" and "love" instead of "name" for I see God's word as laws and commandments, and I see His name as Love. Add to this James 2:13, "mercy rejoiceth against judgment" which confirms the love of both Father and Son for the repentant sinner.

We have only one enemy and that is 'death'. Jesus did not come to save us from dying our natural death but from dying the second death - the judicial death that will be suffered by those who have rejected Him. This second death is the wages of sin.

It is not a matter of God having to be paid off before mercy and forgiveness can be considered, but God exercises mercy and forgiveness because of the law. He pays what the law requires! If God and Jesus were not one in their unbounded love for us there would be no salvation. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever should believe on Him should be saved" and "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" and "Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you". These and other such passages of Scripture show how God and Jesus are one in thought and purpose, both showing loving kindness and mercy to us who were in bondage to sin and concluded under sin, and therefore without the Father and Son we are without hope.

Brother Fred wrote,

"I have two sons, and there is no way known that I could let one of them die the most horrible and excruciating death known, even if happy and willing to do so, so that a sinner could go free. I would free the sinner, even though he/she may deserve to die, cancel out all knowledge of past wrongs and give him/her a chance to make good/repent, so long as he/she showed contrition and sought mercy. I ask myself, why are we saying that God acts otherwise? Why does God have to be paid off? Are we saying that judgment/law must rate higher than mercy? That mercy/forgiveness can't be shown until the debt has been paid? I can't get my mind around this idea."

I am thankful you would not consider letting one of your sons be put to death in place of someone else. It would be utterly pointless and could not save anyone beyond this present life. So there is no real comparison with what Jesus has done for us. Jesus did no such thing as give His life merely to save Adam so that he could live this life only. He died so that His friends, those who come to Him in faith, could have eternal life - as He prayed, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:24-26).

Again Brother Fred says:

"Yet, we say that this is what God does. He accepts payment for another person's wrong doings, by allowing an innocent person to put his head on the block instead. How can we call this justice?"

We don't call it justice, we call it LOVE. How often has a mother given her life in a brave attempt to save her child? Was that justice? Of course not; it was courageous love which brings us to tears and for which we give honour to the mother's memory.

Jesus death was not justice - it was the greatest injustice ever perpetrated by mankind, yet God allowed Jesus to go through with it for our sakes. That's PERFECT LOVE, shown by both of God and of His Son. "I and my Father are One" (John 10:30). How is it that Jesus could say "With desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer"? He knew He was establishing the New Covenant that would save all who would come to Him. This is totally outside anything in John Launchbury's treatise on "Change us, not God". The reason for baptism is to bring us into this covenant relationship with God through the shed blood of Jesus; to place us in a position where our sins can be forgiven; so that we can come before our heavenly Father in Jesus' righteousness. "Know ye not that when we are baptised into Jesus we are baptised into His death?"

Brother Fred again:-

"Incidentally, I saw a definition of Grace on the Internet yesterday that made me shudder. This was it: 'God's Riches At Christ's Expense'. This was saying to me, that God robs Peter to pay poor. How can this be put forward as a definition of God's grace? How can beating up on your son, to pay someone else's expense, be equated with grace? . . . No doubt you will be able to add some further thoughts that may well help reconcile my difficulties, if they are in fact reconcilable. God's Riches At Christ's Expense! No! Absolutely not."

Grace is by God's goodness and loving kindness and in which Jesus generously shared. We must start with God's Love, see Love in all God does and end with God's Love.

Further comment

In the first part of this review of "Change us, not God" I wrote of how the writer, John Launchbury shows a contrast between the sacrifices under the Law of Moses with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross in as much as all the sacrifices for sin under the Law were commanded by God and were carried out as He instructed as acts of righteousness; yet the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was carried out by sinful and unrighteous men who had refused to do God's will and whom He destroyed for their wickedness (Matthew 21:41). Those carrying out the sacrifices under the Law of Moses were doing God's will, whereas those who crucified Jesus were cruel murderers who despised the Son of God. The writer therefore concludes that the sacrifices under the law were not types of the sacrifice of Christ.

But however John Launchbury sees it there is still the need to see the purpose of the crucifixion - why Jesus gave Himself to be the sacrificial offering - "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!"

The need and purpose of the crucifixion was to establish a better, nay, perfect and lasting covenant between God and the faithful. The Old Covenant was established by God with Israel as we read in Exodus 24:3-8, "And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words."

This covenant with Israel was established in which all those in covenant relationship with God could receive forgiveness - forgiveness which leads to eternal life for all those whose heart is right with Him.

The New Covenant was established through the shedding of the blood of Jesus as we read in Matthew 26:28, "For this is my blood of the new testament (covenant), which is shed for many for the remission of sins." The reason for this new covenant is given in Hebrews 7:19, "For the law (of Moses) made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God... 22. By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament (covenant)." Only those who chose to accept this covenant with God through Jesus shed blood, by baptism into His death, have the opportunity of forgiveness which leads to eternal life.

We read in Matthew 20:28, "the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." The life Jesus gave was the life in the blood by which we are redeemed.

In 1 John 1:7 we read, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

In 1 Peter 3:21 we read, "The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us ... by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

And Hebrews 8:6,7, "But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second."

And Hebrews 13: 11,12, "For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."

With verses like these it is impossible to say that Jesus crucifixion is only to show us how we ought to live and behave as He did and that by doing so God will grant us eternal life.

When God created Adam and Eve He gave them freewill. This required that God should provide them with a law, for without law there could be no test of their free will, whether they would obey or not. This also required there should be reward and punishment. The moment Adam was given freewill, the sacrifice of Jesus was inevitable. There was no other way.

I find it impossible to agree with Brother John Launchbury's views as he places all the emphasis on salvation by works and this cannot be in harmony with the gospel which states, "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:5-10).

We must consider just what God has done for us through Jesus and not on what we can do for ourselves, for we can do nothing for ourselves apart from having faith and show our works through faith. These, our good works through faith should be our hearts thankful response to the Love of God and of Jesus in all they have done for us. I do not diminish good works, but they do not of themselves lead to eternal life. We must appreciate the covenant we are under and why it is necessary.

“O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?”

Brother Russell Gregory.

Continuing our discussion regarding John Launchbury’s book, “Change us, not God” we received a further email from Brother Fred B. dated 14th October 2010: -

Hello Brother Russell, Greetings from yonder land. CL 245 is to hand; as of yesterday, and I can see that you have evidently been burning the ‘mid-night oil’ given the extent of further thought that you devoted to the ‘Change Us, not God’ article, prompted by my added queries.

Haven’t had time to properly digest all your comments, but I can see that you have given me much to ‘chew’ on, so to speak. One of your remarks did strike me as rather strange, and my wife Robin, unsolicited by me, did likewise. You stated that, “The moment Adam was given freewill, the sacrifice of Jesus was inevitable. There was no other way.”

If ‘freewill’ leads to such inevitable outcome, then how can it be termed ‘freewill’? Surely ‘freewill’ is not loaded with a bias that causes someone to choose other than what is right, which is implied by your comment. If so, then how can it be termed ‘freewill’? Surely Adam could have just as easily chosen to do the ‘right’ rather than the ‘wrong’ thing?

I have often pondered what would have happened if Adam had of made the right choice, and left Eve to suffer the consequences of her poor choice, on her own. Of course, such is somewhat idle thought, as we have no way of really knowing, but one cannot but help wonder at times.

The question of the origin of Angels often rises in mind, when trying to muse on such possibilities. Questions like whether or not Angels were not the product/outcome of a prior creative exercise by God. An exercise or project if you like, which resulted in a race of people, who from the outset, chose to do the ‘right thing’ and were subsequently promoted to ‘glory’ in keeping with the adage, that I think John Thomas expressed, “approbation only follows probation”. There is something in what Jesus said about those in the resurrection, being likened unto Angels, that gives this line of thinking a nudge at times.

Anyway, this is probably nothing more than a side track, and not very helpful in truly resolving the matter under consideration.

The subject of the Atonement does tend to leave me with the thoughts that I have previously expressed, following comment about the discussion that took place on Facebook. At that time, I conveyed my thoughts as, “I checked into that Facebook link yesterday evening and read through every item that had been posted under the Substitution thread. My, what a plethora of thoughts and understandings it reveals. I am fast coming to the conclusion that once you try to turn the reason why Christ died into theology, it opens up Pandora’s Box. I am a fairly simple thinker and don’t go much on some of the profound lines of thought that have been discussed. To my way of reading/thinking, the reason Christ died was because He loved His Father and He loved us. That love lead Him into a head on conflict with SIN, manifest in those who rose against Him, and SIN killed Him, because he would not fight against SIN the way the rest of mankind has and does. Christ is the one who shows greater love than man, because the greatest love that man can show is to lay down life for friends, but Christ laid down His life for enemies. How incredible is that? We need to learn from His attitude and example and do likewise. We must stop living in the ‘flesh’ and put to death our affections and desires and be lead of the Spirit, just like He did. Then we too might be prepared to happily

die, even for enemies, that others might live. This is what the sacrifice of Christ is all about to me. It is about showing us how to die to self and live for others. All the other arguments about why He died or had to die seem to miss the point to my way of thinking. The lessons to be drawn from the sacrifices under Mosaic Law were surely meant to impress on everyone the need to sacrifice our lives, in order to live unto God effectively. It was all about “not my will, but yours be done”. Sin can only be dealt with by covering it with Lamb like behaviour.”

Must conclude for now. Perhaps I will write again, when I have cogitated on your further thoughts at length?

In the faith and hope which we share through Christ Jesus our Lord, Fred C.B.

By way of reply: -

Dear Brother Fed, Thank you for your further correspondence regarding John Launchbury’s book “Change us, not God”. You are right to challenge my statement where I said, “The moment Adam was given free-will, the sacrifice of Jesus was inevitable”. I should have qualified this statement for as it stands I am sure it is not strictly accurate because in the passage concerning the Good Shepherd the Lord showed that He was not compelled to give His life as a Ransom for (Gk. *anti* = instead of) many (Matthew 20:28), but did so voluntarily.

It would have been better for me say that ‘Jesus sacrifice would be asked for.’ The facts are given us by Jesus Himself - “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24). Surely there can be no doubt that here Jesus was referring to Himself, and that if He chose He could enter heaven alone and avoid the crucifixion. He confirmed this when He said, “Thinkest thou not that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53). But how then would the scripture be fulfilled that He lay down His life for us? So my statement should have read, “The moment Adam was given free-will, the sacrifice of Jesus was inevitable - if He was to save us from our sins.” Jesus had the free-will to choose, which is the point you made. However, without the crucifixion there is no salvation. I have enlarged on this in the short article that follows entitled “The Importance of The Virgin Birth.”

I agree with you when you say that “the reason Christ died was because He loved His Father and He loved us. That love lead Him into a head on conflict with SIN, manifest in those who rose against Him, and SIN killed Him, because he would not fight against SIN the way the rest of mankind has and does. Christ is the one who shows greater love than any other man, because the greatest love that man can show is to lay down life for friends.”

This brings to mind the occasion we read of in John 13:34-35 when Jesus said “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” And yes, “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8). But Jesus didn’t die for those who choose to be His enemies. And yes, we should follow Jesus example and show love to all as He did because we have no way of knowing who will come to repentance.

The Importance of The ‘Virgin Birth’

We know that Jesus was the Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary and we must never overlook the significance of this matter. It is a known and accepted biological fact that life is passed from father to child and having God as His Father means that Jesus’ life was not passed down from Adam but direct from God. Mary was a descendant of Adam and this ensured that Jesus was “made like unto His brethren” (Hebrews 2:17) but the “life of the flesh is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11) and as the foetus makes its own blood which never mingles with the mother’s blood, there was no possibility of the life in Mary’s blood being passed down to Jesus. So we can say with assurance that neither Jesus’ life nor His blood came from Mary.

Let us now compare and contrast these two Sons of God from scripture:

Adam received his life from God at his creation.
Jesus received His life from God by begetting.

Adam transgressed God's commandment and served Sin as a master.
Jesus always did His Father's will and never served Sin.

Adam by sinning was in bondage to Sin.
Jesus was never in bondage to sin.

Adam, through transgression, became alienated from God.
Jesus was never alienated from His Father.

Adam's descendants are all concluded under sin.
Jesus was not concluded under sin.

We see then that Adam once had the same standing as Jesus inasmuch as he too, was a Son of God, but he lost that position through transgression of God's law. He forfeited his life and became a servant of Sin – as Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters.” (Matthew 6:24) and as Paul explains, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Romans 6:16). ‘Sin’ is personified as a ‘master’ or a ‘King’ reigning over his servants - and servants receive wages; “the wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23).

The First Sin.

The one sin of Adam meant that his life was forfeit, or under sentence of death, and he should have died in the day he transgressed God's commandment. But God in His mercy, provisionally covered over that first sin when the animal was sacrificed in Eden allowing Adam to continue his life under new circumstances outside of the Garden of Eden. It is surely obvious that had Adam died in the day of his transgression we would never have lived. The life Adam then passed down to his descendants was a life under sentence of death, or as Paul expresses it, “concluded under sin” (Galatians 3:22). Our life then, is as Adam's forfeited life.

We see from this that Jesus, because of the virgin birth, had an unforfeited life, a life not in bondage to Sin, not concluded under sin, in fact, a free life.

Herein lies the importance of the virgin birth.

Freedom From Sin

This freedom Jesus has promised to the faithful. John 8:34-36, “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever: but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.” Free as the sons of God by adoption, no longer servants of sin. This is the work of God in Jesus – to give this freedom to the faithful that they may abide with Jesus for ever. Freedom from condemnation as Paul tells us in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.”

So the one sin of Adam brought all into subjection, concluded under sin - not as a punishment for something we did; not as a curse for something Adam did, but for the purpose of a blessing in God's plan of redemption and salvation in Jesus Christ, “that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.” (Galatians 3:22).

The purpose then, of the Virgin Birth was to produce a man who was personally free and uncondemned and therefore in a position to offer Himself as a sacrifice. All we have considered here are legal matters consequent upon the Law of Sin and Death (Roman 8:2), from which we have been freed.

Unless Jesus had received His life direct from His Father He could not offer it back to His Father to “take away the sin of the world” as John the Baptist said at His baptism. (John 1:29). Nor “give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28), as Jesus said of Himself.

But Jesus was rejected as the Son of God by the Jews in authority in His day, refusing to be enlightened as to their position. Jesus said, “This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world and men prefer darkness,” and again, “Except I had come and spoken unto them they had not had sin”, showing that enlightenment brings responsibility. But when we become enlightened and responsible we find that what God requires initially is not strict obedience to a legal code, as the Jews thought and sought to their sorrow to observe, but faith in the promises made to the fathers. When we learn what these are and what faith involves, we find that we are under the law of (the) sin and (the) death and ready to perish. If anyone then thinks he can obtain forgiveness and salvation by good works he is doomed to failure.

If Jesus had not been the Son of God there would have been no salvation for us.

If Jesus had not lived a life of perfect obedience before His sacrifice there would have been no salvation for us.

If Jesus had not given Himself as the sacrificial Lamb of God there would have been no salvation for us.

If Jesus had not risen from the dead to be our Mediator and High Priest at God’s Right Hand there would have been no salvation for us.

Jesus means of birth, His manner of life, His willing sacrifice in place of Adam, His resurrection by His Father, are all essential steps ensuring salvation for the faithful.

Once again I quote Jesus, “O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory?”

Brother Russell Gregory.

Correspondence with Brother Allon Maxwell:-

Hi Russell, I thought you might be interested in this short article which was prompted by a comment from a correspondent about John Launchbury's book - “Change Us Not God” - which was mentioned in a couple of recent issues of the Circular Letter. Feel free to use it at your discretion.

My correspondent said:

“I can see even from cursory examination, that he raises challenging argument against substitutionary views of the Atonement. Something that I must confess, has been rolling around in the back of my mind, ever since I read John Launchbury’s book, ‘Change Us, not God’.”

Allon answers: Yes, I have a copy of John Launchbury's book. I think it is quite good for a Christadelphian source in that it does not promote the doctrine that Jesus died to cleanse himself of “sin in the flesh”. However like all of the many Christadelphian works on the subject which I have read, he fails to deal adequately with the Biblical concepts of RANSOM and REDEMPTION. They are mentioned only in the briefest possible terms, without addressing properly what they DO mean in relation to our salvation.

About SUBSTITUTION he (John Launchbury) says:

“The development of the substitution doctrine is well established historically. The first atonement theory of the Catholic Church came from Origen in the third century. He believed that the devil had gained formal ownership over us, and that God had to pay a ransom to the devil to buy our

release. Jesus was that ransom, but once the devil released his claim on us, God then raised Jesus from the dead to get him back, too.

In the eleventh century, Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury completely recast the theory of atonement. He replaced the Ransom Theory with a Satisfaction Theory, in which God has been dishonoured, so His righteousness has to be satisfied. The death of Jesus was his method for satisfying His honour. The satisfaction theory quickly became the standard understanding of the Catholic Church, but it itself was replaced by Luther and Calvin et al in the Protestant movement by the substitution theory. Penal Substitution, as it is properly called, replaces the honour aspect of satisfaction with the legal theory we have explored above.”

Of course it is easy to reject these obviously UN-Biblical theories. However from that promising beginning, Launchbury completely fails to address the Scriptures which DO speak positively of a REAL “Ransom theory”, and from thence to a SUBSTITUTIONARY aspect to the Atonement!

The most commonly encountered argument against substitution, from Christadelphians, says that it can't be right because it isn't “just” by their human standards. Many of them introduce that tired old Mainstream Church “STRAW MAN”, that says an angry God vented his wrath against us on Jesus, in order to change his attitude towards US. And from that they too quickly conclude that ALL substitution MUST be completely wrong!!

Of course THAT Mainstream Church theory can't be true. Indeed in my opinion, it borders on blasphemy! God wasn't beating up on Jesus to satisfy his anger before he could change his attitude towards us. The Atonement arises from God's LOVE for his creation - NOT his WRATH against sin.

The important issue is that the Bible does in fact teach a different form of SUBSTITUTION which doesn't accuse God of injustice, and doesn't accuse Him of assuaging his wrath against us by beating up on an innocent man, and instead does correctly emphasize the LOVE which led God to GIVE his son that we might have everlasting life! (John 3:16)

So, what do the Scriptures say about this subject?

RANSOM AND REDEMPTION

“Ransom” is a price paid for release of a captive. “Redemption” is the buying back of something sold or encumbered.

And the Bible does use both of those concepts to describe what Jesus did on the Cross. His BLOOD (life) was the price paid to RANSOM us from “captivity” to sin AND its penalty. His BLOOD (life) was the price paid to buy us back (redeem us) from the captivity into which we had sold ourselves.

SUBSTITUTION

BOTH of those terms introduce the concept of some sort of SUBSTITUTION.

Jesus paid the RANSOM with his blood (life) when he was UNJUSTLY put to death on the Cross as a criminal, to save us from the criminal's death we did JUSTLY deserve.

REDEMPTION uses a different word to describe the same thing. His blood (life) was the price paid to redeem us from the slavery to sin, into which we had sold ourselves.

HE died and WE live! If HE hadn't died WE would still face death at the judgment. Because HE died WE will rise from the dead. And because HE died WE will live for ever. Because he has done that our sins will NEVER be mentioned to us again.

Of course we must not ignore the fact that this salvation is NOT offered without obligation on our part. The Scriptures do NOT support the common Mainstream Church concepts of unconditional “*salvation by grace alone*”, or “*once saved always saved*”.

The offer of the salvation PURCHASED by the SUBSTITUTIONARY sacrificial death of Jesus comes with a NON NEGOTIABLE CONDITION that we first commit ourselves to a real and ongoing repentance before forgiveness can be granted.

The Scriptures say plainly that there was no other way for us to be forgiven, without the shedding of Jesus' blood. He died (for our sins) and, because of that, we don't die (for our sins). Instead we live!!

I think the REAL issue is that if GOD says the death of Jesus is somehow a FORM of substitution, (and he does) we have to come to grips with it, rather than try to find reasons to reject it because we don't like some of the “standard” non-Biblical explanations. If indeed we must have any explanation of HOW and WHY Substitution works, there is no need to get complicated, the way so many do. For me it works OK for at the simplest level.

Q). Who died on the cross for my sins? A). Jesus.

Q). Who should have died in the cross for my sins? A). ME!!!

Q). What is the result of Jesus dying on the Cross? A). I have found a love for God and his Son which led me to repentance and obedience, and I have been forgiven, and I will NEVER have to die for my sins.

Inevitably that brief explanation does imply some form of substitution.

Of course our English Bible does not use the word. But the meaning behind those Old Testament sacrifices for sin certainly does imply “substitution”. The beast dies, and the repentant sinner lives instead of dying!

Isaiah 53:11 says it without using the precise word. (in Hebrew “*bear iniquity*” is idiom for “*bear the penalty of iniquity*”. The NEB has it in plain words - “*himself bearing the penalty of their guilt*”)

And although the word itself is not found in the New Testament English texts, the Greek New Testament text actually does use the word!! In a couple of places, when speaking of the Atonement, it uses the Greek word “anti” (“instead of” or “in place of”), e.g. Matt 20:28, Mark 10:45, where Jesus said of Himself, “even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for (anti) many.”

1 Pet 3:18 uses a different word (*hyper*) with similar meaning, Jesus gave himself “*the just for the unjust*”. (1 Pet 3:18 - see it in Weymouth's translation). Timothy also uses this word when he speaks of “ransom” in 1 Tim 2:6.

Of course SUBSTITUTION isn't the ONLY concept used by the Bible in connection with the death of Jesus. It is only one of several.

But that doesn't mean we are permitted to emphasize those others at the expense of substitution. Nor may we simply dismiss it or ignore it. Indeed for me personally (without ignoring the others) it is THE one which most inspires my love for Jesus!

Romans 5:6-9 - “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.”

FINALLY

If you have a different theory of “how the Atonement works”, I will not reject you on account of it! I have learned that love must concede that, even if your own understanding of how it “worked” in your case is different to mine, **you may also have arrived where I am**. If you are truly reconciled with God, that will be obvious from the visible “*fruit of the spirit*” growing in you, (Gal 5:22-25). If I can see that, I dare not fail to confess you before men as my brother in Christ, (Matt 10:32-33) just because we differ in our understanding of the detail of how it came to pass for each of us.

Have we “arrived”? How do we measure that?

“By **THIS** shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have **LOVE** one to another”. (John 3:35).

Hope some of this is useful. Brother Allon Maxwell.

After receiving the above I wrote to Brother Allon as follows:-

Just one small query... You wrote, “Of course substitution isn't the only concept used by the Bible in connection with the death of Jesus. It is only one of several.”

My question – what concepts do you see which exclude substitution?

Reply from Brother Allon:-

Hi Russell, I certainly don't think that any of the other biblical concepts of the Atonement exclude substitution. Rather, they present it using different metaphors, each of which emphasizes the love of God and Jesus for us from a slightly different perspective.

Individual differences in personality seem to result in each of us possibly emphasizing one more than others because it makes more impact on our individual minds when presented that way.

But the bottom line must always be that Jesus shed his blood FOR US, to SAVE US FROM OUR SINS, (1 Cor. 15:3) and that there was NO OTHER WAY possible for God to save us (Matt 26: 39-42) and that should inspire LOVE and REPENTANCE and OBEDIENCE. (John 14:15; 15:10).

If it doesn't do that for us, then no matter how technically “correct” we may have the “theory” of how it “works”, we are still lost!!

That said though, Jesus did talk about his death in relation to our salvation. When He did it was in the simplest of terms, and all contained in a few verses. He spoke about:

1. *Love in Action – A man laying down His life to save His friends. (John 15:13)*
2. *A Good Shepherd defending his flock from the wolf. (John 10:1-16)*
3. *A grain of corn dying to produce a harvest of many grains. (John 12:24)*
4. *A brass serpent “lifted up” for sinners to see, and be saved from a “bite”. (John 3:14)*
5. *The Bread of Life – Manna from heaven – Eating His flesh and drinking His blood. (John 6:53-58)*
6. *Drinking from a Cup. (Matt 26:39-42)*
7. *His blood shed for remission of our sins. (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20)*
8. *His blood shed to seal a covenant. (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20)*
9. *A sacrificial “ransom” paid by Jesus for our release from the penalty of our sin. (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45)*

And that's it! Just a few short word pictures designed to help us understand that he sacrificed His life to save ours – BECAUSE HE LOVED US.

Hope this clarifies it for you, In Christ, Allon