

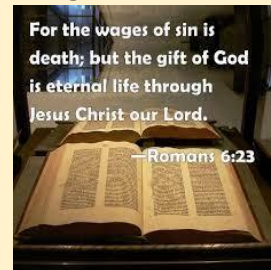
Study Guide #4: Jesus the Substitute

Introduction

Read Explorer II, Study Guide #3 carefully on “The Nature of Sin.” No one can truly understand salvation and Jesus’ role in it without a thorough understanding of sin because salvation is *from* sin. In this Study Guide, we examine the role of Jesus in God’s plan of salvation for mankind.

Question #1: How is sin a debt? What is that debt and to whom is it owed?

Answer: In Matthew’s version of the Lord’s Prayer, Christians are told to pray that God would “**forgive us our debts**” (Matthew 6:12, NKJV). The parallel passage in Luke 11:4 reads, “**forgive us our sins**” (NKJV). The debt described here is a *spiritual* debt that we owe to God because of our sins. *First*, we are in debt precisely because we owe God the *opposite* of sin—which is *righteousness*. Since God is *perfectly* righteous, and mankind was created with perfection (Genesis 1:26-31), we owe Him perfect righteousness! God’s character cannot change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), so He can’t simply overlook our sinful state. If He’s going to save us from our sins, He has to do so on a *just* basis. Therefore, we owe God 100 percent perfect righteousness. Nothing else will do. *Second*, we owe God the death penalty for our sinful state because a *just* God reckons death as the “**wages**” of sin (Romans 6:23)—wages being something that’s earned.



Question #2: How and by whom can this two-fold debt owed to God be paid?

Answer: We should note that we can’t pay this debt ourselves. There’s no way that a human being who is born with a sinful nature (see Explorer II, Study Guide #3) could ever produce 100 percent perfect righteousness from beginning to the end of life because he already starts out in a sinful state. We could pay the death penalty. But, of course, that only means a permanent death—without salvation. Therefore, it becomes logically clear that if God wants to save us from sin, then someone else is going to have to pay our debt for us. This Savior would have to be our Substitute who (a) enters the world without a sinful nature, (b) lives a perfectly righteous life, (c) dies in our place, and (d) rises from the dead in order to offer us His perfect righteousness as a gift. [NOTE: A dead Savior is no Savior at all; so He must be resurrected!]

This Substitute must have 2 natures. *First*, He must be *human* because it’s humans who owe this two-fold debt, and God can’t die (I Timothy 6:16). *Second*, He must also be *God* because (a) a *mere* human would need all of his righteousness just to keep himself right with God (assuming he had any righteousness); (b) only God has righteousness (like life) intrinsically within Him and can thereby give righteousness to others as a gift (I John 5:11); and (c) Satan’s rebellion in heaven challenged God’s authority, so that God must answer the challenge. Therefore, the Substitute must be fully and really man and fully and really God.

Question #3: Who is mankind's Substitute, and did He meet the qualities outlined in the previous question's answer?

Answer: We believe this Substitute was Jesus, a 1st-century A.D. Palestinian Jew. Before His birth, His mother Mary was told to **“call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”** (Matthew 1:21, NKJV). The name *Jesus* means “Savior.”

Yes, He met the necessary qualifications. *First*, He was human. This is testified to by His human birth (Matthew 1:1; Luke 1:31; John 1:1-4) and human development (Luke 2:40, 51-52), as well as being known as a **“man”** in I Timothy 2:5. Furthermore, Jesus became (a) hungry (Matthew 4:2; Mark 11:11-12), (b)



Jesus eating with others

(c) thirsty (John 4:7; 19:28), (d) needed rest (Matthew 8:20, 24-25; Luke 9:58), and (e) could die (Matthew 28:50, 63; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46). *Second*, His human nature didn't have the principle of sin within Him. Luke 1:35 calls Him **“that Holy One”** from birth; Hebrews 7:26 says He was **“harmless”** (“innocent”), **“undefiled,”** and **“separate from sinners;”** Hebrews 9:14 says He was **“without spot;”** and I Peter 1:19 says He was **“without blemish and without spot”** (all NKJV). These passages overwhelmingly mean that Jesus, while fully and really human, did *not* have the *exact* same human nature that we are all born

with. Instead, the evidence in this paragraph indicates that Jesus was *affected* by the *results* of sin in the human race, but He was not *infected* with sin (as we are all infected). Therefore, Jesus had Adam's *physical* nature *after* the human fall into sin, but He had Adam's *spiritual* nature *before* the human fall into sin. [NOTE: See Explorer I, Study Guides #8-#11 for the evidence that Jesus was also God.]

Question #4: If Jesus had no sinful nature, didn't that give Him an advantage?

Answer: Yes and No. Yes, because it allowed Him to become our Substitute-Savior. No, because it actually made His suffering in the presence of sin all the more severe than our suffering. It also put a target on His back so that Satan must have hounded Him to a far greater extent than he harasses us. It's also important to note that Jesus came to take Adam's place and pass the loyalty test. And Adam's *spiritual* nature was perfect when he faced that test.

Question #5: Are the teachings of the virgin birth and the immaculate conception Biblical concepts?

Answer: Since Jesus is human, He must have been born of a woman, which the New Testament says He was. But as God as well, His divine nature must have come from Himself. This points to a miraculous conception in which God “impregnated” a woman in some mysterious way that we can't understand (since God is a spirit). However, the idea of the *immaculate conception* is that His mother Mary was free from a sinful nature in order to give birth to a sinless Savior. Two problems arise from that false teaching. *First*, it robs Jesus of the glory due Him by placing the origin of His perfection in His mother. *Second*, it results in an illogical conundrum—because then Mary's parents would have to be sinless to give her a sinless nature; then their parents would have had to be sinless too; in fact, you'd have to take it all the way back to

Adam and Eve. It just doesn't make sense. As for the virgin birth, we believe it because Matthew 1:20-21 teaches it.

Question #6: Could Jesus have sinned? Or, could He not have sinned?

Answer: Jesus could have chosen to sin because He came to take Adam's place and to pass the test of perfect loyalty that Adam failed. If He could not have sinned, then His life was a mere show in that He never had to make any real choices about how to live and what to do and not to do. Again, **"God is love"** (I John 4:8, 16, NKJV), and love requires a free will in order to make decisions.

Question #7: Does the New Testament directly teach that Jesus paid our debt by living a perfectly righteous life for us and then died for us in our place?

Answer: Yes. *First*, Romans 5:12-19 contrasts Adam and Jesus in a way that means Jesus is the human representative of the human race that Adam was initially after he sinned. I Corinthians 15:45 explicitly calls Jesus **"the last Adam"** (NKJV cf. vv. 20-22). *Second*, Jesus never once committed a sin either by thought, word, or deed, according to John 8:46, II Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 4:15, and I Peter 2:21-22. That this was a Substitutionary life is evident from Romans 3:21-22 and in Romans 5:18-19: **"...through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men...by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous"** (NKJV). The context in Romans 5 makes it clear that this doesn't refer to Jesus' obedience as an *example* for others to follow (though we should do so), but to that which results *directly* in "justification" and "righteousness." [NOTE: **"Justification"** is a courtroom term and is used in Romans 5:18 as the opposite of "condemnation," another courtroom term.] Finally, the Scriptures also teach that Jesus died as our Substitute in our place. Note that Romans 5:8 declares that **"Christ died for us"** (NKJV), and I Corinthians 15:3 says that **"Christ died for our sins"** (NKJV). Hebrews 2:9 puts it this way: **"He [Christ] taste(d) death for everyone"** (NKJV).



Jesus on the Cross

Question #8: How is it just/fair that a person die in place of a guilty person?

Answer: It is true that normally it's not just for an innocent person to suffer in the place of a guilty person. However, remember the concept of corporate personality discussed in Explorer II, Study Guide #3. That's the idea that sometimes one person represents numerous other individuals so that the latter get credit for what their official representative does. Corporate personality also means sometimes there is corporate guilt. It's only when we ignore the ideas of representatives of humanity and corporate personality that one can reject the death of Jesus as being fair or just.

Question #9: What has been the most significant theory of salvation in Christian history that has rejected the idea of the Substitutionary Atonement?

Answer: That would be the Moral Influence Theory of the Atonement, first most notably promoted by a French professor of philosophy and theology named Peter Abelard in the early 12th century (1100s). It's

not usually identified with any particular Christian denomination, but it has been adopted by some of the more liberal Christian scholars. It starts with the premise that it's unjust for Jesus to have died as our Substitute, the innocent for the guilty. Instead, the cross is viewed only (or primarily) as the greatest demonstration of God's love for mankind so that it would transform people's characters and make them "safe to save." In this way, Jesus didn't suffer from the wrath of the Father at all. This view so emphasizes God's love so as to redefine God's wrath as merely a sorrowful turning away from the persistent sinner and allowing him to suffer the natural consequences of his sin.

Question #10: Doesn't the idea that God directs His wrath on the sinner the same as the pagan notion of appeasing the gods?

Answer: That's what advocates of the Moral Influence Theory of the Atonement allege. But there's a profound difference between those 2 concepts. *First*, God's wrath against sin is based on the principle of His holiness, which naturally recoils against sin. It's not a capricious, emotional anger of a pagan god who needs sacrifices to appease him into cooling off. *Second*, the New Testament teaches that one Member of the Trinity doesn't need to convince the others to save anyone, **"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"** (John 3:16, NKJV).

Question #11: Why is God's wrath against sin active and not passive?

Answer: It is indeed true that God will be sorrowful at the end-time and allow the wicked to suffer the natural consequences of their choices. But what is the natural consequence for choosing sin? We have previously argued (see Explorer I, Study Guide #3) that Love includes the idea of Justice, because justice helps us define *how* to love. Mankind often has separated these 2 qualities. In the Middle Ages, God was all Justice and little to no Love. In modern times, the tendency is to view God as all Love and little to no Justice. But these 2 concepts are encompassed within each other. Therefore, a God of Love is also a God of Justice. By any standard of Justice, this must mean that God has direct, active wrath against evil and will exercise righteous indignation against those who insist on clinging to their sin. Moreover, God's wrath



The Global Flood

is not the same as our human wrath, for our anger is at best mixed with selfishness that people will finally get what they deserve. But a God of Love must mingle heartbreak and tears with His wrath because He is completely selfless. Finally, the idea of God's wrath only being passive ignores the plain Bible teaching that God's wrath is often direct, active wrath which cannot be reinterpreted in a passive sense—such as the global Flood (Genesis 6:5-7) and the final punishment of the wicked (Revelation 14:10; 15:1; 19:15, 21; 20:9). Therefore, the natural consequences of insistence on clinging to sin will be the direct, active wrath of God—directed primarily at sin itself, but it will engulf the beings who insist on clinging to it.

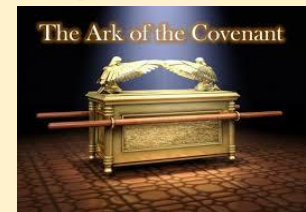
Question #12: But isn't the cross of Jesus the greatest demonstration of God's love for mankind?

Answer: Yes, it is. However, that wouldn't have been the case if Jesus' death had not been absolutely necessary. If not necessary, it would be the equivalent of a husband and wife walking on the beach and the

husband telling his wife how much he loved her—and then “proving” it by rushing headlong into the ocean and intentionally drowning himself. That’s not love, but absolute foolishness! Yet the Moral Influence Theory of the Atonement says Jesus’ death was *not* absolutely necessary except to prove His love for us. Moreover, while God certainly wants to transform our characters, which will make us “safe to save,” the implication that His moral influence in changing our characters is what actually saves us is wrong and dangerous. He wants to transform us, but our transformation doesn’t save us. Rather, it’s the *fruit* of our salvation. See Explorer II, Study Guide #7 for the evidence of this relationship between salvation and character transformation.

Question #13: What does the word “atonement” actually mean?

Answer: Both the Old Testament Hebrew and the New Testament Greek words for “atonement” essentially mean “to make reconciliation” or “to purge or cleanse.” The same Hebrew root is related to the word for “ransom” and “mercy seat,” the latter being the lid on the Ark of the Covenant as the *place* of atonement. Moreover, the Septuagint (LXX), the early Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, translates the word for “atonement” as “propitiation,” meaning “to be merciful” or “to reconcile” or “to atone.” The New Testament also uses 2 different Greek words translated as “ransom” (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45; I Timothy 2:6), whose root means “to loose, to free, or to liberate.” Finally, the root for the 3 Greek words for “redeem,” meaning “to buy or to buy back,” are all related to the root for “ransom.”



Ark of the Covenant

All of these linguistic connections tell us that the essential idea behind the word “atonement,” as applied to the relationship between God and mankind, is the notion that God reconciles sinful man to Himself by means of cleansing us from sin *through* the substitution of Jesus’ sinless life and death. Therefore, although cleansing from sin itself includes actual liberation from the *power* or *control* of sin, the cleansing by means of the *atonement* is the cleansing of wiping out our sins because Jesus’ perfect life stands in our place. [NOTE: The popular definition of “atonement” as “at-one-ment” (as the believer becomes one with God) is true as long as one understands that oneness is obtained by the substitutionary perfect life of Jesus standing in our place. If not, then it becomes the false view that God atones for our sins by making us *inwardly* right with Him. He does do that, but again, that’s the *result* of the atonement, not the cause of it. See Explorer II, Study Guide #7 for the importance of keeping the distinction between what actually saves us and what the results are in the actual life of the believer.]

Question #14: Does this mean that Jesus paid the Devil a ransom in order to buy us back from him?

Answer: No. *First*, God would never negotiate or yield to the Devil over anything. *Second*, even if He wanted to, God would know that the Devil couldn’t be trusted to keep his end of any bargain. The idea of being ransomed by Jesus is simply that He bought us, or bought us back, by paying the price of His life that sin caused us to forfeit. In this way, we have been redeemed and liberated from sin.