A PREFERRED UNDERSTANDING OF ATONEMENT THEORY: IDENTIFICATION WITH CHRIST: RATIONALE AND RESPONSES

Virgil Warren, PhD

Introduction

Our understanding of atonement may sound unique and raise practical questions we need to take responsibility for. First, identification theory can be unsettling because it implicitly denies what for many is a settled issue: Christ saves us by being our negative and positive substitute, negatively by enduring the consequences of our guilt in place of us and positively by becoming our righteousness in our place. They may not identify this concept as John Calvin's atonement theory, which he gave its classical expression only during the Reformation. Christian Churches, Churches of Christ, and Disciples of Christ may not stop to consider the implications of the fact that their movement has set aside Calvin's other distinctive doctrines. Knowing no alternative to his theory, they may assume that any alternative to it is a doctrinal departure.

Second, as with any new idea, people can misunderstand identification theory because they have difficulty hearing it on its own terms. They can unconsciously mix it with elements of their own understanding and produce artificial, hybrid ideas and make irrelevant inferences.

Third, since we may have no predecessors to pave the way, standard terminology, reasoning patterns, and presentation formats do not already exist for communicating clearly and efficiently. We must assume responsibility for any confusion in the body of Christ that this atonement concept could bring. It does none of us any good to be wrong and to mislead people with our mistakes. Nevertheless, correct understanding must be the concern because a more satisfying explanation of Christ's work can lead to more effective outreach to unbelievers and greater confidence among the faithful.

We offer this document as an effort at stating the idea itself, the reasons for it, the values of it, the interpretation process involved, and the common ground it does have with other views. We respond also to certain misunderstandings and mis-inferences that have come to our attention.

I. Statement of Common Ground Between Theories of the Atonements

We all believe that **(1)** salvation means being brought back into personal relationship with God (reconciliation). In this respect, 2 Corinthians **5**:17-21 stands out by using reconciliation repeatedly to describe the nature and purpose of Christian mission: *" . . . in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself . . . having given us the ministry of reconciliation"* (**5**:19).[1]

We all confess that **(2)** Jesus Christ is the only savior, the only One in terms of whom God figures the salvation of any person that is saved in any dispensation or circumstance. We put the point this way because Jesus Christ is more than savior of those who lived after him. Hebrews **9**:15 says that God figures the salvation of all Jewish saints in terms of Christ:

> *"He is the mediator of a new covenant that, a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, they who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."*

1 Peter **3**:19-**4**:6 speaks similarly about saved people from the patriarchal age: *" . . . the gospel was preached even to the dead that they might be judged indeed according to people in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit."*

We all believe that **(3)** sin is what separates us from God, that we have all sinned and are all thereby separated from him, and that not everyone will be saved. In Isaiah **59**:2 God declares, *"Your sins have separated you from me."* Romans **3**:23 serves as a familiar reference for the conclusion that *"all have sinned and fall short of God's glory."* Matthew **25**:46 joins many texts in saying, *"These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous* will go away *into eternal life."*

We all know that **(4)** we cannot save ourselves, but that God saves us on the basis of our identity with Jesus Christ (Ephesians **2**:4-10, *etc*.). In addition to the Great Commission itself, a host of statements about Christian baptism express the idea that in it we identity with Christ: *"As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"* (Galatians **3**:27). In Christ we receive grace and glory (Ephesians **1**:3-14, *etc*.) and have fellowship with the Father (1 John **1**:3).

Furthermore, we agree that **(5)** as a matter of practical appropriateness, God identified with mankind through incarnation in the person of the Son, who carried his obedience to the Father to the point of shedding his blood in violent death on a cross, thereby establishing his own obedience to the same degree that he calls on his own disciples to do for him as their savior (Matthew **10**:38; **16**:24; Mark **8**:34; **10**:31; Luke [**8**:23]; **14**:27).

(6) Identification with Christ Jesus means deliberate, total, permanent, exclusive commitment to him in contrast to all parallel possibilities. It means commitment to carry our righteousness to the same level as he carried his out in our physical arena. It means commitment to him as a person, to his values for our life, to his purpose for our future, to his leadership and lordship in everything. It means our sense of being on his side as well as our sense of who we are. We agree on the facts up through this point.

II. Statement of the Distinctive Issue in Identification Theory

The difference in our view comes in the next step. What is the manner in which Christ saves us? What does identification with Christ give us access to? Does it give us access to an interpersonal act (forgiveness as in identification theory), a legal mechanism (penal substitution as in John Calvin's atonement theory), a supernatural power (conquest of Satan, sin, and death as in Christus Victor theory), or a ransom of one person by another? Penal substitution, conquest imagery, and ransom language are three prominent ways of picturing the reality. To these we may add purchase imagery as perhaps a broader image than ransom (1 Corinthians **6**:20; **7**:23; Ephesians **1**:7, 14; Colossians **1**:14; Hebrews **9**:12, 15; 2 Peter **2**:1; Revelation **5**:9; **14**:3-4**)** **These viewpoints have an important, true element in them: a result that comes from someone else to people in need who cannot do anything about it on their own and do not contribute to producing the result when it comes.** But those are not complete pictures of the reality; they are different pictures scripture offers, and they do not comprise parts of a common whole.

Identification theory strikes at the full reality of what Christ's atonement means. It calls for personally identifying with Christ as God's condition for viewing us as righteous like him and for giving us everything that implies and derives from it. Because of our identity with him who is righteous, God is willing to view us as righteous like him (forgiveness), regard us as in fellowship with him (gift of the Holy Spirit), and add us to the body of Christ (church membership). Salvation

is a choice in God's mind. The death that we are in (alienation) and would continue to be in (hell) is replaced by reconciliation, a reconciliation based on being viewed as righteous, not because we are but because we have identified with, and committed to, him who is righteous. The correctness and adequacy of this last step is the point at issue and no other.

In other words, the issue lies in "the theory of the atonement." Any concern over the theory offered here implies one of two things: **(1)** this final step contradicts one or more of the previous confessions or cannot provide for their basis; **(2)** this final step cannot account for actual statements of scripture. On the first point, we have not seen any such implication. On the second, we have not found any texts that are incompatible with identification theory. In fact, our search for an alternative to John Calvin's popular penal substitution theory arose because of texts that do not fit with substitution language taken as straightforward explanation. So we move to some objections that attempt to make one of those two points.

III. Responses to Questions About Identification Theory

A. If identification is the foundation for salvation, would identification with Moses, David, Paul, or Peter also work? Would Jesus have needed to become a man at all?

Identification with some human person would certainly not work. It would have nothing to do with what we mean by identification; it would have nothing to do with gaining righteousness because all people have sinned (Romans **3**:23). Righteousness means perfect righteousness, not just predominant goodness. Identification unto being viewed as righteous appropriately calls for identification with the Righteous One unto God's viewing us as like him. The object of identification needs to be sinless, and it is most suitable that the object of identification become sinless in the arena of the ones he became the basis for saving (Hebrews **5**:8-9; **2**:14-18): human on earth, the physical realm. Consequently, God sent his Son as a man to earth to establish his righteousness on earth even to the point of agonizing death, and then he called for us to commit to him—as his condition for viewing us as righteous –like him—with the result of reconciling us to himself. The righteousness of the Son is in regard to the same values and purposes the Son has; he is an extension of the Father. So identifying with the Son amounts to identifying with the Father who sent him.

Christ's becoming a man (incarnation) made it possible to establish the only case of human sinlessness in voluntarily *"laying down his life for his friends"* (John **15**:13), yes, even his enemies (Romans **5**:8-11). He became the only one the Father could appoint for us to identify with in the—as a basis for being viewed as righteous—like him—in place of our own being righteous.

Besides, this is not a "light" kind of identification where we feel a sense of closeness to or appreciation for. Because Christ is also appointed as Lord, identification with him includes commitment to him as a person and to his values and purposes. Commitment to him as "container" of righteous is an aspiration the Father is willing to accept in place of our achievement, a good-faith indication of where our heart is. God views us as like the one we commit to. It is not a matter of somehow transferring our guilt to him or transferring the penalty for our guilt to him; neither is it a transfer of his righteous to us and the blessings of his righteousness. Our being considered righteous is a personal choice in the mind of the Father, something that he does, not something that happens in the operation of a law external to him. Objectively transferring a positive or negative moral quality is inherently impossible as well as scripturally forbidden (Ezekiel **18**:20).

Those factors and others come together to show that identifying with some other person does not represent what atonement through Christ involves. Whatever may be thought about whether Christ had to become a man, **(a)** that is in fact the way the Father decided to set up the "system," the "plan of salvation." Inherent necessity of doing it the way he did it, is a theoretical idea no one needs to prove. Nevertheless, we can use sanctification imagination like Abraham did at the sacrifice of Isaac to offer some comments about **(b)** practical need for doing it the way he decided. The ones Christ came to save are physical people that God calls on to endure ultimate righteous even if agonizing death becomes the case—as tradition says about Peter's being crucified upside down. If God calls on his people to obey him to that degree, **(c)** it is appropriate to call on their Savior to endure as much as the saved are called on to endure. **(d)** Christ's suffering eliminates accusing God of unfairness because he supposedly does not realize what it is like to live like us in the physical condition and its limitation, suffering, and death. **(e)** Christ's enduring what he did in the flesh serves to show God's love for us in a way like no other. See also comments in "Strictures on Penal Substitutionary Atonement Theory," III, E.

B. Hebrews **9**:22 says that *"without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins."* Does not Christ's death, then, appear to be specifically what establishes the foundation for forgiveness and to establish that foundation on the principles that underlie animal sacrifice?

First, the text says, *"According to law/[the Law] there is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood."* Salvation is granted, however, on the basis of primary realities, principles operating prior to the giving of the Law (Galatians **3**:15-22). Law was a secondary element temporarily added to the pre-existing reality by which God reckoned Abraham righteous and promised him a seed like himself. That reality is interpersonal, for which "faith," "grace," "promise" are Paul's code words (cp. Romans **4**). Thus, Abraham is regarded as the father of the faithful (Galatians **3**:3-29), the prototype of all who relate to God by faith rather than personal perfection (Romans **3-4**; **11**:1-25; *etc*.).

Second, grace-faith does not take place inside law as if legal process were the primary category whose mechanisms provide the reconciliation to God. Law was a secondary overlay that did not come in till the time of Moses. Even then it was added to enhance readiness for the real thing in Christ. The gospel marks a return to the realities already in place 430 years before the Law (Galatians **3**:17), principles operative from the beginning. In respect to divine-human relationship, law did not exist. Even during the time of the Law, it was not the Law that provided the real basis for salvation (Galatians **3**:11-12 < Deuteronomy **27**:26; Habakkuk **2**:4; Leviticus **18**:5).

Third, the original question above was, *"Does not Christ's death, then, appear to be specifically what establishes the foundation for forgiveness and to establish that foundation on the principles that underlie animal sacrifice?"* The assumption in the question lies in the word "specifically." "Without the shedding of blood" does not mean "only the shedding of blood." In place of "specifically" should be "the last and highest" expression of his human righteousness; it is the epitome that culminates all his previous righteous life. His whole righteous life is in view, not just the blood-shedding final act. Christ's whole life, including his death, becomes the basis for atonement because his whole life participated in establishing his human righteousness on earth that he took to the cross. His death is the epitomizing basis rather than the discrete basis for atonement; it epitomizes rather than exhausts the Father's will for him. So to speak, we need look no further than his death to see the kind of man he was all along. It was the Father's will for him

that serves as the standard for measuring the Son's righteousness, and his righteousness is the quality in him that, among other things, we identify with when we identify with him.

That includes the good things he did earlier in other kinds of situations confrontational or not. He demonstrated his righteousness not only in dealing with rejection by the religious authorities and others, but also in his compassion for the people he healed and fed and defended against criticism, his corrective teaching on some excesses in the tradition of the elders as well as in popular notions that needed remedy. His establishing a foundation for our salvation was not just the one, most outstanding act by itself, but the whole life of which the last act stood out above the rest and was the culmination of.

Fourth, the question needs adjusting. *"Christ's death specifically . . . establishes that foundation on the principles that underlie animal sacrifice?"* As expressed in this wording, the question is at least unclear if not erroneous. We stress the fact that animal sacrifices did not establish the basis for understanding the meaning and mechanism in Christ's death. His death established the reason the previous sacrifices were instituted, not how they pictured effectiveness. They were analogous to Christ's death, not of the same as his death. They were a picture of the fact that he would die, not a definition of the meaning of his death. The sacrifices could be viewed as substituting for the worshiper's punishment or death, but that was not a real substitution but a legal transaction. *"The blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin."* To put it differently, that animal sacrifices were legally substitutionary does not mean Christ's death was legally substitutionary. The common element is death by shedding blood, not necessarily the meaning of the blood-shedding death.

Second, the comments above about Hebrews **9**:22 show that even in terms of secondary legal backgrounds, Christ qualified himself to serve as Savior, born of woman and born under the Law (Galatians **4**:4). *"Without the shedding of blood there is no remission,"* however, is a statement that applies also to the interpersonal framework wherein lies identification with Christ unto reconciliation. In our physical human realm, Christ carried out his obedience to the Father to the ultimate level: agonizing death on a cross where he shed his blood. So there is "remission of sins" through him with "the shedding of blood" because by that obedience he achieved the highest possible level of righteousness and became the only appropriate object of identification appointed by the Father.

C. Could salvation be applied interpersonally, as identification says, but be founded legally on Messianic penal substitution?

That is perhaps something someone could say to harmonize John Calvin's substitution theory with interpersonal process—reconciliation, but Paul's burden in Galatians **3** is to show that law and faith/grace are parallel systems, not one within the other or overlapping circles. He does not mean they are parallel just in application, because he presses the point that the Law chronologically followed the time of Abraham's justification and God's promise to give him a seed by promise. The primary reality (interpersonal relationship) cannot be based on a secondary system (legal process). The very nature of antecedent and consequence requires them to be of the same kind; interpersonal consequences cannot come by legal means.[2]

IV. Picture *vs*. Reality: The Crux of the Issue

This presentation on atonement theory comes in a context where penal substitution theory is the main alternative view. Our proposal considers sacrificial, substitution language either (a) in reference to salvation for Jews in the lesser plane of law or (b) as a picture more than a reality. Naturally, then, objections to that view center around taking such language as a picture. What justifies making this shift? Is penal substitution too frequent to be "just a picture"?

Several responses appear above and elsewhere.[3] We repeat here the observation that **(1)** substitution is but one among as many as twenty images for describing Christ's work or aspects of it, depending on how we count them: ransom/buyer/redeemer, the brazen serpent, healer, "whipping boy" (Isaiah **53**:5), animal sacrifice, purifier, founder/pioneer, conqueror, propitiation, example, representative, prophet, priest, primogenitor, testator (Hebrews **9**:16), sire (1 Peter **1**:23), protector (John **10**:11). Since they are discontinuous and mutually exclusive descriptions, several of them have to be pictures; so substitution may be a picture too because scripture freely uses pictures in treating this subject.

(2) The frequency of substitution language does not determine whether it is a reality or a picture. Number (frequency) and nature (picture *vs*. reality) are different kinds of things.

(3) Understanding substitution as a picture does not make it meaningless. Calling it "just" a picture would depreciate the positive reasons for using that picture. Writers use pictures (a) to communicate more than little or nothing, (b) to establish a point of contact with an audience, (c) to stress the affective dimension more effectively, and (d) to make the point more memorable.

By "communicating more than nothing" we mean that subjects are often difficult to understand because they are complex, because they deal with intangible matters or address facts not fully knowable by experience. In such cases, it is better to use a picture than to communicate nothing. A picture can communicate at least something real about the subject. Jesus' parables have this value and so do atonement images.

"Establishing a point of contact" by a picture makes topics more interesting by making them feel more relevant. When hearers can identify with the picture, they can thereby be led to some appreciation for the message. In this case, sacrifice was a familiar concept that shared significant elements with the reality it pictured.[4] Using sacrifice in that Near Eastern setting was similar to Don Richardson's using the "peace child" image to gain a foothold for the gospel among the Sawi people of Netherlands New Guinea.[5]

"Making information more memorable" comes from providing a "reality" through the picture. Sacrifice adds the visual element to greater interest and stronger relevance in order to make Christ's love unforgettable.

Most importantly, **(4)** considering substitution as an image removes contradictions with other, clear teachings of scripture. Taking something as a picture is a form of figurative interpretation, but the motive for figurative interpretation is to harmonize, not to evade. Figurative interpretation is a justified inference based on inerrancy.

A. Understanding Suffering as Discipline

To illustrate the principle in the fourth observation, we offer an analysis of a comparable case found in Hebrews **12**:5-13. The writer tells his readers not to forget the exhortation of Proverbs **3**:11-12:

> *"My son, do not regard lightly the disciplining by the Lord or give up when you are reproved by him; because the Lord disciplines the ones he loves and whips every son he receives."*

In this way the Hebrew writer puts a positive reconstruction on a negative experience. The readers' sufferings became an opportunity for growth they could not otherwise have experienced. **(a)** They were to infer from suffering that God loves them even as a son is to infer from his father's spankings that Dad cares enough about him to confront him, to take the time to correct him, to do something he does not enjoy needing to do, and to do so at the risk of losing favor with him (**12**:7). **(b)** Every son receives discipline from his father, so the readers should expect suffering as discipline (**12**:7-8). **(c)** As they respected their parents when they disciplined them, so also they should respect God when they suffer (**12**:9). **(d)** At the time suffering is grievous, but **(e)** later it yields peaceful fruits (**12**:11). (f) The suffering is temporary (**12**:10). **(g)** Discipline does not have the purpose of breaking a son's spirit, so he should redouble his efforts when he suffers (**12**:12-13).

So far so good, but then problems start arising. Some things about this description simply do not ring true, as clearly shown elsewhere in the Bible. (a) Discipline is deliberate, but suffering is allowed. (b) Parental discipline is one-for-one with disobedience, but suffering is not. When a parent spanks his son, he does it for a specific disobedience. He does not just spank the boy once in a while to keep him humble or show him who is boss. (c) Parents discipline only their own children, but suffering happens to non-Christians as well as God's sons. The Bible is clear that a suffering does not necessarily correspond with a sin (the Book of Job; Luke **13**:1-5; John **9**:1-3; Acts **28**:1-6) and that the degree of suffering does not correlate with the degree of sinfulness (Luke **13**:1-5; 2 Corinthians **12**:7-9; cp. Psalm **73**; Jeremiah **12**:1-2; Malachi **3**:15).

There are crucial differences between father-son discipline and God-Christian suffering. The way we look at our suffering must include these mental adjustments or the suggested attitude toward it does more harm than good. God is not bringing this into my life to punish me for a sin I committed; rather, he is not stopping it because he knows I can handle it and grow from it (cp. 1 Corinthians **10**:13).

How many times, though, we have heard people claim that a personal tragedy betrays a secret sin and that the sufferer should examine himself to identify his fault. Sin, sickness, and suffering, it is said, have been overcome in Christ; so repent of the sin to relieve the suffering. If the sufferer objects to such a reconstruction of his plight, the accuser can put him on the defensive again by appealing to his guilt complex. And since "nobody's perfect," a-suffering-for-a-sin can seem plausible and may not easily be disproved from experience. Besides, there are some biblical texts that can be bent into serving that moralizing view of suffering life. *"Do not sin lest a worse thing befall you"* (John **5**:14); Herod got worms and died because he accepted divine acclamation for his oratory (Acts **12**:20-23); Old Testament prophets repeatedly tied national catastrophes to apostasy from the worship of Yahveh only.

Once an idea like punitive suffering is in place, it is hard to get rid of it. All kinds of reasons can be thought of to support it, and all kinds of excuses can be made up to justify it when the picture does not fit. The whole problem originates from taking Hebrews **12**:5-13 as reality rather than analogy. Taking it as reality, however, does not give other clear scriptures their proper value in the interpretation process. When the parallel starts breaking down, we should realize that we are dealing with an approximate comparison rather than a strict explanation.

The relevance of divine discipline to atonement theory lies simply in illustrating the interpretative approach, how such an approach works, and why it is possible, legitimate, and necessary. We are not suggesting that divine discipline and substitutionary atonement themselves are the same kinds of things. Our handling of the discipline picture for suffering illustrates our handling of substitution as a picture for atonement. We are not denying one scripture in preference

for another or spiritualizing texts that contradict an idea we derived by human reason. We are reading substitutionary language figuratively because elsewhere scripture states things about sin and guilt that would contradict what substitution language would imply if read literally.

B. Human Reason

The discipline picture for suffering illustrates why we need not fear that we are pitting human reason against biblical teaching if we read substitution language as picture rather than reality. We are not judging whether scripture is reasonable, but whether human interpreters are using reason properly if their work creates a dilemma when interpreting scripture—in this case a dilemma between the teaching that guilt is personal and the idea that our guilt is transferred to Christ as the mechanism underlying the atonement. Human reason is not judging scripture but evaluating an interpretation of scripture. We cannot escape the demands of common sense, and we must not try to do so. Self-consistency is a necessary test of truth, so self-contradiction means there is a mistake somewhere in the exegetical enterprise. Dilemmas become disproofs when we assume the Bible is fully reliable. Refusing to apply the test of self-consistency could lock us into staying in a false religion, and it can leave us open to accepting false ideas about the Christian religion. It could, for example, lead us into believing that every catastrophy we face God has planted in our life to make us cognizant of some sin.

C. Divine Sovereignty

The discipline picture for suffering illustrates the irrelevancy of supposing that since God is sovereign, he can do what he wants to—as if to say, *"Who are we to reply against God? If he wants to substitute Christ for every sinner who is willing to accept him as substitute, that is his business."*

Sovereignty and omnipotence, however, have nothing to do with overcoming a contradiction. It would be a contradiction for scripture to teach that guilt and its penalty are personal and then teach that guilt and its penalty can be transferred from sinners to Christ. Since God is righteous and holy, his sovereignty is not capricious. He is not just a god of power but a God of principle, which means that he sticks with the implications of what he has already created (nature) and said (revelation). Sovereignty deals with authority and omnipotence deals with power; neither can solve a logical and natural contradiction.

If a person says, "Why not?" we can simply refuse the negative burden of proof and ask instead <u>why</u> either authority or power <u>could</u> solve a matter of logic since the problem and the proposed solutions are different kinds of things. Or we can use the discipline example again to clarify the problem. We would not tell our children one thing one time and an opposite thing another time and then, when they object to the contradiction, tell them that we are in charge here and it is none of their business (authority) or that we are bigger than they are and if they don't be quiet, we'll spank them some more (power). Even we, being evil, know how to treat our kids. Likewise, we do not suppose that God does what conscience would keep us from doing. So to speak, we serve the Christian Yahveh, and that affects the way Christians go about their interpretation endeavors.

D. Apparent Contradiction

To retain the idea that sovereignty can justify penal substitution, we might suppose its inconsistency is only apparent.

At least three points address such a proposal. **First**, the task is not to disprove John Calvin's penal substitution theory. His idea is not already established so as to mean that we cannot take any other view unless we first unseat his view. That pattern of thought does not assume the positive burden of proof for that view. In doing the interpretation work on any subject, there is never a view already in place; an interpreter ideally starts with a blank sheet; each view shoulders its own burden of proof. It seems to us that penal substitution cannot bear that burden in regard to the highest frame of reference, the interpersonal one.

Second, supposing that this contradiction is only apparent would only be trying to remove the concept from investigation. It would be appealing to silence to say there is an answer to the dilemma, but we do not have access to it, we do not know what it is, scripture is silent about it. The appropriate question is why we should think that such a thing is true. Like faithful Abraham, we at least need to postulate a plausible reason for the apparent contradiction produced by our interpretation (Hebrews **11**:17-19). Reason, so help us God, is the only thing we have to work with; we must use it well rather than set it aside. While human reason may be inadequate to critique a viewpoint, it is just as likely that reason was inadequate for constructing that viewpoint in the first place. It is more reasonable to refuse an apparently self-contradictory concept than to affirm it with abandon and anathematize anyone that questions it. We have no guarantee that it represents anything more than other human beings using frail reason to misinterpret God's Word. Besides, it is more reasonable to take a view that does not have apparent contradictions than to choose one that does—which leads to the next point.

Third, people usually believe what they believe because they suppose there is nothing better. But in atonement theory, there is something that seems better than the rest. We often accept a viewpoint, not because it presents no difficulties, but because it presents fewer difficulties; and we hold onto it till we find something better, something with fewer difficulties. But we are not in that situation with identification. Identification does not seem to involve internal inconsistencies or contradictions to clear scriptures. Internal inconsistency is, in fact, the reason we set aside John Calvin's penal substitution except at a secondary level in atonement theory and put identification in the ultimate frame of reference for Christ's work in laying the basis for our righteousness pursuant to reconciliation to God.

End Notes

[1]Not every Christian necessarily understands salvation this way. From what some believers say, they seem to consider salvation something impersonal—a state or circumstance; being saved means heading for heaven rather than hell. Salvation is like living in the same house with God without necessarily being on good terms with him. We believe, however, that being on good terms with God precedes all other considerations like living in mansions in glory. Being on good terms with God is what salvation is, reconciliation. The contrasting view appears among Christians that believe in "eternal security" as distinguished from perseverance of the saints. For them, genuine conversion leads to an irreversible state regardless of what a person comes to do, believe, or care about later. Salvation is like being a legal heir; the son may be alienated from his dad, but he is not disinherited; so he gets the "inheritance" anyway.

[2]We handle other objections in "Strictures on Penal Substitutionary Atonement Theory: Identification as an Alternative Proposal," and in chapters **6** and **7** of *What the Bible Says About Salvation*.

[3]See again "Strictures on Penal Substitution Atonement Theory" and *What the Bible Says About Salvation*, pp. 54-93.

[4]See *What the Bible Says About Salvation*, pp. 80-84; and "Strictures," pp. 7-8.

[5]Don Richardson recounts this well-known story in his *Peace Child* (Regal Books: Ventura, California, 1976, 3rd ed.).