

THE NECESSARY HORROR OF THE CROSS: THE GRIM NATURE OF OLD TESTAMENT
REDEMPTION REFLECTED IN THE ATONEMENT.

A Paper

Submitted to Dr. Adam Harwood

of the

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Course

THEO9404 The Work of Christ

in the Division of Theological and Historical Studies

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April 20, 2022

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Introduction

The violence of the Old Testament is difficult to reconcile with the kind, gentle ministry of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.¹ For some, the transition from the book of Malachi to the Gospel of Matthew is an awkward changeover from a malicious, vengeful God to his patient, loving Son. The popular theory of atonement, particularly in conservative circles, has long been the theory of penal substitutionary atonement (PSA).² Many theologians view this theory as immoral or problematic in its perceived promotion, allowance, and acceptance of violence.³ James Alison described PSA as “too conservative” portraying God as an angry deity in need of pacification.⁴ J. Denny Weaver criticized PSA for asserting that God the Father was culpable in Jesus the Son’s demise.⁵ Contrarily, Wayne Grudem wrote, “To attack the idea of penal substitutionary atonement is to attack the central message of the Bible.”⁶ Fleming Rutledge

¹ Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?: Coming to Terms with the Justice of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 34–47.

² Penal substitutionary atonement: Christ’s death was “penal” in that he bore a penalty when he died. His death was also a “substitution” in that he was a substitute for us when he died. This has been the orthodox understanding of the atonement held by evangelical theologians, in contrast to other views that attempt to explain the atonement apart from the idea of the wrath of God or payment of the penalty for sin.” Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 719.

³ Archdeacon H. E. Guillebaud, *Why the Cross?* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1937), 146; Gregory Anderson Love, *Love, Violence, and the Cross: How the Non-violent God Saves Us Through the Cross of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), vii.

⁴ James Alison, “God’s Self-Substitution and Sacrificial Inversion,” *Stricken by God?: Nonviolent Identification and the Victory of Christ*, Brad Jersak and Michael Hardin eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 166–79.

⁵ J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 74.

⁶ Grudem, 722.

asserted that the heinous nature of sin demanded a horrific counter at the cross.⁷ This paper seeks to address the horror of the cross and determine its gruesome nature as necessary.

Though Jesus's ministry is defined by love for all and the pursuit of peace, the Bible is undeniably violent. In order to bring to terms the seemingly opposing stances of the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT), I will attempt to bridge the gap by illustrating the heinous nature of sin and its demand for a terrible sacrifice. Therefore, it is necessary to understand the purpose of the sacrificial system in the OT, the monstrous problem of sin, the gruesome truth of Jesus's execution, and the outcome of Jesus's sacrifice.

The Bloody Old Testament

The purpose of the cross was to complete Christ's work of atonement: the sacrifice of Christ that paid for the sin of all who would believe (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). The word *atonement*, in the realm of Christian thought, means to make right the relationship between man and God. "The term is derived from Anglo-Saxon words meaning 'making at one,' hence 'at-one-ment.'"⁸ Atonement assumes a ruptured association between created and creator that needs to be rectified. Reconciliation between God and man is completely dependent on God's action. The possibility of atonement, then, relies completely on God.⁹

⁷ Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding the Death of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2015), 102.

⁸ Robert W. Lyon and Peter Toon, "Atonement," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 231.

⁹ Lyon, 231.

The Hebrew word meaning “make atonement,” כִּפָּר (kā·pār), is used throughout the OT as is the Greek word καταλλαγή (katallagē) which means “reconciliation.”¹⁰ The word kā·pār translated means “to wipe out”, “to erase”, or “to remove.”¹¹ Therefore, the OT concept of atonement is more focused on the removal of sin. The NT term katallagē centers on the resolution of severance between man and God. Despite the difference in terminology, atonement is a constant theme throughout the Bible which recognizes a rift separating God from man which requires God’s response to repair.

In the OT, God established a sacrificial system for the Israelites by which the people would atone for their sins. An important aspect of the sacrificial system is that it was completely dependent upon God. The sacrificial system does not represent man’s effort to appease God, but rather represents God’s effort to forgive man’s sin. In this arrangement, God is taking the initiative.¹²

The sacrificial system was based upon the shed blood of an animal, an innocent victim, provided by God. This requirement is exemplified in the story of Abraham and Isaac which reads to a modern audience like a scene from a horror film. A father who hears voices divvying commands is ordered to lead his son out into the wilderness under false pretenses with the intention to murder his child (Genesis 22:1-18). In his seminal work, *Fear and Trembling*, Søren Kierkegaard observed that Abraham’s intense faith made him capable of murdering his own son,

¹⁰ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew [Old Testament]* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 4105; James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek [New Testament]* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 2903.

¹¹ Lyon, 231.

¹² Lyon, 231.

accompanied by the belief that, somehow, Isaac would be returned to him. Paul Copan argued that Abraham's faith was justified based on the content of his calling; the evidence of God's previous action provided sufficient reason for Abraham's trust in God.¹³ At the last moment, God provided a sacrifice to take the place of Isaac, sparing the boy's life. Kierkegaard posited that only God could turn murder into a holy act.¹⁴ In the same way, God used the grisly sacrificial system and Christ's violent execution to accomplish his divine purpose; God can turn horror to holy.

Leviticus 17:11 described blood as "the life of a creature" and the means by which atonement is performed. In Scripture, life is synonymous with blood and is sacred in God's sight.¹⁵ Therefore, the shedding of blood is directly connected to spiritual reconciliation. The author of Hebrews concurred with this connection and wrote, "without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness (Hebrews 9:22, CSB)." In the NT, the connection to Jesus as a willing sacrifice, an innocent victim, for the purpose of atonement is made clear in passages concerning Christ's shed blood such as Matthew 26:28, Luke 22:20, and Ephesians 2:13. These verses described a new covenant rendered in Christ by which the sacrificial system was abolished. Because of Jesus, there is no longer a need for continued bloodshed.

The gruesome reality of the sacrificial system lies in the use of blood. The Day of Atonement in Hebrew culture was a messy ordeal, involving copious amounts of blood drained

¹³ Paul Copan, *Is God A Moral Monster?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 44–50.

¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear And Trembling: Dialectical Lyric by Johannes de silentio*, translated by Alastair Hannay (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 82.

¹⁵ Louis Goldberg, "Leviticus," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, vol. 3, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 78.

from a mature bull and an adult goat.¹⁶ Clothing, documents, furnishings, and anything else in the temple would be covered in blood at the end of the day. For over a millennium under the old sacrificial covenant, there were more than a million animal sacrifices. The drained blood of a full-grown bull comes to over a gallon, and a goat, a quart, which amounts to 2.5 Olympic-sized swimming pools full of blood over a thousand-year period.¹⁷ At the first Passover, God instructed the Israelites to paint their doorposts with blood (Exodus 12:1-11). According to R. Kent Hughes, “[The] Old Covenant truly rested on a sea of blood. During the [Passover festival], for example, a trough was constructed from the Temple down into the Kidron Valley for the disposal of blood—a sacrificial plumbing system!”¹⁸ Why did God demand the constant shedding of innocent blood? The reason is not an insatiable appetite for gore nor is it due to a sadistic need for the destruction of innocence. Rather, the shedding of blood was a requirement for atonement. Hughes wrote, “Why the perpetual sea of blood? For one main reason—to teach that sin demands the shedding of blood.”¹⁹ If death is represented by sin and life represented by blood, the biblical contrary to sin is blood.

The shedding of blood is inseparably connected to death and violence. In order for an animal to be drained of its blood, it must die. In order for an animal to die, it must have violence acted upon it. Even in the most humane of treatments, the act of killing an animal involves

¹⁶ Leviticus 16:1–34; The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) is the tenth day of Tishri (the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar). On that day, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies in the temple to atone for the sins of all Israel. Charles L. Feinberg, “Atonement, Day Of,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 233.

¹⁷ R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*. Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993), 234.

¹⁸ Hughes, 234.

¹⁹ Hughes, 234.

violence as a means of ending sustained life. Such an act, to the believer and skeptic alike, is horrific.

In the OT, horrific acts were not limited to animals. In some instances, murder was committed by Israel under God's order, and, in others, by God's hand. In the book of Joshua, God ordered the Israelites to conquer the city of Ai, slaughtering men, women, children, and animals (Joshua 8:1-29). Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan addressed the argument that the reasoning "God told me to do it" could be used as permission to commit genocide. To the contrary, they observed that the destruction of the Canaanites at Ai was an act of God's judgment carried out by the Israelites under God's command.²⁰ The book of Genesis also recorded the destruction of those who perished in the flood and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 6-7, 19). In Numbers 16:31-33, the earth opened to "swallow up" a group of rebels. These acts of violence bear the potential to be interpreted as the whims of an angry God, but to do so is to misunderstand the context. In each instance, acts of violence were in direct response to sin.

The Grievousness of Sin

The design of the sacrificial system echoes the natures of both God and man: man is helpless in his sinful state, completely dependent upon a benevolent God for reconciliation. The need for atonement is connected with man's inability to help themselves. The whole of Scripture attests to man's sinful nature. Isaiah 53:6 says, "We all went astray like sheep," and Psalm 14:3 says, "There is no one who does good, not even one." The Apostle Paul wrote that all men have sinned in Romans 3:23 and 5:12, and described men as "hostile" and "doing evil deeds" in Colossians 1:21. Confessions of faith throughout Christendom have described man's depravity.

²⁰ Copan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?*, 61-74.

The First London Confession stated that mankind is born into sin and are helpless apart from Christ.²¹ Similarly, the Baptist Faith & Message 2000 stated that man is corrupted from the moment he becomes capable of moral action, and, regarding his sinful state, “Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God.”²² The history of Christianity attests to the understanding of man’s helpless state.

The problem of sin is its role in separating man from God. Sin is identified by Scripture as disobedience, as inward corruption of a person, and as ubiquitous to all mankind.²³ Francis J. McConnell posited that sin is not merely the absence of goodness, but also the willing refusal to obey God’s commands.²⁴ W. Ross Hastings defined sin using three descriptors: *deontic*, *relational*, and *ontological*. Sin is *deontic* in that it is associated with moral debt; it is *relational* in that it disrupts relationships between the sinner, God, and fellow man; it is *ontological* in that it bears the weight of guilt and shame.²⁵ Sin is recognized by theologians such as J. Denny Weaver and Greg Boyd as more than rebellious acts or a condition of disobedience, but as a malevolent force.²⁶ No matter the idiosyncrasies, sin presents a problem for humanity that demands a solution.

²¹ *First London Confession of Faith 1644* (London, 1644), V.

²² “Baptist Faith & Message 2000,” bfm.sbc.net, accessed April 19, 2022, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#iii-man>.

²³ Francis J. McConnell, “Sin,” ed. James Orr et al., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 2798.

²⁴ McConnell, 2800.

²⁵ W. Ross Hastings, *Total Atonement: Trinitarian Participation in the Reconciliation of Humanity and Creation* (Lenham, MD: Lexington Books/Fortress Press, 2019), 267.

²⁶ Weaver, 74; Gregory A. Boyd, *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God: Interpreting the Old Testament’s Violent Portraits of God in Light of the Cross*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 1121.

In the OT, the depravity of sin in Israel demanded restitution in the form of the sacrificial system. Animal sacrifices date back to periods preceding the Mosaic covenant. The book of Genesis recorded the offerings of Cain and Abel and the aforementioned command for Abraham to sacrifice his son, Issac (Genesis 4:1-16). Following the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt, the sacrificial system appeared, using animal sacrifices to consecrate the priesthood and to atone for sin.²⁷ Prophets such as Isaiah and Micah observed that the sacrificial system was misunderstood and misused in that it became the focus—the ritual became more important than obedience.²⁸ E. Ray Clendenen and Langston Scott wrote, “The prophets did not want to abolish the sacrificial system. They, instead, denounced the people’s misuse of it. God wanted more than the physical performance of meaningless sacrifices. He desired the offerings to exemplify the heart of the worshiper.”²⁹ This view is supported by Hebrews 10:5–10 which stated that God never desired the shedding of blood but rather obedience. Therefore, the violence of the sacrifice was necessary to bring forgiveness and inspire obedience.

A non-violent view of the atonement does make the violence of the Old Testament more palatable. However, a non-violent view also makes sin plausibly excusable by not addressing its depravity and the necessity of defeating horror with horror. In order to counteract the heinousness of sin, a heinous act was required. According to Mark Dever, the Biblical language

²⁷ E. Ray Clendenen with Langston Scott, “Sacrifice and Offering,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1429.

²⁸ “Stop bringing useless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me...” Isaiah 1:13, CSB; “What should I bring before the Lord when I come to bow before God on high? Should I come before him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves? Would the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousand streams of oil? Should I give my firstborn for my transgression, the offspring of my body for my own sin? Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the Lord requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 4:6, CSB.

²⁹ Clendenen, 1431.

clearly asserts that a legal payment is due as the penalty of sin. Our penalty was paid by Christ, “the sin-bearer,” at the cross as the propitiation of our sin.³⁰

The Grisly Reality of Christ’s Execution

The day of Calvary was more than Jesus carrying his cross to the hill called Golgotha. From Jesus’s midnight trial before the Sanhedrin to his burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, Christ was humiliated. In his seminal work, *A Manual of Theology*, John Leadley Dagg referred to Jesus’s existence in three stages: original glory, humiliation, and exaltation.³¹ Christ’s original glory and exaltation referred to the period of time before and after the incarnation and earthly ministry. Jesus’s original glory represents his presence with the Father in creation and exaltation refers to his present station seated at the right hand of God (John 1:1; Hebrews 1:3).

Humiliation is representative of Jesus’s earthly life and ministry, not just the event of the cross, as the creator humbled himself to become one with his creation, submitting himself to “toil and sorrow.”³² The singular experience of God existing in the form of man is beyond our understanding, but, it can be assumed that such recourse would have involved unfathomable struggle and sacrifice on the Son’s behalf. Christ’s *humiliation* and *suffering* are correlated in that

³⁰ Mark Dever, “Nothing But the Blood,” *Christianity Today*, May 2006, Vol. 50, No. 5, 29.

³¹ John Leadley Dagg, *Manual of Theology: A Treatise on Christian Doctrine and a Treatise on Church Order* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 203–205.

³² Dagg, 205; “In a broad sense, the penalty Christ bore in paying for our sins was suffering in both his body and soul throughout his life. Though Christ’s sufferings culminated in his death on the cross, his whole life in a fallen world involved suffering.” Grudem, 709.

both were experienced by his own volition; Jesus chose to endure both his humiliation and suffering as a means to complete God's salvific plan. For the remainder of this paper, a distinction will be held that humiliation refers to Christ's incarnation and his suffering will refer to the events of Good Friday.

Christ's suffering at the cross can be separated into three stages: mockery, flogging, and crucifixion. A careful reading of the Gospel accounts of Jesus's trial and crucifixion will reveal that more text is devoted to mockery than to any physical injury that Christ endured. The men who held him before the Sanhedrin mocked, spat on, and struck Jesus (Luke 22:63=65). The Roman guards who escorted Jesus before Pilate and to and from his torture ridiculed him by giving him a crown, robe, and staff and pretending to worship him, all the while physically abusing him (Matthew 27:26-31). The Roman guards displayed a disregard for Jesus's dignity by gambling for his possessions (Mark 15:24). And the people, those who witnessed Jesus's execution, treated Christ with contempt as he carried his cross and then hung upon it (Luke 23:35-37). The psychological effect of such treatment can have destructive results for the individual, resulting in depression and self-doubt. However, when combined with the extreme physical abuse that Christ endured, such treatment is devastating to the psyche.

Wayne Grudem postulated that Jesus's psychological suffering stretched beyond the material world in that the Son submitted himself into the spiritual realm.³³ Guilt and shame are natural emotions felt by human beings and, therefore, were experienced by Christ as well. However, since Christ lived a sinless life, he had no cause for guilt and shame until he took on the sin of mankind on the cross. At that moment, Christ experienced the guilt and shame for the

³³ Grudem, 711.

sins of all that would be saved in his name according to Scripture (Isaiah 53:6; John 1:29). Grudem wrote, “Taking on himself all the evil against which his soul rebelled created deep revulsion in the center of his being. All that he hated most deeply was poured out fully upon him.”³⁴ The emotional pain of taking upon himself the shame of all who were to be saved is incomprehensible, but a reality of what Christ accomplished at the cross. Rutledge noted that Christ bore the sin of the redeemed alone as the sole being who could accomplish such a task.³⁵ Jesus had been deserted by his disciples and felt abandoned by the Father as evidenced by Jesus’s words on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”³⁶ Christ bore the wrath of God on his own which must have resulted in emotional and psychological anguish.

Curiously, the four Gospels do not contain detailed accounts of Jesus’s physical trauma. Instead, such images of Jesus’s injuries have been propagated by films such as *The Passion Of the Christ* which devoted twenty minutes of screen time to Jesus being flogged which, comparatively, is described in only a sentence in Matthew 27:26 and John 19:1.³⁷ The same can be said of crucifixion in the New Testament. The Gospels do not give great detail concerning the act or methods of crucifixion. John 19:18 simply stated, “There they crucified him,” and Mark 15:24 reported, “Then they crucified him...”.³⁸ In both cases of flogging and crucifixion, the first-century audience would have been familiar with both heinous acts and would not have needed a detailed description of what was done to Jesus. The mere mention of “he was flogged”

³⁴ Grudem, 711.

³⁵ Rutledge, 96.

³⁶ Matt. 27:46, NIV.

³⁷ David A. Ball, *The Crucifixion and Death of a Man Called Jesus: From the Eyes of a Physician* (Bloomington: CrossBooks, 2010), 64.

³⁸ CSB.

and “then he was crucified” would have been enough to make the early Gospel audience shudder. Donald Senior observed that long before Jesus was crucified, the act of execution via suspension was foreboding to the ancient Mediterranean world.³⁹ A modern audience, however, is typically not familiar with the horror of these terms which necessitates a more detailed account.

The act of flogging is difficult to describe not for its complexity but rather due to its brutality. Flogging is mentioned in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 25:1-3 but, in Hebrew tradition, flogging was performed with a single-thonged whip and limited to forty lashes as to preserve the dignity of the individual being punished.⁴⁰ The Romans, however, infamous for their ruthlessness towards their enemies and criminals, used a flagrum which is more commonly known as a *cat-of-nine-tails*.⁴¹ This type of whip consisted of four or more thongs with sharp pieces of bone, glass, or stone attached to each thong tip. A flagrum caused an immense amount of damage compared to a single whip, and the Romans did not hold to any limitation on lashes.

Dr. David A. Ball conducted a series of experiments concerning Jesus’s torture and execution. Dr. Ball’s book, *The Crucifixion and Death of a Man Called Jesus*, presented an attempt to observe what Jesus experienced on Good Friday from a medical perspective. An accomplished M.D. and surgeon, Dr. Ball was uniquely qualified to perform and present such research. Regarding the act of flogging, Dr. Ball reported the following information:

³⁹ Donald Senior, *Why the Cross?* (Nashville: Abdingdon Press, 2014), 1.

⁴⁰ “There was a noble concept of human dignity in Israel. In matters which involved corporal punishment there was a proper penalty for each crime. To give a man the punishment due for his crime did not dishonour him, but to go beyond this was to insult him as an Israelite and degrade him.” J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 272.

⁴¹ Ball, 65.

The Gospels recorded that Jesus was flogged while naked which removed any possible, although limited, protective layer between the flagrum and Jesus's skin. The intense pain of being repeatedly struck with a flagrum would cause intense trauma to the epidermis leading to pupillary dilation, profuse sweating resulting in dehydration, increased heart rate, dilation of airways, constriction of blood flow to the extremities, and increased blood coagulation.

As the outer layer of his skin was significantly damaged, Jesus would receive trauma and bruising on his muscles and internal organs. Damage to the musculature would expose nerve endings and arteries resulting in excruciating pain and life-threatening blood loss causing strain on the heart and kidneys. As his lungs struggled to exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen, Jesus's body would enter into a state of respiratory acidosis, resulting in rapid and shallow breathing. Blunt trauma to the chest would cause fluid to build up around the pericardium, increasing stress on the heart.⁴² As Jesus's heart, lungs, and kidneys failed, his body would enter a state of metabolic acidosis in which acidic balance is difficult to regulate.⁴³ In this state, barely hanging on to life, Jesus was given his cross to carry (John 19:17).

Crucifixion did not originate in the Roman Empire. It is most likely that the Romans inherited the practice from the Greeks who had themselves mimicked the Persians.⁴⁴ It can be said of Rome, however, that they honed and intensified the procedure of crucifixion. The Romans used different methods of crucifixion for varying crimes and criminals. For instance, the act of nailing a person to a cross actually made their time on the cross shorter as blood loss and bodily injury caused them to die more hastily. Being tied to a cross resulted in longer periods

⁴² The pericardium is the fibrous sac that surrounds the heart.

⁴³ Ball, 66–67.

⁴⁴ Ball, 81.

spent hanging in agony. If an executioner tied a person's hands directly above their head, it caused more difficulty breathing and a quicker death.⁴⁵ Regarding crucifixion, the Romans did not act in barbaric ignorance but rather with the meticulous purpose to cause the condemned as much or as little pain as intended.⁴⁶

Roman citizens were not permitted to be crucified as it was viewed as undignified for a Roman.⁴⁷ Crucifixion was reserved for foreign criminals and the enemies of Rome.⁴⁸ Historians report that the road into the city of Rome would at times be lined with crucified individuals in the process of dying as a warning to those who considered opposing Caesar.⁴⁹ Jesus was crucified as a political usurper, having been called the "King of the Jews" and posing a possible threat to Caesar's rule.⁵⁰ In ancient Jewish culture, crucifixion (execution via suspension) was viewed as being reserved for the purpose of shaming a rebellious individual and also as a curse upon those who receive such punishment.⁵¹ This understanding explains why the Jewish people demanded that Jesus be crucified, so that he would be humiliated and "cursed."⁵² In rare instances, however,

⁴⁵ Ball, 84.

⁴⁶ Ball, 83.

⁴⁷ Senior, 4.

⁴⁸ J. P. Malan, "The Metaphor 'Crucified Together with Christ' in Cultural History," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies, [s. l.]*, v. 65, n. 1 (Skool vir Bybelwetenskappe & Antieke Tale, Noordwes-Universiteit, Potchefstroomkampus, Suid-Afrika, 2009), 70, my translation; Rutledge, 78; Senior, 7.

⁴⁹ Ball, 81–82.

⁵⁰ Philip Whitwell Wilson, *The Christ We Forget: A Life of Our Lord for Men To-Day*, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1917), 283–88.

⁵¹ Gunnar Samuelsson observed that, prior to the New Testament record of the execution of Jesus, there is no record of the term crucifixion, but rather various terms that refer to death by *suspension*. Samuelsson discovered evidence of historical record of execution via suspension in the writings of the Greeks, Romans, and even in Genesis 40:1-9. Gunnar Samuelsson, *Crucifixion in Antiquity* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 211; 303.

⁵² Malan, 71.

crucifixion envisioned the executioners as the evildoers who carried out unjust treatment upon an innocent victim such as later interpretations of Lamentations 5:12.⁵³ In both the Roman and Jewish cultures, crucifixion was associated with indignity and punishment. Jesus's execution, as was the practice of crucifixion in the Roman era, was public.⁵⁴ J. P. Malan observed that the method of his sentencing guaranteed that Jesus was "completely deprived of human dignity."⁵⁵

Dr. Ball provided a similar account of the physical stress placed on the body during execution via suspension, particularly related to how Jesus was crucified. Scripture recorded that Jesus was nailed to the cross, based on Thomas's request to see the holes in Jesus's hands for himself in John 20:24-25. Dr. Ball assumed that, if Jesus's hands were nailed to the cross, it is likely that his feet were nailed as well though there is no Scriptural account to confirm. Jesus's hands would have been placed far apart and his knees kept in a bent stance.⁵⁶ This position made it very difficult for Jesus to breathe, being forced to push up on the nails in his feet and pull on the nails in his hands to extend his torso enough to take a breath, only to slump back down onto the cross. In fact, the most common cause of death for a crucified person was asphyxiation caused by the extreme stress on the torso and lungs.

In his research, Dr. Ball performed experiments during which he suspended multiple men aged twenty to thirty-five from a cross to test their endurance. The longest period of time that any one man could tolerate suspension was thirty-one minutes.⁵⁷ According to the biblical

⁵³ David W. Chapman, *Ancient Jewish and Christians Perceptions of Crucifixion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 213-218.

⁵⁴ Senior, 2-9.

⁵⁵ Malan, 75.

⁵⁶ Ball, 83.

⁵⁷ Ball, 86.

account, Jesus hung on the cross for six hours before he died.⁵⁸ What is more, Dr. Ball determined that Jesus's death occurred as a result of a ruptured heart, not suffocation.⁵⁹ The evidence for this conclusion is based on Jesus speaking from the cross in John 19:25-30, the Roman soldier halting before breaking Jesus's legs, and Pilate's surprise to learn that Jesus had died so quickly.⁶⁰ The evidence suggests that Jesus died suddenly, not slowly, which favors Dr. Ball's theory.

The knowledge of the horrific details of Jesus's suffering is beneficial to the believer. To better understand the cost that was paid on man's behalf, Christ's suffering must be recognized. Though we may never know the true spiritual suffering that Christ endured, we can reconstruct the physical suffering and speculate regarding his emotional suffering. Rutledge argued that the indignity and horror of the cross must be acknowledged and not disregarded.⁶¹ We dismiss, avoid, and ignore the horror of the cross to our detriment. Christ's suffering was essential to understanding the sacrifice that Jesus made on man's behalf. The question remains, why was Christ's suffering necessary?

The Necessity of Christ's Crucifixion

Fleming Rutledge noted that Christ's is the only crucifixion that holds historical significance.⁶² Of the thousands upon thousands of people who died in this manner throughout

⁵⁸ Ball, 87.

⁵⁹ Ball, 101–104.

⁶⁰ Ball.

⁶¹ Rutledge, 5.

⁶² Rutledge, 4.

history, only a handful are remembered by name but none more so than Jesus.⁶³ Donald Senior described the cross as the ultimate expression of Jesus's mission; the culmination of his life.⁶⁴ The significance of the cross is cultural and historical, indeed, yet it is also spiritual. Rutledge rightly pondered, did Christ die to *show* humanity something or did something *occur* on the cross?⁶⁵ If something did happen at the cross, what was its purpose and significance? The cross of Christ served a magnanimous purpose by which Christ accomplished reconciliation for the saved.

The Romans used crucifixion as more than a method of torture and execution. For Rome, crucifixion was a deterrent for opposition to Caesar.⁶⁶ Just as a line of crucified rebels on the road to Rome served to deter potential rebellion, so the image of Christ crucified serves as a caution to the wages of sin.⁶⁷ The horror of Christ's cross is a testament to the horror of sin. The observance of a crucifix serves as a reminder not only of what Christ did for man but also of man's rightful place on that cross. All mankind is guilty of sin and the result of sin is death (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Therefore, Christ died in the place of those who deserve death.⁶⁸ On the cross, Christ displayed the penalty of sin and accomplished the removal of that penalty from those who would believe.

⁶³ Rutledge, 4.

⁶⁴ Senior, 31–32.

⁶⁵ Rutledge, 17.

⁶⁶ Senior, 8.

⁶⁷ Senior, 8.

⁶⁸ Romans 5:8; William F. Hogan, *Christ's Redemptive Sacrifice* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), 70–87; “This view of the atonement is sometimes called the theory of *vicarious atonement*. A “vicar” is someone who stands in the place of another or who represents another. Christ's death was therefore “vicarious” because he stood in our place and represented us. As our representative, he took the penalty that we deserve.” Grudem, 719.

At the cross, God's plan for salvation for all of mankind was realized through Jesus's willing sacrifice. The writings of the Apostle Paul provide three "impacts" of the cross: societal impact, relational impact, and cosmic impact. In Ephesians 2:11–16, Paul wrote that the dividing lines between Jews and Gentiles were erased so that there may be peace between men who are all one in Christ. In regards to human society, the cross bridged the gap between man and his fellow man. 2 Corinthians 5:18 stated that at the cross "God was reconciling the world to himself." Relationally, the cross provided the means for man to be in a right relationship with God. On the cosmic level, Colossians 1:15–20 confessed that Jesus, who is above and before all things, has set the universe in its right order via the cross. Therefore, the cross is the means by which all things have been and will be returned to God's intended order. The cross was necessary as the means of Christ's victory leading to his resurrection.

The Victorious Participant

Contrary to non-violent atonement theories, it is necessary to recognize Christ as the volunteer in the atonement scenario rather than the delegate.⁶⁹ Christ is the horror defeater, not the victim of horrors.⁷⁰ He endured horrors as a means of defeating them. Jesus is not a martyr, nor a victim, but a participant. Rutledge wrote, "The Christ event derives its meaning from the fact that the three-personed God is directly acting as one throughout the entire sequence from incarnation to ascension to Last Judgement."⁷¹ The act of Jesus's crucifixion was instigated by

⁶⁹ Proponents of non-violent atonement argue that God "saves through the power of love, not through Jesus's torture." Love, x.

⁷⁰ Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 66–78.

⁷¹ Rutledge, 13.

God the Father's will, endured by the Son, and empowered by the Holy Spirit.⁷² God did not force the punishment of sin upon Jesus; the Son chose to give himself out of his love for man. Marilyn Adams defined "the sacrifice of meaning-making" in which Jesus turned crucifixion, an intentionally demeaning and meaningless death for the condemned, into an act of limitless meaning and importance.⁷³ Sin, as a curse, brought horrors upon man so Jesus conquered horrors through his death and resurrection. Jesus confronted and defeated what man could not.⁷⁴

The discussion of violence and the atonement must move beyond the cross and focus on Jesus's entire life from incarnation to ascension. Richard Mouw described the cross as "a decisive encounter with evil," and stated that the authorities of the day were acting in the service of the powers of evil.⁷⁵ Jesus, in an act of non-violence, did not use violence to respond to that which was inflicted upon him but rather defeated violence by the means of his resurrection. Jesus's resurrection, as the culmination of the atonement, is the superior act of non-violence. The resurrection, then, displays the true nature of God.⁷⁶

Jesus's humiliation and suffering go hand-in-hand. Rutledge wrote that an overemphasis on the incarnation "diminishes the cross as though it were a minor theme" and asserted that the incarnation and the crucifixion "stand or fall together."⁷⁷ The incarnation alone is not enough for salvation. Apart from the resurrection of Christ, both the incarnation and crucifixion are

⁷² Grudem, 717.

⁷³ Adams, 281.

⁷⁴ Adams, 272.

⁷⁵ Richard Mouw, "Getting to the Crux of Calvary," *Christianity Today*, May 2012, Vol. 56, No. 5, 28.

⁷⁶ Rutledge, 44.

⁷⁷ Rutledge, 62.

insufficient. The complete portrait of the atonement must consist of the incarnate Christ, the crucified participant, and the risen Jesus.

Conclusion

The Old Testament sacrificial system and the cross share the commonality of existing as a reaction to the heinous nature of sin. The horror of sin demanded a horrific response. Though horrors were enacted upon Jesus and thousands of innocent animals, those sacrifices are an expression of God's objective to accomplish salvation for mankind. Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the horror of sin was crushed. Sin was ultimately defeated not as horror against greater horror, but as horror conquered by glory.

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